

I am a Jew

By Mel Waldman

I am a Jew, born in Brooklyn, New York, United States of America in the early forties. It's just an accident of Fate that I was not born in Vienna or Germany or Poland in the late thirties or before.

I was merely a conscious or unconscious thought or a dream in my mother's psyche during Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass (Crystal Night), and the Holocaust. Mother was in America during Kristallnacht, on November 9-10, 1938, when Nazi storm troopers, members of the SS and Hitler Youth assaulted, beat and murdered Jews.

Throughout Germany and parts of Austria, Jewish shop windows (made of expensive crystal glass) were smashed. There were shards of broken window glass in front of Jewish stores. Thousands of Jewish businesses, homes, and synagogues were ransacked and destroyed. (Some sources say that 7,500 businesses were destroyed, 1,228 synagogues were ransacked, 267 synagogues were burned, and 177 synagogues destroyed.) More than 91 Jews were killed and 30,000 Jews were sent to concentration camps. (Some sources say that 25,000 or 26,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps. In any case, it really happened. Evil swept over Germany and Austria and was not stopped. Why not?)

Mother was here -- in Brooklyn -- during the Holocaust. My family and I were safe. But it could have been different. We could have been there. We could have been murdered during Kristallnacht or in the concentration camps. It wasn't our time or place to die. It wasn't mine! Yet I've noticed in the past few years that anti-Semitism is spreading surreptitiously-right here in Brooklyn and in other parts of New York City. How can this be!

My gold eyes reveal dark revelations almost every day. And although I pray to Hashem, the evil surrounding me is growing exponentially like a malignant tumor.

II

The nightmares began last year. And now, they consume my soul.

Each night, I dream I am in Vienna in the thirties, perhaps in the 9th district near Sigmund Freud's home -- Berggasse 19. We have never met, but I feel this kinship with him. Of course, we are both Jews. Yet I believe he is an atheist. (I do not know what I believe. Sometimes, I believe in Adoshem. Sometimes, I am an agnostic. The remainder of the time, I am a full-fledged atheist. I want to believe. In fact, I pray that G-d exists. If not, I'm afraid that life is meaningless. Or must we create our own meaning? Must we?) Still, I am drawn to him. Too bad we have never spoken. There is so much I wish to ask him. He is the Master!

III

Tonight, they will come for me. Hitler's soldiers will come! (And Freud has already fled to England! I can't reach out to him. He's gone.)

It is only a dream, you say. A nightmare I will awaken from. But will I? I have this premonition that I shall never return. It is no longer a dream, I believe. It is my metamorphosis! My entrance into a wormhole-taking me on a phantasmagoric journey to Vienna-a few days before Kristallnacht. Before...the concentration camps. Before...The Final Solution!

IV

If I vanish, please search for me. Don't forget!

V

I vanish! It's just an accident of Fate (is it?) that I'm there-during Kristallnacht and later-the Holocaust. Just an accident of Fate!

VI

I'm in a cattle car going to an unknown destination. (Later, I will discover it is Auschwitz!) I survive the eternal trip. But we are packed inside a small car-a sarcophagus for some of us (inducing claustrophobia or death or a broken soul).

I can't breathe! The stench is oppressive-unbearable! The dark walls are closing in on us...me!
Yet I survive.

VII

On the Auschwitz ramp, some of us march to the left-some to the right. Where am I going?

VIII

Goodbye. I am marching to Death or something worse. My soul is broken. Still, I am a Jew. And now, I belong to History. No longer do I belong to Brooklyn, New York, United States of America in the 21st century.

I am one of 6 million Jews! I belong to History-Kristallnacht and the Holocaust! Don't forget me. Please. Don't forget!

Goodbye!

POSTSCRIPT

I am one of six million Jews! But how do I approach the end of my days? How do I confront evil? Do I rebel? Try to escape? Alone, or with the others? My soul is broken. Do I try to fix it? The universe is shattered! Do I perform tikkun olam, the repair of the world?

I am one of six million Jews! Will I transcend the horrific evil that wishes to steal my soul and final breath? Will I?

I am one of six million Jews! If I die, I will die with courage and nobility. If I die...

Dr. Mel Waldman, a psychologist, has authored stories in numerous literary reviews and commercial magazines. His mystery novel, "Who Killed the Heartbreak Kid?" was published by iUniverse in February 2006. "I am a Jew," a book in which Dr. Waldman examines his Jewish identity through memoir, essays, short stories, poetry, and plays, was published by World Audience, Inc. in January 2008.