

RANDOM THOUGHTS by Muriel Levitt

I write in anticipation of the Passover holiday. It is the beginning of spring and the start of a beautiful new season. Trees bud, flowers bloom, and the very air we breathe is fresh, full of delight, and heavy with chicken fat.

This time of year is very special. It is a time of preparation and household frenzy in anticipation of Passover, and the accompanying Seders. The month of April never arrives but that I recall the flurry of activity that took place in my home when I was a child. Maybe you also have similar memories.

At the outset I must tell you that I rarely, if ever, heard the word "Passover." To us it was always Pesach. We were not sophisticated or very worldly in those days and pretty much stuck to the ways of our parents and grandparents. They called it Pesach, and Pesach it was.

First came spring cleaning. No army sergeant was ever more demanding than my mother. She pressed my sister and me into service and we all cleaned, scrubbed and polished. Armed with buckets, rags, vacuum and brushes we attacked each room with a vengeance. No mop was ever allowed to infiltrate my mother's equipment. Mops were for shirkers. In her opinion, a properly washed floor meant that you got down on your hands and knees to scrub. And scrub we did. Everyone shared the work and there were no exceptions.

Each room got the treatment, but the kitchen was the really big job. Every closet had to be emptied and washed down. All chometz was destroyed, dishes and utensils were packed away,

and the smell of ammonia was so strong that it cleared your sinuses with one whiff. The stove and oven were made immaculate and a special slotted wooden board covered the sink. The pots, pans and dishes used only for Pesach were brought out of their hiding place, washed and dried, then placed in the newly lined cupboard.

The next step was the marketing. This meant going from store to store and shlep-ping bags, boxes, and packages home. Although we had a new fangled A&P supermarket in the area, mother preferred to shop in a small family-type store where she was waited on with personal service and attention. My mother was always a favored customer since she bought enough food to feed the Polish army.

I recall vividly that her order always began with twelve dozen (yes, I said twelve dozen) eggs. This may seem like an incredible amount but when you realize that most Passover dishes contain eggs, it's not as unreal as it sounds. In fact, more eggs were always needed before the holiday was over.

Her shopping list seemed endless. Mountains of matzos, cake meal, potato starch, nya fat and special jams and jellies. Mother's specialty was a 14 egg sponge cake covered with jelly and nuts. No pastry chef will ever produce a more succulent dessert than this Passover delight. It was high, light and lemony, and it was impossible to eat just one piece. The more you ate, the happier she was.

Our trip to the chicken man was an adventure in itself. This was before the era of frozen poultry and all the chickens,

pullets and capons were displayed on a grey zinc counter. Mother punched, handled and inspected until she made her decision. Her selections were then cleaned and plucked by the chicken lady (dressed in a torn gray man's sweater) who always commented on the wisdom of our choice.

Up the street we went to the fish market. It was not my favorite place with the strange smells and glassy eyed fish resting on beds of shaved ice. Choosing white fish, carp and baffle was very important since they were the basic ingredients of mother's gefilte fish — and I mean MY mother, not the ersatz produce called Mother's that we find in the supermarket today. The fish was scaled, cleaned and boned so that it could be ground to perfection at home.

And the meat market. It was the gathering place for the ladies of the neighborhood. The butcher wore an ankle length apron and a straw hat. He was as much a gossip as his customers who chatted in front of the counter to share local information. His flanken, Roumanian tenderloin, veal chops and lamb shoulder were cut in large quantities to meet the demand. Price was rarely discussed. He charged and they paid.

I could go on and on. I am sure that many of my memories are similar to yours. You may think your mother made better gefilte fish or tastier sponge cake, but I'll fight you to the bitter end on whose was more delicious. Unfortunately, my mother is no longer here to prove the point — and when Pesach comes and spring arrives, I miss her more than anyone will ever know.

Fenelon to Speak

The guest speaker of the annual I.D. Blumenthal Memorial Lecture will be Fania Fenelon. She will appear at Temple Israel on April 2 at 8 p.m. The lecture is open to the community at no charge.

In 1943, Fania Fenelon was a Paris cabaret singer, a secret member of the Resistance, and a Jew. Captured by the Nazis, she was sent to Auschwitz where she became one of the legendary "orchestra girls" who used music to survive the Holocaust! She is the author of the international best selling book, *Playing For Time*, which is her personal account of the most powerful true stories of our time. Fania Fenelon's book was recently made into a television feature film with Vanessa Redgrave as Ms. Fenelon and it became the most controversial production shown on national television.

Fania Fenelon stands 4' 11", but her courage, spirit and sense of humor make her seem 10 feet tall. She is a survivor, an earthy woman whose experiences in life, good and bad, have shaped strong social and political convictions.

She had a comfortable middle class upbringing. Educated at the Conservatoire de Paris, she graduated a trained soprano, with a prize in piano. She was married at 18, was divorced later and became involved in politics during the occupation of France in the late 1930's. In 1940 she joined the Resistance, singing in a cararet frequented by German officers, photographing the contents of their briefcases when they became drunk.

She was discovered by the Nazis three years later and was sent to a prison outside Paris and eventually to Auschwitz in January 1944. After two days in Auschwitz she was transferred to its 46 member all-women orchestra which was under the direction of Gustav Mahler's niece. After 11 months the orchestra was disbanded and the women were sent to Bergen-



Fania Fenelon

Belsen, another concentration camp. The members were due to be shot at 3 p.m. on April 15, 1945. The British liberated the camp at 11 a.m. Although weak from typhus and weighing only 62 pounds, Fania Fenelon sang a stirring rendition of the "Marseillaise".

After the war Fania Fenelon worked as an entertainer for G.I.S., then did concerts in Paris and in 1953 settled in East Germany where she lectured about the Holocaust, performed and was a professor of music in Dresden, Leipzig and East Berlin.

Mme Fenelon, who is fluent in English, German and Russian as well as French, now lives in Paris. She still leads a very active life and still reflects the optimism and enthusiasm that are her hallmarks.

Playing for Time was published in hard cover by Atheneum and in paperback by Berkley Books.

Europe Challenges Reagan

The leaders of Britain and France have made no secret of their desire to scuttle the Camp David peace process. In their White House meetings, British Prime Minister Thatcher and Foreign Minister Carrington, and French Foreign Minister Francois-Poncet, no doubt wanted of "growing tensions" in the Middle East constituting a "serious danger" requiring a "comprehensive solution" to the Israeli-Arab conflict. Essential to the resolution of the problem, naturally, is "the recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people" and the Palestinians' "right to self-determination" — code words for a PLO state. The PLO would of course "have to be associated with the negotiations" — with no quid pro quo requiring acceptance of UN Resolution 242 or even recognition of Israel's right to exist. At the same time, Israel would have to return to the 1967 borders and withdraw from East Jerusalem, following which the Holy City would be internationalized or divided again between Israel and Jordan.

We are informed that this approach did not get very far with President Reagan. He will not abandon the leadership in Middle East affairs that our country won at Camp David, nor will he accept the PLO as an "associated" partner in the peace negotiations, particularly in view of his oft-repeated description of the PLO as a terrorist gang and his Administration's decision to make war on international terrorist activity. If this were not enough, the President's tough-minded attitude toward Russian expansionism would surely veto any

PLO state that would immediately be in thrall to the Soviet Union. "Hundreds" of PLO gunmen have been trained in the USSR, the PLO chief in Moscow boasted in Beirut. The State Department revealed that the PLO had helped train "selected Salvadorans in the Near East and Nicaragua."

The President has also said that Israel's settlements in Judea and Samaria are not illegal, that the Palestinians never elected the PLO to represent them and that the primary obstacle to peace in the Middle East is the Arabs' refusal to accept Israel's right to exist, thus rejecting in advance the very premises on which the European initiative is based.

Western Europe's effort to insert itself into the Middle East peace process by derailing Camp David thus comes as a major challenge to American leadership. The West European initiative can only undermine U.S. influence in the area, contribute to the delegitimizing of Israel and jeopardize the prospects for an Arab-Israeli

settlement. In this confrontation, President Reagan is not apt to flinch; not only is his fundamental outlook on the Middle East diametrically opposed to the Europeans; he also recognizes that the strength of American leadership and the firmness of U.S. foreign policy as conducted by the new administration will be measured by how firmly the President and his Secretary of State resist the Anglo-French effort to interfere with the ongoing Middle East process.

The President would be well advised to inform our British cousins and our French allies that he objects to their meddling in the U.S.-sponsored peace process and that placating the Arabs will only whet their appetite for more concessions. In the interest of the Western alliance, to which they pay lip service and from which they derive their protection, our European partners should be obliged to cease their mischief and abandon their attempts to appease the Arab-oil producing states that are such good customers for their arms exports.

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