

"They say there is youth in the world, where is my youth?" (Chaim Nachman Bialik- poet)

Dad was just twelve years old when the Nazis invaded Poland, or as he used to say, "I didn't even have a bar-mitzvah celebration".

The bar-mitzvah ceremony marks a child's transition into adulthood. After the ceremony, the child is no longer a child. He is invited to complete a "minyan" and, in Judaism, he is already considered a man.

I remember the bar-mitzvah ceremonies of my three sons - Gil, Guy and Ron.

The teachings of the "Melamed", practising the *Haftarah* and its special melody, our excitement of buying the talit, tefillin, a special yarmkula, white shirts and printed invitations.

I remember the synagogue's cantor inviting my son, the bar-mitzvah boy, to the Torah.

I remember the excitement among the women, the silence and the tranquility in the crowd.

I remember my husband Danny, standing on the stage with great pride and teary eyes, and only the bar-mitzvah boy's voice being heard, "Bless G-d, the blessed One". And the congregation responds with, "Blessed is G-d for all eternity". The tables were all well prepared and friends threw candy and cheered him and danced with Torah scrolls and hugs and kisses...

During the Holocaust, children grew up rapidly. They were the smugglers beyond the walls, they were the ones who risked their lives and brought what they were able to bring, by any means, to feed their parents and younger siblings. The role plays have been changed. Children did not need a special ceremony to explain to them that, from now on, they are already mature. Years before, they had already learned how to survive and cope in a crazy, dangerous and evil world and do everything possible to stay alive in the "game of life" - all without a manual.

My grandfather Joseph died before the outbreak of the War, when my father was still a little boy. He was barely fifteen when his mother - my grandmother, Chaya-Sarah - was sent with Bronia-Sprinca, Dad's sister and his little brother Beris-Mendel, to Treblinka. Regina, his sister-in-law, was sent with them and then his brother Shalom-David, Regina's husband also.

So, at such a young age, still in need of parents' warmth and love, his mother no longer covered him at night nor sat beside him to hear all that he had been through during the day.

No longer hugged, no longer kissed ...

Dad survived the horrors of the Holocaust, but the scars never healed.

The War ended on my father's birthday, 8th May 8th 1945, when he was an eighteen years old - an old man.

I remember my father thanking my mother, every night, for being the whole world to him - for being a mother, a sister and a wife.

He told almost nothing about what he went through during the Holocaust. He begged me not to ask.

"It hurts too much", he used to say. He told me that he wrote about the horrors after he was released from the camps, in 1946, when everything was still fresh in his memory.

"And, someday, after my death", he said, "translate the diary and then you'll know everything, my child".

Dad died at the age of fifty-nine after a long illness.

As he requested, after his death, his diary was translated and, from it, I learned everything - and now I have written, on behalf of my father.

Judy Glikson-Pasternak