

Samson and Me
A Story of Blind Love
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Some might toss it off as just another school-girl crush, but for me it was an infatuation of Biblical proportion. A passion that transformed a humdrum year into a time of excitement and emotional turmoil. I was eleven years old.

The meetings with my beloved took place at B'nai Israel Jewish Center, a storefront cheder where I attended class two afternoons a week. The *Jewish Center* was a shabby store wedged between similar structures on Clarkson Avenue, Brooklyn.

Hymie's Appetizing was our neighbor on the right, and the tangy smell of kosher dill pickles often wafted through our after-school sessions. His store was not exactly the Zabar's of East Flatbush, but people said he carried a pretty good selection of smoked salmon.

Our neighbor on the left was *Judy's Beauty Parlor*, a modest salon where my mother had her nails done on Wednesday mornings. The shop was popular for its perms, and the nauseating odor of ammonia that drifted into our classroom is a sharp memory of that long ago time.

So there we were on our first day of school, about twenty students (mostly boys) crowded in a small room of worn wooden desks and chairs, paint-chipped walls, and books randomly scattered on shaky shelves. This was the start of my formal Jewish education.

We were a disgruntled group; we ate our browning bananas and wished we were home enjoying milk and graham crackers and the predictable but always exciting episode of Superman on the kitchen radio.

As the kids exchanged jokes and complaints, a young man entered the room and stood in front of the class. He said his name was Mr. Abrahamson, and that he would be teaching us Bible. There were groans and lots of eye-rolling from those who were even listening. But I paid attention.

The teacher was thin, of medium height, and wore horn-rimmed glasses. He had on a brown suit, white shirt, and green tie. A knitted green yarmulke was fastened to his kinky brown hair with a bobby pin. It was that green yarmulke and the bobby pin, as well as his gentle manner that did him in.

The kids were merciless. They talked among themselves stopping only to ask exasperating questions which Mr. Abrahamson tried to laugh off or answer with a gentle smile. Noah was grist for the mob's mill.

"Were there really elephants on the ark, Mr. Abrahamson?" a smart aleck would ask. "How did they fit them all in?"

"And who cleaned up after them?" another genius added.

"Let me guess...uh, was it Mrs. Noah?"

Well, you get the idea.

Somehow, this young teacher became the hero of my fantasies.

He was the mighty Samson, and I was the beautiful Delilah. Jerusalem was the playground for our love. As we strolled, the Temple grounds, my Samson charmed me with stories of Moses, Noah and his other Biblical buddies.

We swam in the refreshing waters of the Mediterranean and explored ancient caves and fortresses. I was in love with his wisdom, his powerful body, and his long dark

curls. I was certain that we were soul mates. I, suffering the agonies of adolescence, and he suffering the humiliation of students' cruelties.

On Thursday afternoon, Mr. Abrahamson handed out black and white Biblical scenes that we were to color and hand back. The best pictures would brighten the drab classroom walls. Of course most of the class accepted the assignment with disdain. But not me.

In fact, I could hardly wait for the week's selection. Would it be Noah with his parade of animals, or Moses leading a pack of whining Israelites (sort of like Mr. Abrahamson and his obnoxious students) to the Promised Land? My favorite was Samson, the Charles Atlas of his day, and my personal hero. In the illustration he is pulling down the Temple walls with his amazing Popeye muscles.

As soon as I got home, I searched my box of 48 Crayola crayons for just the right colors for my masterpiece. I was certain that Mr. Abrahamson would not only admire my artistry, but would realize how his lessons inspire me.

Week after week, my crayon art decorated those dreary walls. To tell the truth, few students even bothered to turn in work. Only Adam and Eve on their way out of the Garden of Eden seemed to catch the boys' attention, and somehow, none of them were appropriate for the classroom wall.

As the school year came to an end, I decided to write a note to my teacher expressing my gratitude. My glorious card was decorated with cut-outs from *Modern Screen Magazine*. On its cover were Samson (superbly portrayed by Victor Mature) and Delilah (the memorable Hedy Lamar). The message was brief: *Thank you for a wonderful year. I'll never forget you.* I signed it with my Jewish name, *Blumah*.

On the final day of school, as my classmates ran home to enjoy sidewalk games and the arrival of the Good Humor man, I began to approach Mr. Abrahamson's desk. Before I could offer him my farewell card, he turned and entered the small office he shared with Mr. Green, the school's principal. The door was not quite closed, and I could clearly hear the conversation.

Mr. Green began. "Well, Chaim, it's always hard to believe that the year is over."

(Hmm, Chaim..so that was my beloved's first name.)

"There were times when I didn't think I'd make it."

"That bad?" asked the principal.

Mr. Abrahamson replied, "Terrible. The kids are spoiled brats. Rude and heartless."

Mr. Green tried to console him. "I know you've had a hard time, but there must have been a few who appreciated your teaching."

"Well, there was this one girl who turned in all those Bible pictures, but I can't remember her name." He paused for a minute and then said, "Oh yes, I think she signed her work *Blumah*."

Both teachers laughed and laughed. "Blumah!! It's not even a proper Hebrew name," said Mr. Abrahamson. And he went on, "Anyway, I have no idea if she understood anything I said. She always gazed out the window in a perpetual daydream."

Mr. Green said, "I guess you won't be returning in September."

“Absolutely not, thank heavens. My family and I have decided to make aliyah. My Rachel will be starting school in the fall, and Shoshanah is expecting our second child, a son, I hope. In Israel I will have serious students.”

That was all I could stand to hear. Betrayed! Ignored! And humiliated! If I were truly Delilah, I would not only have shorn his locks, I would have shaved his head down to the very last hair. And fed him poison, just to be sure. My Samson did not deserve a second chance!

I ripped up my card and dropped the pieces in a trash can on Clarkson Avenue. If I hurried home, I would be in time for the latest adventure of Superman. I suddenly saw myself as Lois Lane. Clark Kent and I were crushed together in a telephone booth. I helped him disrobe and don the splendid cloak of the Man of Steel. He smiled, and lovingly stroked the back of my neck.

I was definitely finished with Biblical kid stuff.

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