Discovering My Yiddish Self
Steve Kowarsky

What has inspired me lately is Yiddish literature. It all started with the incredible play "Indecent," which made me want to read more of Shalom Asch. This led me to a free audio book of Yiddish Tales on Librivox, which had a few Asch stories and many others, which in turn led me to start getting and reading more of the Yiddish classics. Each new story just stunned me, stopped me cold, almost, but not exactly, had me weeping.

My father's father grew up in a shtetl near Vilna. He never told me his stories. Of course, I've read Shalom Aleichem, seen Fiddler. But, getting into more of it with some of the other incredible, magnificent writers has affected me profoundly. Their lives, so unimaginably difficult. In one way, my life, two generations later, could not be more different. But in another way, it's clear to me when I read their stories that these are my roots, and that who and what I am now is an outgrowth of who they were then. Which made my father who he was. Which made me.

And more than that, even. There is something so familiar about it. I am them. They are me. This has been nudging me to a new understanding of the Jewish people. Just going back two generations from now, from our time, when we have the two thriving communities of Jews in America and Jews in Israel. We have been talking lately about the differences between the two, which are many, of course. But, allowing for some vast simplification, because it's far more complex than that, they can both be seen as two major branches of the same tree. I am seeing this more clearly now, just going back 100 to 150 years.
Sometimes I see it going back a lot farther than that. And I think this is one of main points of it all. Jewish learning is, literally, learning about oneself.

Steve Kowarsky is an avid learner. After joining TBT in Israel he has become involved in the Social Action Committee and will be spearheading further projects with Latet, one of the organizations we visited in Israel after TBT supported their Elderly Holocaust survivors.

Would you like to share your Elul Story for our This Inspired Me series? Please share a book, a movie, a song, or a TV show that left a lasting impression on you. Send your This Inspired Me to: ravsusie@gmail.com. (This theme is inspired by the fact that this month we are holding a Book Drive for the Brooke Jackman Literacy Foundation. We are collecting new children and teen books which will be delivered to children all over the NY area. Come hear the Jackman’s story on Friday, Sept 8th after services.)

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