

YIZKOR 5780

Rabbi Mara S. Nathan

A friend's mother asked about my kiddush cups. She saw them on a shelf in our dining room at Rosh Hashanah lunch. She told me about her's, the broken one that her grandmother sewed into her dress when she fled Eastern Europe. She didn't want to get it fixed. It helped *her* remember.

So, I opened my cabinet and shared some of my memories too. This white one is Elijah's cup- we use it for Pesach, I told her. This one with chuppah, bride and groom was given to us for our wedding. This little silver one, a baby gift for Larry when he was born. This hand painted ceramic one was created by a treasured family friend who died too young. We use it at family weddings, and baby namings... so that she is there too.

Family heirlooms are precious- not because of their monetary value They are precious because of the remembering. They help us remember wonderful moments from our past. They help us remember our family's history and they help us remember people we loved... people we *still* love, even though they are no longer here to sit beside us.

I think my most treasured family heirloom is a set of tin kugel pans my mother gave me a few years ago. They belonged to my great grandmother Minnie Cherlin. I am named after her....Michla was her (and my) Jewish name. I never met grandma Minnie, but I know her life wasn't easy...She emigrated with her family from Minsk. She had two brothers and a sister. She was quiet and shy.

And her husband died leaving her to raise 4 kids on her own...
the oldest, my great aunt Mary- legally blind from scarlet fever.
Yet somehow, she persevered.

Her kugel pans are like that too. They appear to be humble and worn
But all these years later- they persevere and make a perfect matzah
farfel kugel.

I am sure she could never have imagined that her great granddaughter-
her namesake would be a rabbi...or that I might stand before a full
congregation and talk about her kugel pans. But here I am. Paying
tribute to her strength and perseverance. She didn't have a shiny life. It
was humble and worn.....But her memory....her legacy...they live on
Through her children and their children- now grandparents
themselves...and all the generations that are to come.

Yizkor gives us space- not only to honor those we've lost, but to
remember who they were...what they meant to us...how they
influenced us. We open up our minds and hearts and peer in-
a cabinet of precious memories. Heirlooms to share and enjoy...to
miss...and pass on to the generations that are to come.

Our sanctuary is a precious heirloom as well. Some of us sitting here
this afternoon feel the empty chairs beside us. Even if someone else is
actually sitting right there. We remember our parents and
grandparents, a beloved husband or wife...a precious child, a dear
friend. Who sat with us through holiday and shabbas celebrations,
b'nei mitzvah, weddings, funerals. And for those of us who did not grow
up in these actual pews, we still pause- if only for a moment-

wanting to save a seat for those we never stop missing-who we keep safe in our hearts.

It is always at Yizkor- when our sanctuary is close to full- with few seats to spare that it feels like there are actually empty chairs- everywhere. This space- this hour- then.....is a gift we give to ourselves. It is a place to linger in our memories of the past....To acknowledge our sorrow and our longing, but also our gratitude, pride and love. We know that to fulfill their legacies- we must eventually close the cabinet and place our memories carefully back in their place. Finding Solace in the truth that they will wait patiently for us to come back.... and remember.