

Praise for Sister Mary Baruch: The Early Years

Sister Mary Baruch shows how ordinary struggles become the stuff of a divine life of grace. Through the imaginative eyes of Sr. Mary Baruch, Fr. Jacob has given us a look into the mystery of the Dominican cloistered nun and captured the intersection of the human with the divine.

—Fr. Basil Cole, O.P., Professor of Moral Theology, Dominican House of Studies, Washington, D.C.

I would thoroughly encourage anyone to read this book. It is truly an abundant presentation of Monastic life yesterday and today. We had the opportunity of having Fr. Jacob as our chaplain for six years, and during his homilies at Mass we heard many of the stories that make up the foundation of this book. Once you start reading this book, you won't be able to put it down, believe me!

—Sr. Theresa Marie, O.P., *Monastery of the Mother of God, West Springfield, MA*

Such a blessing, this book. Fr Jacob is a gifted storyteller who can be hilariously funny and yet pierce the heart. His years of experience as a monastery chaplain give him authentic insights into the trials and the profundity of cloistered life, and he skillfully balances a story of delightful simplicity with

profound insights into human nature and the mystery of the monastic life.

—Sr. Mary Dominic, O.P., *Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary, Buffalo, NY*

Father Restricket's novel offers characters, settings, and life situations that are realistic and recognizable to a wide-range of readers. One is easily drawn into sharing the ups and downs, joys and sorrows of Rebecca's life and spiritual journey while experiencing the pulse and culture of New York City living. Readers will smile, chuckle, and knowingly nod as they are unexpectedly lead to gentle reflections of God's providential impact in their own lives. A delightful story that begs to be continued!

—Marianne T. Jablonski, O.P., *Dominican Laity*

Fr. Jacob's attention to detail is what makes everything come alive for the reader. At times he made me laugh, at other times weep, and at times he made me pray. He weaves truths about the Catholic faith into the story's fabric, educating even as he entertains the reader.

—Darillyn Paterson, *Dominican Laity*

Sister Mary Baruch

SISTER MARY BARUCH

The Early Years

Fr. Jacob Restrick, O.P.

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This humble work is dedicated to today's cloistered daughters of St. Dominic who walk this road less traveled, and to the sons of our Holy Father Dominic who serve them and depend on their prayers.

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

—Robert Frost

FOREWORD

THIS IS THE story of Sister Mary Baruch's deep loves. As we come to know Becky Feinstein (her name "in the world" before becoming a contemplative Dominican nun), we learn about her love for warm bagels and good chocolate, for Broadway theater and good books, for her good friends and her close-knit family, and, of course, for New York City itself. But it is another love—one that comes upon her quite unexpectedly—that gives her story its power: the love of Jesus himself.

This is a story of conversion, acknowledging all of the crises and consolations, both small and large, that come from that. We follow Becky as she first comes to hear the Lord in that "still, quiet place" in her heart and then as she follows that newfound love and encounters its (sometimes bitter-sweet) consequences.

This book is the fruit of the contemplation and the rich experience of a wise and gifted preacher. Fr. Jacob Restruck's long service as a chaplain to different communities of Dominican nuns has given him a privileged insight into the experience of this form of intimate friendship with Jesus, and its moments both sublime and ordinary. The reader who

accompanies Sr. Mary Baruch on her odyssey is receiving not only the story of a soul but a profound lesson about the spiritual life itself.

—Jonah Teller, O.P.

PREFACE

The nuns of the Order of Preachers came into being when our Holy Father Dominic gathered women converts to the Catholic faith in the monastery of Blessed Mary of Prouille. These women, free for God alone, he associated with his “holy preaching” by their prayer and penance. Our Holy Father drew up a rule to be followed and constantly showed a father’s love and care for these nuns and for others established later in the same way of life. In fact, “they had no other master to instruct them about the Order.” Finally, he entrusted them as part of the same Order to the fraternal concern of his sons.

—Fundamental Constitution of the Nuns 1.1

I WAS PREACHING AN Advent retreat at one of our cloistered monasteries and the readings at Mass for the Monday of the Second Week are from Isaiah and the Gospel of Luke. I wondered how a cloistered nun would reflect on these readings and how they pertain to the life of a cloistered nun. And so Sr. Mary Baruch of the Advent Heart was born. I “discovered” a journal she had written with her own reflections

on these readings and shared them in my homily. The nuns seemed to identify with her, and so she would appear in homilies thereafter. Through her journals, we eventually got to know her family and the story of her own conversion from Judaism. Here the full story can be told.

Sr. Mary Baruch was originally written for Dominican nuns, as I had been chaplain to two of our cloistered monasteries, and familiar with most of the others. But her story has entertained, and I hope, inspired, many beyond the cloister walls: Dominican laity, priests, Sisters, Brothers, Catholic and non-Catholic friends alike.

We welcome a new and revised edition of Sr. Mary Baruch, O.P. *The Early Years*. There have been a few factual errors in the original which have been corrected, while the storyline remains the same.

I am especially grateful to two of my Dominican brothers, Jonah Teller and Henry Stephan, for their editorial expertise, desire, and diligence in editing and reformatting the entire novel. I am also grateful to the many Sisters who have come to know Sr. Mary Baruch and welcomed her into their hearts, and have offered their personal reflections.

Sr. Mary Baruch is completely fictitious, as is her monastery of Our Lady Queen of Hope in Brooklyn Heights, New York. The Sisters, priests, family, and friends of Sr. Mary Baruch are also completely fictitious, while the churches and places in New York are factual (except for Tea on Thames).

If you have not met Sister Mary Baruch before, the early chapters will introduce you to her and her family and friends, and her coming into the Faith of the Holy Catholic Church. If you are reacquainting yourself with her, you will

follow her again into the monastery and the grace-filled life of a Dominican nun. Whether you are reading for the first time or renewing the acquaintance, may you be moved to laughter, to tears, and, most of all, to prayer. May you find something of yourself in Sr. Mary Baruch, who has found that loving God with all one's heart is "such a blessing."

Fr. Jacob Restruck, O.P.

October 31, 2015

Vigil of All Saints

One

MY NAME IS Baruch; I know, it's not a girl's name, but it's *my* name...Mary Baruch, actually, which gives it a nice feminine flavor, yes? Sister Mary Baruch to be exact, but *Sister* is a title that we nuns are all called by. I did not choose Mary Baruch as my name when I became a nun; it was chosen for me. It was a day I'll never forget. In my journal I have written right after the date, November 1, 1970, *My Wedding Day*.

It was a crisp, autumn-in-New-York kind of day. The community had just chanted Lauds before the Solemn High Mass for All Saints' Day. I had come into the choir, the nuns' part of the chapel, dressed in an eggshell white Chantilly lace wedding dress. It was a used dress; I don't know how many nuns before me had worn it, probably not too many, as it came off the extra-large rack and even then had to be let out some. Most of the more portly nuns don't acquire their portliness till many years after their wedding day, but I came in as a size 18 and a half. Some of the nuns had even worn their own mothers' wedding dresses, if they passed the inspection of the prioress; they couldn't be too exquisite, but plain and not tight-fitting.

Mine was not my dear mother's, who would have been horrified at the thought of her gown being worn by a Catholic nun, even if—or especially if—it was her own daughter.

She wasn't even in our lovely chapel that All Saints' Day to see me in Chantilly lace with the little pillbox lace veil. I may have looked like a chubby old gal making her First Holy Communion, but I couldn't have been happier. My wearing the wedding dress was an exception to the rule, as the custom had been let go some years before. "Letting go is always difficult," Mother John Dominic, the prioress, would often say; we seemed to be more reluctant than others. Mother also had another reason to make this exception in my case, which I'll explain later.

Like all the nuns that came before me, I was dying to know what *name* I would receive. When I entered and officially became a postulant, I was called Sister Rebecca; Rebecca was my "name in the world." As a postulant, just entering the cloister, I wore a 1930s style schoolgirl's jumper and white blouse with a black caplet and a shoulder length black veil. We were three postulants in 1970. I was the third from that group to receive the habit. We entered the chapel as brides on our vestition day, the day we were married to Christ, although we didn't take our vows then, but were clothed in the habit of the Order. Our hair was cut for the first time, and we were given our new names.

I had never heard of a Sr. Mary Baruch before and doubt that Baruch is even counted as a saint. I was hoping for the name of one of the Apostles, or one of our Dominican Saints. Well, I confess, I thought Mother John Dominic would probably name me after Thomas Aquinas; I think he may have worn a size 18 and a half tunic too. But I learned later that Mother wanted something from the Hebrew Scriptures, or the Old Testament, as we Catholics called them. Rachel

or Ruth would have been nice, even Judith, as there's a bit of the old warrior in me. Of course, I would have been thrilled to have been given the name Hannah, my dear old mother's name. I called her Hannah of a Thousand Silver Hairs. And Ruth is the name of my younger sister; she would have been thrilled to no end. So it was to my surprise that I was to be called Mary Baruch of the Advent Heart. *Baruch*? I didn't know the Hebrew Scriptures all that well, and Baruch, for me, was the name of the college on Lexington Avenue and 24th Street where my cousin Esther went to get her teaching degree.

Mother John Dominic no doubt thought she was being clever naming me Baruch, as the Old Testament Baruch was the personal secretary to the Prophet Jeremiah. Actually, "Jeremiah" would have fit me better as I was often given to jeremiads, even before we were encouraged to speak up at community meetings. I've grown to love my name, however, as I know it means "Blessed." And I have certainly been blessed. Hannah, I hope, loved it too, as Mama used to say that we, her children, were each a blessing. Even when we'd make awful or dumb mistakes, or have accidents, she could see the blessing in everything. "Such a blessing for you," Mama would say, usually while remedying the situation.

Before all that, I was just a nice Jewish girl from the Upper West Side of Manhattan. I grew up on West 79th Street between Columbus and Amsterdam, in the shadow of the Museum of Natural History and the wonderful Hayden's Planetarium. How I loved that mysterious place; I think it made us kids both awestruck and giddy with joy. They could make the whole night sky—the Big Dipper and

everything—shine and move on the ceiling-dome above us. My older brother, David, always wanted to go see the dinosaur remains, but my sisters and I loved the Planetarium. Actually, we didn't go to the Museum of Natural History very much, even though it was just a half block away.

Across the street was a synagogue where we went. I would like to say that we went every Friday night or Saturday morning, but we didn't. I did go to Hebrew School, along with my sisters Sally and Ruthie and my brothers David and Joshua, so we *got the basics*, as Mama would say. "Such a blessing you should have to know a little Hebrew!"

We were not the most devout of Jewish families, but we did keep Shabbat every week; that was probably the strictest...or at least the most self-conscious part of growing up Jewish; and it was one of the nicest too. I have emblazoned on my memory Mama lighting the Shabbat candles on the dining room table, which was always covered with a special lace tablecloth only used on Shabbat. I can still see her covering her eyes while she prayed aloud in a voice that I will always remember; it was somehow different from her normal voice the rest of the week. The Hebrew words seemed to roll off her tongue like a quiet brook flowing in the woods.

Barukh atah Adonai,
Eloheinu, melekh ha'olam
asher kidishanu b'mitz'vo-
tav v'tzivanu l'had'lik neir
shel Shabbat. Amein

Blessed are you, Lord,
our God, sovereign of the
universe, Who has sancti-
fied us with His command-
ments and commanded
us to light the lights of
Shabbat. Amen

The house was always quieter after the candles were lit, or so it seemed.

My full family name was Rebecca Abigail Feinstein. My initials were thus shared with the British Royal Air Force. I was called Becky by everyone except Papa who always called me either Rebecca or Raf; I thought it was for the R.A.F. but Papa said it was short for Raphael and that I was his little angel. Papa's name was Ruben, but people called him Ben; not Benny, but Ben. When I got a little older and Papa would call me "Raf, my little angel," I would say, "What is it, Ruben, my little corned-beef sandwich?" And Papa would laugh and give me a hug.

"Becky, Becky, my little side of coleslaw, why are you being such a sour pickle today? So serious you are, for sixteen years old."

And I would laugh too; Papa could always make me laugh...funny, huh? It makes me almost weep today when I remember it and how I thought I broke his heart, and he never showed it. But that was a few years after my sixteenth birthday. I don't know what broke my father's heart more... when my brother, Josh, at nineteen years old was killed in Vietnam, or when I became a Christian when I was twenty. These are not totally unrelated as I think about it all now. Funny how time changes the way we see things. Time is capable of putting things in a context, in a setting, like a fine piece of jewelry.

I *was* a serious child, as Papa teased, at least compared to my sisters. Sally, or Sarah, was the oldest girl, just four years older than me. She was also serious, but in an academic way. She was the smartest daughter of the three Feinstein girls, or

so I believed because I heard it said once by Mrs. Melbourne at Max the Butcher's. She was discussing something about lamb chops with her spinster sister, when Sally and I rushed past them with our newly butchered, but neatly wrapped, chickens. They were not wrapped tightly, and chicken blood dripped out from the brown paper and down my seersucker jumper. I, of course, gave out a scream of horror, causing the old ladies to jump three feet in the air and clutch their chests. Sally very calmly explained that our chickens were apparently leaking a bit and perhaps Max could double wrap them for us, and would he have a washcloth for Becky's jumper? It wasn't a highly intelligent explanation of the situation, but Mrs. Melbourne squeaked out, "Oh, my dear, look at your poor dress, all covered with blood. You mustn't grasp the packages too close to yourself, dear, carry them straight down away from yourself. Oh my."

We were scurrying past the two commentators, now fussing over the wrapping of their lamb chops, when I heard Mrs. Melbourne nonchalantly say to her sister, "The older girl, Sarah, should be charge of the packages; after all, she's older, *and* she's the brightest of the Feinstein girls."

I never questioned anyone how Mrs. Melbourne came to that bit of knowledge, but it was true. Sally was always on the Honor Roll at school, and dumb ole Becky was just schlepping her bag of books around and letting chicken blood drip all over her dress.

I did okay in school; Sally was already at Barnard, the women's college at Columbia University, when I was a high school sophomore. She was going to be a teacher someday. I wanted to go to Barnard too, and study law or English

Literature or creative writing and be a journalist for the *New York Times*! I wanted to write for the *Sunday Times Art and Entertainment* section and get free tickets to all the Broadway shows and be invited to movie premieres. Sally wound up being the journalist, not for the *New York Times*, but the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. She relocated, as we say today, to Philly which I would have found to be the greatest sacrifice in the world. I wouldn't leave New York City for a million bucks. Why would anyone, I thought, ever want to live anywhere else? I wanted to visit all the grand cities in Europe, but not to stay, and not till all the wars were over.

I wanted to see London's Broadway, which I knew they called the West End; and Amsterdam, which I pictured with windmills on every corner, and people walking around in wooden shoes, and pointed hats looking like nurses' caps, with embroidered pink and blue and yellow tulips growing around even more windmills. All the boys looking like the little Dutch boy on Dutch Boy Paints.

Mama had a single Dutch wooden shoe, painted white with little windmills and tulips painted on it. She had gotten it in the mail all the way from Holland, from Berta, her pen-pal for many years, ever since World War II, I think. They never met, but would write almost every month to each other.

Mama would always remember Berta's birthday, and of course, we kids always made fun of the tongue twisting alliteration: *Better buy Berta's Birthday Box*. Mama's wooden shoe was a real Dutch wooden shoe, sent to her from Berta for one of Mama's "berte-days." She kept it on a shelf in the front parlor, and sometimes we'd find things in it, like rock

candy and sour balls. I used to hold it and imagine everybody clapping around the sidewalks of Amsterdam in those clodhoppers. When I was older I read that one could visit the house in Amsterdam where Anne Frank had been hidden and wrote her diary. I saw the Broadway show when it first came out, and afterwards I wanted more than anything to write stories that would hold people spellbound, like I experienced that night on Broadway.

I had two papier-mâché theatrical masks, the Comedy and Tragedy faces. They were hanging in my corner of the bedroom I shared with Ruthie. I understood what they meant and how spiritual it was to *touch people's souls*, as Mama would say. Mama would say that her greatest spiritual experience, besides lighting the Shabbat candles, was listening to the cantor, especially on Yom Kippur. I knew what she meant. His voice carried you to another place inside of you. I liked that place. It wasn't the same as the Broadway theater, but something akin to it. I was fascinated by it; I wasn't afraid of it like I was afraid of buses and delivery boys on bikes, swerving and weaving in and out of New York traffic. I wasn't afraid of it like sometimes I was afraid of the dark. Ruthie and I kept the Venetian blinds in our bedroom window slightly open, enough so we could see the street light. We were afraid if the light went out that it was an air-raid and we were going to be bombed, right on West 79th Street.

We were all afraid of air-raids and even rehearsed them in school. We'd have to crouch down next to our desks with our heads almost on the floor. It was a most unladylike position, and once acquired, it caused giggles and fits of laughter among the girls. Once, Nola Finley, probably the smartest

(and fattest) girl in our class, tried getting in “air-raid-position,” which was most difficult for her size, and she broke wind. Tommy Schultz shouted, “We’ve been bombed!” The whole class got hysterical laughing, even Mrs. Peterson, our second grade teacher. It makes me laugh today to think of it, but I also feel sorry for poor Nola Finley; nobody thought about how humiliated she must’ve felt, but I think she ended up laughing too. The next day, Tommy Schultz’s bike tires were mysteriously flat, and he had to walk home pushing his bike. I wonder what ever happened to Nola?

When I was afraid, I could escape to my secret hiding place, like Anne Frank, but mine was inside. I could feel it on the other side of my rib cage. I think Mama escaped to her hiding place too when she prayed and closed her eyes and her voice became all mellow. Sometimes, it seemed I could find that place inside of me more at a Broadway play than at Temple—I could get all teary-eyed during a curtain call, more than the saddest lamentation on Yom Kippur. I didn’t think about it, but I knew those tears sprang up because something was touched in that secret hiding place. I didn’t analyze it when I was a kid, but that secret place, surrounding my heart, behind my sternum, I just knew it was always there, and I was safe there...it was my inner space.

Ruthie shared my interest in show biz news, and we loved to go to the movies together, and if we were down around 57th Street, we’d go into Horn and Hardart’s for a piece of pie from the automat, and tea. We called it our afternoon high tea; we would both be “her ladyship” and addressed each other rather formally with our amateur British accents, but we were sure we were fooling the tourists who goggled at

us British girls. We, of course, were dressed as properly as we could be for a matinee and high tea. We always remembered our white linen gloves, even when indoors, and I would pour as I was the elder, even if I was not as smart as Sally. I was a better “pourer” than Ruthie, who was too full of antsy energy to pour a decent cup of tea.

If she were going to become the grand actress in the Feinstein family, of course she would have to change her name, so she informed us, every time she came up with a new one. For several months she was Edith Friend or Edie Stein...and that’s when she discovered a story in the *New Amsterdam Jewish Press*, about a German Jewish girl who was a Catholic nun, a Carmelite, who died at Auschwitz. It was a fascinating story which we knew we couldn’t talk about at home, at the dinner table, but Edith Stein was welcomed at our imaginary high teas at Horn’s. “Little steins” became our secret code word for “caramels”...the little brown square ones which were so chewy they could almost pull out your fillings, not the caramel in all its creamy thickness, hidden in Snicker bars or poured over vanilla ice cream, which was often served at our high teas, along with lady fingers. Ruthie loved lady fingers. We used to joke that if we ever became nuns we would be “caramelites,” like Edith Stein. Ruthie was my sister, but also my best friend, and the keeper of secrets. We also planned on being each other’s maids of honor when we got married under the white and gold brocade canopy at Temple.

It seemed to all change overnight when we were both in high school, and boys became more interesting than afternoon tea parties. *Fiddler on the Roof* was all the rage on Broadway, and David, the eldest and firstborn son of Ruben

and Hannah Feinstein, had the most brilliant idea for a gift to celebrate Mama and Papa's twenty-fifth wedding anniversary: Broadway tickets to *Fiddler* for the whole family—except Josh, of course, who was in Vietnam. We had already gotten the Broadway album and knew the songs almost by heart. Papa was no Zero Mostel, of course, but he did have three daughters, like Tevye, who had five. Mama and Papa knew all the words to *Sunrise, Sunset*, and would sing out loud with the album, but they wouldn't splurge and go see the show. David really paid for the tickets, but we each contributed something from our "Broadway Fund."

Ruthie and I had a joint fund. It was an empty Maxwell House Coffee tin, which we kept on the bookshelf under my Comedy/Tragedy masks. We would save quarters and dimes whenever we could. We still got allowances for the little chores we did around the apartment, and sometimes we could put half our allowance in our Theater Tin. We'd save and save for months, and sometimes cheated and used the savings for movies rather than the theater. But David accepted our contribution, which I don't think paid for one ticket. Sally was coming up from Philadelphia and probably paid more than David, but let us think David did; he had come up with the idea. It was perfect—Tevye and his three daughters, off to break tradition, which we did...off to the theater on a Friday night. We ate before sunset so we wouldn't be late for the theater, arriving in two cabs, which was a treat in itself. Hannah of a Thousand Silver Hairs looked so elegant in her powder blue dress and the pearls she wore on her wedding day. It had been years since she went to a Broadway musical, and I caught her getting all teary-eyed

when the house lights went down, and the overture began. She and Papa held hands like lovesick newlyweds. David, always the proper one among us, leaned over me and Ruthie and whispered to them, “Now you two behave yourselves.” Mama blushed a little, but it made her face youthful and almost regal. I know when Tevye and Golda sang their love song together near the end, we were all holding back the tears. Such a blessing, I thought, to have my own Golda and her milkman.

After the theater we took two more taxis home, and when we got in it was almost eleven o’clock, but Mama lit the candles for Shabbat, and we all ate cake and drank Mogen David’s Elderberry Wine, Mama’s favorite. David had another surprise which had been hidden all night in the soup tureen on the dining room buffet table. It was neatly wrapped in silver metallic paper, which fascinated everyone, as metallic paper was not a common wrapping paper. It didn’t have a ribbon or bow on it; it didn’t need one, the paper itself was so pretty—very fancy for David, we all thought.

Well, it wasn’t from David at all; he was just the delivery boy. It was from Josh, sent to David weeks before from Manila, where Josh had been deployed before going to Vietnam. Inside the box were two other smaller boxes, marked M and P. That was for Mama and Papa, not Military Police. Papa opened his first. It was a gold Timex watch with a Speidel expandable band. Papa was quite taken by it, as his old Bulova watch was always “on the blink.” He had actually taken to going watch-less for the last month, thinking maybe Santa would bring him a new one for Chanukah. We had a Jewish Santa, you see.

And Mama's gift was an exquisite brooch, which she said must have cost Josh six months' wages. It was silver, appropriately, but an old, antique, burnished kind of silver, with ruby and sapphire chips set in a lace-like spread of tiny leaves with five tiny flowers in the center. She touched the silver flowers very gently and lisped through a tiny flood of tears rolling down her cheek, "How thoughtful of Josh, my five children."

Papa squeezed her shoulders and gently took the brooch in his hands and pinned it on her dress below her left shoulder. It looked even more beautiful with a powder-blue backdrop. Almost on cue, she took Papa's new watch and slipped it onto his left wrist, "*Mazel Tov*, my Ruben." And the Feinstein Family Singers shouted back, "*Mazel Tov*," and sang "Happy Anniversary to You."

David opened another bottle of Mogen David, in honor of Josh. Of course, we put *Fiddler* on the hi-fi and sang most of the score to our hearts' content, talked about how wonderful everybody was in the show, and wondered if we had a fiddler on our roof. Papa had us all in stitches pretending Fred, our Super, was Fred our Fiddler. Everyone in our building called him "Fred Mertz" (for Fred from *I Love Lucy*) because he could have been William Frawley's understudy: Fred the Fiddler on the Roof.

We needed a "fiddler on the roof," without realizing it, that happy September evening in 1964. Two days later "Tevye and Golda" received the telegram every parent with a son or daughter in the army dreads to receive. Josh had been killed in action. Sally came up from Philly again that same night, and David with his three sisters surrounded them

with love and grief. We were not conservative Jews, but we covered the mirrors, and rent our garments and Mama and Papa went without shoes...sitting Shiva and saying Kaddish. It just seemed to be the right thing to do. How poor we become when we lose the life of a loved one. How much Josh would have been moved.

My brother, Joshua Hiram Feinstein, was only two years older than me. I was his first baby sister, he would like to remind me. I think he did that on purpose so I wouldn't be jealous of Ruthie when she came along and I lost the position. Nonetheless, Josh was probably the most religious of the Feinstein kids. We always thought if there was going to be a rabbi in the family, it would be Joshua. He had a voice which was a cantor in the making, and a sense of humor like a stand-up comic at Grossinger's.

However, he wasn't given too much to school work and didn't want to go to college. Maybe he felt inferior to David, who was the eldest and the shining star. "My Star of David" Papa would call him. So if it wasn't rabbinical school, Baruch College, or Grossinger's—what would it be? Mama was always afraid he'd run off to a kibbutz in Israel and get married over there and we'd never see him again. Ruthie and I wanted him to audition for Broadway; he had the talent, and the looks, but not the ambition. And to everyone's surprise, he enlisted in the army. David had beat the draft because he had flat feet and was partially blind in one eye. ("Such a blessing, your feet," Mama said when he was rejected by the draft board.) Josh enlisted before he could be drafted, even if it was for a longer time, it would be better...he would be an officer.

I think Josh's death touched something different in each of us. We never played our *Fiddler on the Roof* album after that, although they are not really related except by the association of time. I don't think Mama and Papa really celebrated their anniversary afterwards, except in a quiet private way. Papa never took his watch off, and Mama's brooch, well, I don't remember her ever wearing it, but she kept it in its box, with the tissue paper and metallic wrapping, in the top drawer of her dresser, where she had Josh's photo in his uniform framed.

David lost himself in his studies. He didn't seem to come home as often. Sally came home more often, it seemed, and filled the house with her chatter and news, which was usually more annoying than informative. Ruthie became a distracted teenager who screamed over rock stars and got lost in her school activities, which weren't always so savory.

I graduated high school that next year and planned to go to Barnard College. Josh's death affected me in ways that I couldn't talk about. I still went to the movies, but took to going by myself and liked the escape into the darkness of the theater and my "hiding place." That interior place I would go to became more like a second home. I was going to live at home, of course, and since David and Josh's room was empty now, it became my room, for which I was very grateful. Ruthie was playing her music all the time and wanted an extension phone in the bedroom, which she got for Chanukah. I even gave her my theater masks as a "room departing gift," and she gave me the Theater Tin. The family was still close, but it was different. Or maybe I was just different. Something was stirring inside me, which I didn't know at the time.

I loved walking in New York, at all times of the year. There are always a million people out walking, it seemed, but one could always be alone. My friend, Gracie, was probably my best friend from school. We graduated from high school together and had been good friends all during school, ever since we were on the *Banner* together. That was our school newspaper, which came out every two weeks. She was a reporter for the *Banner* and I was an editor. She was lots of fun to talk to, and wasn't boy crazy like so many of the other girls in school. If we weren't going to the movies, we'd go for long walks on Saturdays and Sundays.

During the day it was pretty safe to walk through Central Park, and it was really like another world. For one thing, it could be very entertaining; you never knew what you'd see or hear. And the show was for free! Gracie and I would make up stories about the people we observed, like the bird-watchers going by with their binoculars and tweed jackets. I suppose Gracie took the place of Ruthie when we'd do things like go for coffee at the Boathouse Café and pretend we were actresses taking a break between takes. Gracie loved to ride the carousel. We'd jump on with all the kids and ride on a painted pony which moved up and down with the music. Sometimes when I'm feeling sad or lonely, I close my eyes, and I can feel myself riding the carousel; the warm air of Central Park blowing through my hair; and I can almost hear the carousel music and hear Gracie's laughter. It can still make me smile.

But I also enjoyed going for solitary walks. I found it very easy to think and get everything in focus. Living near the Park was "such a blessing, the Park," as Mama would say. I

think it must've been good for me too, in dealing with the stress of living in the city and all that meant, but I didn't think about that and didn't think I was under stress. I liked to think about more serious things. And I liked to read, which is not unusual, of course, but I didn't read fashion magazines or romance novels or the more spicy novels the girls passed around at school.

I liked biographies and what today we would call the "classics." English Lit had become my favorite subject in school, which again, was not unusual. I always liked a good story; that's why the movies and the theater were my second homes. But books! It's a whole universe to explore, and everybody has a story. Every single life is a story in the making. That realization is probably what helped me get through the sad years after my brother's death, my sisters' running off to other worlds, and my own—well, how should I put it? My own "falling in love."

It was a Saturday morning in early autumn when I had taken a crosstown bus to the East Side. Gracie had called me at daybreak to tell me she was in Mt. Sinai Hospital. She had been running around the Reservoir in Central Park the night before and became very weak and nauseous, and before she knew it she was being rushed by ambulance to Mt. Sinai. Apparently she had passed out, and another jogger ran to get the Park police, who called the ambulance. They kept her overnight, and she was feeling okay, but she was scared, and *could I come over?* I wasn't sure they'd let me visit her this early in the morning, on the Sabbath yet, but I would try. I'd tell them I was her sister.

Well, maybe that wouldn't be the best thing, to lie. They wouldn't believe me anyway. Gracie was thin, blonde, had blue eyes, and would never be hidden in an attic with Anne Frank. But even if we didn't look like sisters, she was my friend, so I bundled off the crosstown bus at Madison Avenue and 98th Street. There was an entrance to the Guggenheim Pavilion on Madison and 100th Street, but I like the Fifth Avenue entrance. So I walked a block over. I remember it being rather chilly. My light jacket had a large collar which I raised up; I donned a pair of sunglasses, more to protect my eyes from the cold than the sun, and covered my head with the silk scarf that Ruthie had given me for my birthday. It came from Bloomingdale's and looked very smart with light autumn jackets. Ruthie had one too, and thought they made us look older. She called them our *scarves*, but Mama called them *bandannas*. I thought I looked rather Broadway star-ish as I made my grand and confident entrance into the Guggenheim Pavilion.

There was a matronly-looking volunteer (probably) at the reception desk where one obtains a visitor's pass. Trying my best to appear like a Guggenheim Girl, I requested the room number of Grace Darling Price, and I was politely told visiting hours were not until 11:00. It was only around 9:45. Even removing the sunglasses and giving my best smile didn't change her mind.

I silently turned away, wanting to put on my best Tallulah Bankhead: "*Thank you, Dahling,*" but it came out sounding like a hurt little girl wearing a bandanna.

"I know," I said to myself, "I'll have a nice stroll down Fifth Avenue, get a bagel and coffee, and peoplewatch the

crowd.” Besides, I needed some quiet time to think. And so I did. Autumn in New York. There was a deli coffee shop across the street from the Metropolitan Museum, just a few blocks, really, down from Mt. Sinai. I nursed a pot of tea and a cinnamon-raisin bagel, sitting at a tiny little table in the front window, where I could watch the people going by. I loved those in-between times when one’s thinking moves above the mundane thoughts that occupy the mind.

I thought about Gracie...Grace Darling Price, my gentle friend. She was much more popular in high school than I ever was. She was a cheerleader our junior and senior year, and she went out with Malcolm Linton, the big quarterback star, till he twisted his ankle one fateful Saturday afternoon in October, and his stardom faded for the rest of the year. He became sullen and rather crude in his conversational skills, to put it nicely. He also dropped Gracie...he would snicker, “The Price wasn’t right.” That got handed in by the senior student-gossip columnist to the *Banner*, and Gracie let it be printed. I always liked her because of that, and that she never whined and cried and became all maudlin over a broken love-affair. Well, not really a “love-affair” in the Hollywood sense of that; they were high school sweethearts for a few months. I think Malcolm’s interest was more in showing off his girlfriend as part of his claim to fame. Lord knows he didn’t excel in the academic hall of fame. Sometimes I think I was more angry at him than Gracie was; Gracie never said a bad thing about him. She once told me in the *Banner* Office, when I was going off about him, that I shouldn’t be angry with him, but to “pray for him; it’s the best thing. I lit a candle for him at

church.” She took me a little aback because she didn’t—*we* didn’t—talk about religious things, let alone engage in them. I think I muttered something like, “Yeah, I’ll pray Kaddish for him,” but it went over her blonde head. (Kaddish is our Jewish Prayer for the dead.)

She didn’t get the Kaddish part. She was no dumb blonde, but very smart, popular—and I discovered, apparently prayerful, too! So I sat with my teapot, gazing out on Fifth Avenue, wondering what could possibly be wrong with her. She wasn’t attacked; she didn’t say she tripped and fell or had a Charley horse or “hit the wall” as they say. But here she was, overnight at Mt. Sinai. I decided to myself that I should get her something. Here I was like a real schmuck, coming to visit her in the hospital empty handed. Flowers would be nice, but they were also expensive, and I only had a little over seven dollars when I left home; minus bus fare and my bagel and tea, I could probably get one yellow rose; she liked yellow roses (she called them “blonde roses”)...but one rose seemed so Saint-Exupery, and it wouldn’t last too long. I would get her a couple magazines instead— something to read. So I gulped the rest of my Earl Grey and headed east to Lexington Avenue. I could get her a fashion magazine and put it in a Bloomingdale’s bag. That would impress her. I walked quickly down Park Avenue to 72nd Street and over to Lexington Avenue and went south on Lexington. It had warmed up a bit, or I had, thanks to Earl Grey and the athletic strides I was making. I was perspiring on my forehead and the back of my neck, so I whipped off my Bloomingdale’s scarf and made it a neck-scarf again.

Growing up on the West Side of Manhattan, the East Side always seemed so much more fashionable and somehow quieter; even the passers-by seemed more reserved and pensive. People on the West Side were always kibitzing down the street and made more noise. As I was crossing 66th Street right in front of me was the massive stone church of St. Vincent Ferrer. I had never been inside a Catholic Church, but there was a lady coming out the doors and down the stairs—and it was Saturday morning. I don't know what made me stop, right there, in front of the steps, but I had the instant inspiration to go inside. *I could light a candle for Gracie.* I wasn't quite sure what that meant or how you'd do it, but I'd seen it more than once in a movie. So there I was making my way up the stairs of St. Vincent's on my Sabbath day, which I wasn't keeping very well running around the East Side. I covered my head again with my scarf; I knew girls were supposed to have their heads covered like men covered theirs in the synagogue. There was a nice entry way, which I later learned was called a vestibule. It had several racks of pamphlets and Catholic magazines and newspapers for sale. There's the ticket. That would save me going all the way to Bloomingdale's—I'd get her a Catholic magazine and a lit candle to boot. The vestibule doors were a little heavy to push open, but I managed easily enough, not without some trepidation. I didn't think the ceiling would fall in on me, or anyone would yell, "A Jewess! Get her out!" It was more a quiet fear of walking into an unknown territory, and even feeling somehow naughty for it. What would Papa say if he could see me now? Little did I know that, for my poor soul, it was a sunrise...sunset.