

Passover, As Seen By A Young Boy In New York

60 - 65 Years Ago

My father was the rabbi. He was the cantor in the synagogue. He also earned some money as a marriage performer.

My father was secretary in 4 or 5 "Netershtitzen Farines". These were societies that all the immigrants belonged to, all the people who came from the same little town in Europe or Russia. His duties, as I recall, were to keep the records and send out the notices of meetings. Each member of our family helped in addressing, stamping and posting.

Before Passover, my brothers and I collected the chometz, usually tied up with a chicken feather. This we burnt on the morning before the first Seder.

My mother and father were the chief purveyors of charosis. We would bring the charosis to all the neighbors and friends, especially to the dignitaries of the shul and the Societies. I don't recall if my father got paid for this. We also delivered matzah (in 5 15 packages), farfel, matzah meal, cakes, nuts and gallons of Passover wine -- all delivered using a hand push cart. I do believe I used to get money as tips when I made the deliveries.

At our Seders we usually had 30 to 40 people. Most were our own family, children and friends, but there were a few invited rabbis and dignitaries. My father conducted the Seder dressed in a long white robe (a Kittel) and a beautiful white embroidered close crown. He sat high on pillows, propped up, in his stocking feet.

The Seder was conducted meticulously, with washing of the hands after each course. After my fathers' Kiddush, all who wanted also made Kiddush. Of course, after each one we took a sip of wine! With the eating of the bitter herbs and the egg slices, with the dipping of the matzos, the food was passed down the long table to each one sitting there.

The breaking of the matzo into the "Afikomen" was an exciting point in the Seder. All of us, children and grownups alike, would try to steal it to get the ransom for it. At times we got paid money - a quarter or half dollar each. When money was scarce we would accept a blessing instead from my father. You really couldn't buy those for any money.

After the "Four Questions" and the answering prayers, and the second cup of wine, but before the end of the part of the service before the meal, most of the children under ten were already fast asleep. As we fell asleep we were carried to the bedroom and put on top of a bed, to be claimed when the Seder was over. When the last song in the Haggadah was sung it was usually 1-2 A.M. The whole thing was repeated the next night, of course. I don't think I was able to stay up to finish the complete Seder until I was close to being Bar Mitzvah.

Passover Seders were glorious times for us. I loved every moment of the Holiday, especially being with my parents, brothers and sisters, cousins and friends, at the Seders.

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