

Hillel's Super-Secret Diary of Hide-and-Lean

(Wimpy Kid Style)

ó Sunday, October 1st ó

Okay, so here goes. My name is Hillel, I'm eight years old, and this is my super-secret diary. If anyone finds it, I'm DONE ófor real. Why? Because in Samarkand right now, being a Jewish kid is like playing the world's worst game of hide-and-seek, except the seekers have machine guns and scary buttons on their shirts.

I've barely got any good memories of regular childhood stuff óno riding bikes in the courtyard, no street hockey, no explaining to Mrs. Belinsky why I need extra candy.

Instead, my entire life is Zilch, Zero, Nadda visibility. If the neighbors even see me out front between 8:00 AM and 3:00 PM, they rat me out, and poof óTatty and Mommy vanish to some 'special orphan school' where, rumor has it, they teach you to hate your bubbe and maybe even how to eat treif food. (I shudder just thinking about it.)

So far, I've come up with zero good escape plans. My best was drawing a fake giraffe mask and thinking I could gallop down the street. Mommy just gave me that look grown-ups give when they're trying not to laugh but they're also worried you're actually going to try it.

On the 'Unfairness Scale' (from 0: bedtime stories to 10: never seeing the sun), my life right now is a solid 12.5 out of 10. Because Tom Brady probably never had to hide from government spies.

ó Monday, October 2nd ó

This morning, Tatty tried to explain why all this hide-and-learn nonsense started.

He said back in 1917 (that's a gazillion years ago, I thought) the Communists took over Russia and decided religion was the enemy. According to the law, you could believe in whatever you wantedóHa.óbut in reality, if you prayed to anyone but Lenin, you got in BIG trouble.

He told me about the NKVD (pronounced ðen-kay-vee-dee, but we call them ði osiyos ð the three letters), or sometimes ða knepl ð (ða button ð) because of their shiny buttons. These guys hunted down anyone who dared teach kids Torah or Hebrew. My stomach did a flip when I heard that loads of adults ð yes, real, grown-up people ð got exiled to Siberia, where it ðs colder than the freezer aisle at the grocery store. I asked, ðDo they at least have hot cocoa there? ð Tatty didn't say, but I didn't want to know.

By afternoon, I was halfway through planning Operation Disguise: I'd wrap myself in curtains and wear Mommy's scarf as a fake mustache so no one would recognize me. She told me that was ðcute, ð and then asked if I could instead help peel potatoes. Adult code for ðStop being ridiculous. ð

Unfairness ranking today: 8 out of 10. (Could be worse ð I did get to eat two cookies after lunch.)

ó Tuesday, October 3rd ó

Flashback time! (That's what Tatty called his stories.) He said the new regime declared Jewish schools and yeshivos 'poison of the masses'ew, right?and shut them all down. Poof! Just like if someone threw out every video game. Instead, they made 'public schools' where they taught kids that Hashem is a fairy tale and that 'history' means praising Stalin.

Now, every local teacher'disguised like ninjas with clipboards'had to trudge through neighborhoods and ask neighbors if there were 'any school-aged children' hidden anywhere. If the neighbors squealed ('Oh yes, little Sasha always plays in that courtyard'), the teacher would report back, and the principal would come to your door asking awkward questions: 'Why is your child not in school?'

I peeked out the window today and saw one of those teachers. My heart pounded so loud I thought they'd hear it under the door. I hid behind a potted plant and almost busted a leaf off. In hindsight, I think I actually did. Leaf turbulence is not a great hiding tactic.

Unfairness ranking: 9 out of 10. (At least the plant was decorative.)

ó Tuesday Night, October 3rd ó

Dreamland was extra weird. I dreamed the teachers rode giant paper airplanes with clipboards as wings, scouting kids from the sky. I woke up sweating. Then I remembered I have to memorize a secret knock:

1) Knock

2) Pause (count to three)

3) Knock-knock-knock

4) Pause (count to three)

5) Knock

If it's wrong, the whole family flips out and scrambles into the back room. My

biggest fear: messing up the pause and crushing Mommy's antique cookie jar in the

panic.

ó Wednesday, October 4th ó

Today an emergency meeting at home: Everyone crowded around Tatty's big dining table. I'm like "there's fish on my plate" can't we just discuss in hallway? But no.

We had to plan "Project Hide the Children."

We mapped out who would go where if the principal showed up. Rivka (age 10) would pretend she's our cousin from another building. Yankel (age 12) would vanish into the attic. I'd stand in front of Mommy's seforim (holy books), acting like I was dusting them.

Yankel suggested building a secret tunnel to the shul (just like the Great Escape movie), but Mommy said, "Stop. You'll flood the kitchen." I pointed out that floods are great for hiding tracks, but she stuck to her cooking schedule.

I doodled a blueprint anyway "entrance behind the sofa, slide down to shul basement,

exit through a rug rolled up on the wall. (This is the same rug I rolled on last week and got stuck in the door frame. Helpful.)

Unfairness ranking: 8.7 out of 10.

ó Thursday, October 5th ó

Big day! Mr. Daniel Borisovitch came over and used our perfect secret knock (yeesh, I almost sang it out loud). He's that Yiddish-loving ex-member of the Yevsektzia who figured out how much of a scam it was. One minute, they let parents choose teachers; next minute, they swapped in heretics who'd teach you non-kosher recipes!

He sipped his tea (it smelled like grandma's kitchen) and said, "Children were even force-fed non-kosher bread on Pesach!" My face went green. That's like giving me broccoli cupcakes and calling it dessert.

But then he told us how some kids clamped their mouths shut so tight the teachers gave up. Real superhero stuff. I looked at my big mouth and thought: I'd starve.

He finished with, 'That was only the start. Next, they closed every single shul so people couldn't daven. Except one or two in big cities, just to fool the world.' My head buzzed. No shul? Where were people supposed to pray?

Unfairness ranking: 10 out of 10. For real.

ó Thursday Night, October 5th ó

I snuck downstairs for a snackójust a tiny piece of challahóand found Tatty whispering on the phone in the dark. I caught words like 'committee of twenty,' 'report names,' and 'anti-communist values.'

I have no idea what half that means. I do know that if you bring me cookies, I'll deliver your name straight to the 'committee' for sure. No cookie thieves allowed.

ó Friday, October 6th ó

Oh man. We went to the ONE permitted shul today. It smelled like old books and

candle wax. There was creepy Chaim Tchernovitzer—he popped out of nowhere and said, 'I'm KGB-appointed! Without me, this shul would be closed.' His grin was one tooth away from scary. His shoes went 'squeak-squeak' on the floor like evil mice.

When he talked to tourists, I overheard him whisper: 'Don't even think of helping these people or they'll lose this shul.' I got goosebumps. KGB buttons, secret police, squeaky shoes—NO THANKS.

But I also felt kind of proud. I mean, Zaltzmans went to shul despite squeaky spies and scary committees.

Unfairness ranking: 7 out of 10. Doing mitzvah in shul is cool, but watching Chaim's shoes made me jittery.

ó Friday Night, October 6th ó

Candlelight in the dark feels magical—except when your little brother splashes the wax. Ouch! Got a tiny wax blister on my finger. My plan to hide it under bandages so

no one would see my fingerprint is genius, but Mommy called it 'drama.'

After candle-blowing, Tatty reminded us: every day I need to wrap tefillin and think about my chinuch for thirty minutes. Ugh. I just want to watch clouds outside my window.

Then he whispered that soon, a secret melamed will come to our house right into the couch room so we can learn Torah again. I almost cheered out loud, but instead I just blushed and practiced my secret knock.

Silver lining: learning Torah in whispers = we're like Torah ninjas. That is kind of awesome.

ó Motzei Shabbos, October 7th ó

Tatty said families who got discovered had to ship their kids off to relatives in other cities. I imagine Aunt Gittel's house, with her weird pickles and loud yarmulke collection. No thanks! I'd trade pickles for a backyard any day.

Rivka's back from school, her eyes all tired. She whispered, 'I heard in school they teach that G-d is a myth.' My chest squeezed. The idea of someone teaching lies about our Avos makes me want to show them who's boss.

But I dunno how to fight these big, grown-up problems. I can't even ride my bike.

Unfairness ranking: 11 out of 10. Because Rivka had to sit in those classes.

ó Sunday, October 8th ó

Our secret melamed ó Reb Mendel ó arrived, beard swinging, with a stack of dusty seforim. He's whisper-y and carries a tiny notebook. I bet he's got 'Wanted' posters of yeshiva closers in his pocket. He taught me my alef-beis song, and I want to record it on my brain forever.

He said, 'The walls have ears.' I spent ten minutes staring at the plaster. No ears. But he means people might be listening. Great, now I'm paranoid about echoes too.

Still, learning again feels amazing. Like finding hidden candy behind the fridge.

Sweet.

Unfairness ranking: down to 4 out of 10 because candy.

ó Monday, October 9th ó

Tatty whispered to Mommy tonight that this is just the first battle. The real war is

keeping chinuch alive—academic, spiritual, and everything in between. He quoted the

Rebbe about dedicating half an hour every day to our education. I'm like, "Fine,

half an hour, but then can I play hide-and-seek in my mind?"

I sketched a cartoon of me as a half-hour timer, with a cape, fighting boredom

monsters. That's my secret plan for shin-shin chinuch.

Unfairness ranking: 3 out of 10. Because hero cartoons.

ó Tuesday, October 10th ó

I heard grown-ups say "the net is tightening." I asked Yankel if they're going to fish kids with nets. He snorted. "No, dummy—they mean it's getting harder to hide."

So I made a new scheme: camouflage. I'll wrap myself in fake vines and sit in Mom's plant pot. I tried it for five minutes until I sneezed. Leaves went everywhere.

Mission aborted.

Unfairness ranking: 6 out of 10. I'm starting to think camouflage is overrated.

ó Wednesday, October 11th ó

Today was wild. A teacher showed up with no warning—NO SPECIAL KNOCK—and Mommy shoved me behind the pantry. I knocked over a can of beans (boink!), and they rolled like bowling balls. I heard the teacher gasp. She asked, "Is someone there?"

I held my breath for like a century. Then Mrs. Goldberg from next door blew a raspberry at the teacher ("No kids here!"). The teacher left. Beans everywhere. My heart still pounds.

Unfairness ranking: 10.5 out of 10.

ó Thursday, October 12th ó

They say some Chabad Chassidim even risked exile to teach in secret yeshivos, hiding in basements lit only by candlelight. Can you imagine? I get nervous if the lights go out for two seconds and the cake timer goes off. But I guess when it's for Torah, you do crazy things.

I tried to imagine a secret yeshiva in our basementópillows instead of desks, me wearing a cape instead of a kittel. Sounds funÖuntil I remembered the basement floods when it rains. Maybe not.

Unfairness ranking: 5 out of 10. Because pillow-fort learning could be cool.

ó Friday, October 13th ó

Shabbos againósame routine, different wax burns on my finger. I slipped on grape

chutney and slid across the table. Everyone stared. I said, 'I was testing the table's smoothness.' They believed me maybe because chutney is scary.

Tatty reminded us that chinuch is the cornerstone of Jewish continuity. I nodded solemnly but was thinking about my next hiding plan. Cookie-smuggling orchard tunnel, anyone?

Unfairness ranking: 2 out of 10. Shabbos cholent is epic.

ó Motzei Shabbos, October 14th ó

Diary, I have a confession: I kind of love this secret-school life (only sometimes).

It's like being on a permanent field trip, except the scenery is always my living room and I can't bring my backpack. But at least I'm a hiding champion ó a professional hider in training ó and I have stories to tell my own kids someday.

So, thanks for listening, diary. Tomorrow I hide again, learn more Alef-beis, and maybe eat an extra cookie. Because if Hillel is going to be trapped inside, he might

as well squeeze out every crumb of joy he can.

THE END (of this volume)

P.S. I'm on book two now. Diary Volume 2: Adventures in Basement Yeshiva, or How I

Almost Floated Away in a Flood. Stay tuned!