

Monday

Hi, I'm Hillel, almost nine, and this is my SECRET diary. If anyone finds it--especially the K.G.B.--I'm in huge trouble!

So here's what my parents told me last night by candlelight (because electricity could be turned off any minute):

- After 1917, COMMUNISTS decided religion was "poison."
- They shut down shuls, shot or exiled anyone who resisted, even little kids.
- A scary group called YEVSEKTZIA ("the three letters," GPU/NKVD/KGB) made life super hard for Yidden.
- If your parents taught you Torah at home, YOU could be sent to a "re-education" home.

Unfairness rating: 100 OUT OF 10. Worse than running out of candy on Shabbos.

---

Tuesday

Today Mr. Daniel Borisovitch came over. He's a rare kind of Jew who loves Yiddish (everybody calls him a Yiddishist), but he once worked for the Yevsektzia.

During tea (which smelled like cinnamon and worry), he whispered:

"WE TRICKED PARENTS INTO GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS--'PICK YOUR TEACHERS IN YIDDISH,' WE SAID. THEN WE QUIETLY SWAPPED THEM FOR OUR OWN."

He told how the worst part was forcing kids to eat treif or even bread on Pesach. The children pressed their lips shut like locked treasure chests. He said,

"THOSE LITTLE ONES WERE REAL HEROES."

Now Daniel has a heavy heart--and we have a bigger secret to keep.

Unfairness rating: 99 / 10 (just one point less because at least we got free Yiddish lessons).

---

## Wednesday

I'm basically house-arrested. If the neighbors see me during "school hours," they'll rat me out. My sister Rivka goes to public school (to throw them off our scent), but me and Yankel (my 12-year-old "professional hider" big brother) must stay inside.

Mommy posted a schedule on the wall:

- 8 AM-2 PM: Hide from teachers
- 2 PM-4 PM: Secret Torah learning

I tried to peek outside once and got a stern look from Mommy. I'll never forget it.

Scheme attempt: I drew a pretend mustache and giant coat to look like a short adult. Mommy said NO. Adults have no vision!

---

## Thursday

Guess what? We have our own spy code for slamming the doorbell so only Jewish kids know it's safe to open:

- Knock knock
- PAUSE (count to three inside your head)
- Knock knock knock
- PAUSE
- Knock knock

One slip-up and everyone panics. Today the mailman tried his own knock and I almost answered holding a half-eaten chocolate bar. Fuzzy chocolate on the floor = DOUBLE trouble.

---

Friday

Tonight, by flashlight (candles are risky), our living room turned into CHEDER. First melamed Reb Zushedershamash (everyone calls him "R. Zushe") came. He's tough but kind, with a white beard that tickles when he leans in to correct my alef-beis.

We learned Yiddish alef-beis and Avos stories. Every letter looked like a little puzzle under candle glow. I felt like a Torah ninja.

Silver lining: I'm officially a "hiding champion." I stayed perfectly still for 30 minutes. Gold star, Hillel!

---

After Havdalah, Tatty told us about SECRET YESHIVOS in other homes. He even whispered he's proud we're fighting to be Jewish.

Misheard moment: I thought Tatty said "the walls are spying." I spent 10 minutes staring at our kitchen walls. No spy ears yet.

Ranking this Erev Shabbos: 47 / 10 (but +1 for secret cheder excitement).

---

Sunday

My father finally had to register me in public school--only Saturdays I'm "too sick" to go. Today, Ms. Nina asked me in choir,  
"ZALTZMAN, WHY DON'T YOU SING?"

I blurted, "I don't like YOUR songs!"

Cue panic. She demanded,

"SING YOUR SONG!"

I ran home, grabbed our landlord's son Pinchas's Azerbaijani record, and belted out a tune. She LOVED it, so she forgot all about "my" songs.

Crisis averted.

Unfairness scale: Public school forced me into tiny lies. 8 / 10 (still better than no music at all).

---

Monday

I tried sneaking tzitzis into school under my shirt. Nurse came for shots and spotted the fringes. She whispered,

"ACHACHAMTCHIK--LITTLE RABBI!"

I nearly melted into the floor. Now I do a quick bathroom change: red Pioneers tie in, tzitzis out, then tzitzis back on at home. My arms get a little scratchy, but I look like everyone else. Spy-kid level: EXPERT.

---

Tuesday

Biggest scare yet: I got called to the Principal--the whole "rest two days a week" trick was discovered. They yelled,  
"NO MORE SATURDAYS OFF!"

They threatened to send me to a Soviet orphanage. Daddy begged me to just go for one Shabbos. I ran away to my friend Michael's house instead and missed school again.

Daddy's face turned as white as our challah. We're now plotting a big transfer to a far-away school where nobody asks questions.

Plot twist: I'll walk an hour each way in rain or snow--but at least I keep Shabbos. Hero status: UNLOCKED.

---

Wednesday

In cheder, R. Bentcha told us about Yidden who got persecuted by the

NKVD. One guy put on tefillin in front of EIGHT MILLION armed soldiers. Rebel score: 1 Jew vs. 8,000,000 soldiers. That's some serious hero math.

Afterwards, we looked around at our crumb-covered table and thought, "If WE are the next in line... yikes."

Lesson learned: Even one tiny Jewish kid can out-brave a million bullies.

---

Thursday

Today at cheder, an escaped prisoner was on the loose and REAL soldiers ran with rifles. I walked home "slowly" (they told me) but a guard chased me shouting. I sprinted, heart pounding like a drum, and hid behind a market stall until he passed.

My lungs still hurt. Paranoid rating: 10 / 10.

---



Friday

R. Bentcha found us a new cheder in the old stable cellar--garbage, dust, manure and all. Two barred windows let in sun and spy warnings. The escape window makes our hands bleed from rusty nails, but CHEDER in a bunker? Totally badass.

Secret mission mood: CRUISIN'.

---

R. Bentcha once cut his own fingers so he'd be unfit for the army. He told us that it's better to be "crooked for G-d" than to learn Communist marching drills.

He slapped our hands with his gartel (soft belt) when we misbehaved. I realized real sacrifice isn't about running away--it's about staying strong in what you believe, even if you have to bleed a little on rusty nails.

---

Sunday

One day we were playing soccer in the courtyard when R. Bentcha walked in looking horrified. He told us he saw three holy elders--R. Eliyahu, R. Boruch, R. Yerachmiel--playing soccer too, and joked,

"IF THEY CAN'T DO IT, WHY ARE YOU RUNNING AROUND?"

Unfairness? 0 / 10--today was a real laugh.

---

Monday

Daddy always says:

"READING, WRITING, ARITHMETIC YOU CAN LEARN AT HOME. THE REST COMES FROM TALMUD AND CHASSIDUS."

He called tradesmen to build a sign factory so we'd have a real income. I guess being a factory apprentice beats being a Communist engineer--at least I keep Shabbos!

---

Tuesday

Last night I turned 13 in our living room--no party hall, just eight brave Yidden, a borrowed siddur Torah Ohr, and whispered "Mazel tov." They paid three hundred rubles for that book! My aunt used to say,  
"THREE HUNDRED RUBLES? I'D EXPECT PICTURES!"

I'll treasure that siddur forever.

---

- EVERY DAY can feel like a spy mission.
- ONE SMALL JEW can out-stand millions of soldiers.
- CHEDER BUNKERS are way cooler than playgrounds.
- UNFAIRNESS has to be rated (my average so far: 25 / 10).
- KEEPING TORAH is worth all the mustaches, camouflage, and bruised elbows.

THE END (of this notebook--until someone finds it!)