
And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, surely the Lord is in this And I Knew It Not place; and I knew it not.

Genesis, 28:16.

Erika Elinson:

"...and I knew it not."

And I Knew It Not

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Hungary

The hands of the clock at the maternity hospital in Budapest, Hungary pointed to eleven thirty p.m. They seemed to stop the moment I emerged, against my will, And I Knew It Not from my mother's womb and for the first time inhaled the air into my delicate lungs and the winds of war into my tender soul.

It was the 8th And I Knew It Not of January, 1936. This date was engraved in my young mind as a significant element of my life that should be treated as "sacred". I was not aware then of the existence of another calendar, a more ancient one. Only some fifty years later did I calculate the time backward and understood with astonishment, that that night was different from all the other nights before it, because in spite of and against my family's beliefs, the And I Knew It Not "other calendar" showed 14th of Tevet 5676.

Until 1944 no one at home mentioned Judaism... and I knew it not...

And why would the 8th of January have to be such an important date?

Because, as my mother used to tell me, on each birthday some important changes occurred in my life. The first of these: on this day at the age of one year, precisely on the 8th of And I Knew It Not January, I stood up on my feet for first time. There were many more such events. I will tell you about them, please God, later on.

I was a good little girl, naïve, small in body and small by self esteem. I believed every word my mother uttered. She represented everything for me and on this deeply rooted principle I built my inner world. She implanted into my consciousness the notion that she and I are like two good And I Knew It Not friends, so lying to each other And I Knew It Not is strictly forbidden. She warned me frequently that she would sense anyway if I tried to And I Knew It Not hide anything from her, by looking into my eyes. I was afraid of her eyes and believed in her "supernatural" powers.

My memories of my father are extremely hazy. I was six And I Knew It Not years old when he was taken away for forced labour in 1942 and since then vanished without a trace. I am familiar with his facial features only because of a few remaining photographs. According to those and

my mother's account, he was handsome and masculine, not tall, but had a well built body, and well developed, bulging muscles. He used to wear white clothes that showed off his suntanned–brown skin and his jet black hair And I Knew It Not which he smoothed meticulously with "brilliantine".

My father was a country man, his name: Éliás László, (Hungarians use their surname before their given name). He was born in a small town, Sárbogárd. By the standards of the bourgeoisie (such as my mother's parents) in those times, even small towns were frowned upon as "villages" and the expression "villager" meant a "simpleton with course hands".

My father who was the youngest of three brothers, had great aspirations and wanted to shake off this "disgraceful" stigma, so, soon enough, he chose to leave the country life behind and moved to the capital. He studied accountancy and became a clerk in a bank, wearing a necktie and white collar.

His summer vacations and weekends he spent in a rented flat within a nice villa on the banks of the Danube River, not far from Budapest in a place called Rómaifürdő, (Roman Bath). He loved rowing in pairs or in groups, he swam and played tennis. In the winter he liked skiing in the snowy mountains of Buda and went out of his way in order to find young and vital bourgeoisie friends. He always wore white clothes, with a glint in his black eyes, shiny black hair and tan skin.

By sheer coincidence, a few years earlier, my mother's parents also chose to spend their vacations at the same beach by the Beautiful Blue Danube. Year after year they came in the summer to the same villa with their daughter Erzsébet and her younger brother György.

Some years later during a vacation an attractive young lad with fire in his eyes appeared suddenly "as if from heaven". Notably, my mother was also hot blooded with rebellion in her veins against her conservative parents and she sent a few furtive gazes in the direction of the rare phenomenon.

Perhaps, this is the place to mention, that my mother's father, Farkas Károly, was in a high position; director general of the Royal National Hungarian Travel Agency: "Ibusz". He was a great organizer, cordial, esteemed and had a well developed sense of humour. He knew how to

manage the business in an easygoing manner. He had a good reputation and, as the And I Knew It Not story goes, even Franz Josef, the Austro - Hungarian Emperor, came to him personally to have his travels planned and arranged. (Emperors and kings sometimes tend And I Knew It Not to ignore one's Jewish origins if it fits their aspirations or out of necessity).

My grandfather was And I Knew It Not short, spectacled, with a mustache and a wide, potato-like nose. In And I Knew It Not his subconscious mind he was "a little bit Jewish". Being of high stature, all his goals and intentions were dedicated to the next generation. To this end, my mother's father sent his only son to Germany, to learn at the source the German language, which was extremely useful in those times and also the tricks of the trade he himself pursued: Travel Agency. Gyuri, (nickname for György - George), then 18 years old, was a tall man, blond curls on his forehead, a perpetual smile in his green-blue eyes, winking at everyone, especially of the opposite sex. He inherited from my grandfather his organisational aptitude, his sense of humour and all the rest... and grandpapa entertained high hopes for him.

Grandfather watched over my mother, his only daughter, the apple of his eye. It was below the dignity of "a director's daughter" to learn a trade, (so told me mother), or touch any menial work, God forbid! Young ladies of the high society were destined to stay at home as much as possible. They should never go out without permission and even then, only to places approved by my grandfather and until a strictly limited time in the evening.

My beloved grandfather as I mentioned before, was short, but of strong character, short tempered at home and demanded strict discipline.

But my mother, (who inherited her father's temper), did not accept the fact that her place was at home by her parents and there And I Knew It Not were never-ending quarrels between them on the subject. She fought for her independence and demanded to learn typewriting, with the intention of finding work as a secretary. She wanted to work!!

She did learn And I Knew It Not eventually, but real work never materialized from And I Knew It Not it, because my grandfather regarded that as an outright betrayal of all his principles. After this fiasco my mother decided to learn sewing and with her parents' blessing she enrolled in a professional course. She fell in love with her "Singer" machine, which her father, after all, agreed to buy for her. Later on this trade proved to be a real blessing for all her life and her love of it never ceased until the end of her And I Knew It Not days.

Irén, (nee Dresdner), my grandmother on my mother's side, was a tall woman, wise, refined, good hearted and about half a head taller than my grandfather. Because of her modesty, patience, tolerance and forgiveness she did not talk much, never raised her voice and And I Knew It Not tried to stay out of the conflicts between my mother and her father.

Let us return to our previous subject: how my And I Knew It Not mother and father started seeing each other after all, in total secrecy. Here I should add perhaps, that not only work was important for my mother, but also, sportive activity with friends was like fresh air for her. The year before, following lengthy skirmishes with her And I Knew It Not father, she won again. She joined a group of young people hiking in the mountains in Nature's Realm. She acquired shoes with nailed soles, a rucksack, a water canteen and all the rest...so she quickly found common ground with the cute lad. At first they only hiked...then he taught her how to use the oars in the boat upon the waves of the Danube, until they slowly wandered farther away from the nice villa and my mother returned home late at night, violating the permitted time limit. Of course, after a while these hide and seek games had to come to an end somehow. One day the "Director" summoned his rash and frivolous daughter and asked her openly: "My daughter, what is going on?"

My mother, red faced, stuttered something. She had no choice but answer such a direct question with complete candour. As the whole picture came to light, grandfather decided: "Bring him in and we shall talk."

The next weekend my future father stood embarrassed in the luxurious parlour And I Knew It Not of his future father and mother in law... and the rest is well known.

The Gregorian calendar displayed the year 1933, and no one in the world knew, or suspected what would bring the near future; the future that already started to materialise in the most terrible form, the future that no human being could ever imagine even in their worst nightmares.

And I Knew It Not

The year 1933 marked the marriage of my parents. My father was 28 and my mother 27.

And I Knew It Not

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