

Chapter 1

THE DREAM

“I simply believe that some part of the human self or soul is not subject to the laws of space and time”

Carl Gustav Jung

The house was a pink three bedroom bungalow, set high on the grassy side of Fenton road, Number 55. The house had no view, and there was nothing spectacular about it. It was the home of Arthur and Barbara, and their three children. There was a steep slope from the house to the sidewalk that was a great source of amusement for their children. I, Reginald, was twelve years old at the time, my brother Lewis was ten years old, and the youngest was Florence. We would roll head over heels, slide on our bellies and wrestle each other down the slope for hours. Sometimes we would throw marbles all the way to the top of the hill just to watch them roll down. It was a simple life, and we were happy with what we had. We shared a very close relationship and were often out and about together. Most of our time was spent outdoors. Life was uncomplicated back then. Being immigrants, our family was poor; my brother grew up wearing my clothes, and food on the table was not always plentiful. But as kids, we did not really care much about anything else in life, except that we wanted to enjoy each

other. We were completely free from the troubles of daily life. During the mid-1960's we had some toys but playing together was much more fun, and playing outdoors was the best. My brother Lewis and I, although two years apart, were inseparable, the best of friends. Countless days were spent by us just running around the hillsides, without a care in the world.

Our parents worked really hard to provide a good life for us. We were Litvaks, Lithuanian Jews that had emigrated from Rhodesia and had been living in Canada for about ten years. I did not know what Litvaks were at that time. Occasionally I heard people just calling us dirty Jews. As a young boy, I grasped we were Jewish but I never really understood why people called us dirty. We showered each day, our clothes, although not the most fashionable, were always clean and pressed.

My mother, although not a meticulous house keeper, was tidy and everything was in order and had a place. To scare my brother and I to be clean, my mother used to tell us a story about the Wallace family that lived on the other side of the railroad tracks, some miles away from our home, close to the tall grain elevators. They had five little kids that never washed before going to bed and slept with their faces dirty from dinner. One night Mrs. Wallace walked into their bedroom to check on her children only to find two large rats licking their faces clean as the

children slept. Nobody could keep us from washing our faces before bedtime after hearing that story.

Lewis and Florence were born in Canada, and I was born in Northern Rhodesia, shortly after my parents, Arthur and Barbara, were married. We dressed, behaved and looked as Canadian as anyone else on the street, but at home, my parents insisted we kept our ancestry alive and spoke Lithuanian, a language used by less than five million people in the world. It was our private tongue, a language in which we could have secrets, language that nobody could understand.

We, as young children, were sometimes embarrassed by it, as all we wanted to do was fit in and not be different. We did not have many non-English speaking neighbors at the time, and my brother and I would be teased and laughed at by other children, if caught outside speaking Lithuanian between ourselves. Mind you, I was not even sure where Lithuania was. I remember my grandmother, especially after she had a drink or two, telling us stories of her parents running away from that mysterious land, taking a ship to South Africa looking for a better life, but to us kids they were just irrelevant bedtime stories, fairy tales.

Apart from different language, there was nothing particular or extraordinary about our family. My brother and I had two pet guinea pigs, Moose, the male, and

Princess, the female. Princess belonged to my beloved brother, and I still feel guilty that at least on one occasion, after they had a family, Moose ate all of Princess's babies.

I was always eager to try and do it all: music, sports, you name it. I played the piano and the accordion badly, but sports were my favorite, especially when I got to play with my brother. We loved to wrestle together. I was bigger and stronger than Lewis, so it would take me barely a minute to pin his arms under my knees, so I could tickle him making him laugh uncontrollably. I would wait for the right time, as he was giggling so hard, and press his belly at a precise spot, and a loudest fart would escape him, which would make us both roar hysterically with laughter again. Events at school, competitions barely escaped my attention. I still remember the voting slogan I wrote when running for students' assembly, "If I was facing the future while sitting on a ledge, for second vice-president I would vote Reg". I did not win.

The days were fairly routine. Dad would leave for his machine shop early in the morning, mom would prepare our breakfast and go to her job at the bank soon after, and we would go to school at 9 am every weekday. Once the two of them left, we would get ready and stand outdoors, waiting for our school van to arrive.

Our parents did not have much time for us but they were quite strict. As a norm for those times, my father's *schtick* was that children had to be seen and not heard. My mother would pour Tabasco sauce on my tongue if I swore or used bad language. Her punishments for us, two naughty brothers, were quite creative. Lewis and I loved to pee outside, more often than not - on our neighbor's house when nobody was looking. It became a funny routine for us and utterly horrified our poor mother when she once spotted us in action from her kitchen window. As chastising barely had any effect on us, to reinforce the no-peeing-outside-rule she dragged us inside, made us pull our pants down and painted my brother's willie green and mine a bright red. We were embarrassed and scarred for quite some time after.

We lived in a small bedroom community in Calgary, a growing city, where a lot of construction was going on. There were empty fields surrounding the community, and that is where my brother and I would often go to play and hunt gophers.

These fields were fenced off and access was completely restricted, but it did not keep us away. These were massive grounds consisting of large pipes that were being used for transporting oil and gas, with large "private property" signs. This was my brother's and my favorite place to sneak in and play. We would have great time charging around as army soldiers, hiding in bunkers, or being sea

pirates conquering the oceans, making our mutineers walk the plank. My story begins here, at the field of pipes we passed every day on our way back from school.

I remember the day so clearly; Lewis and I were walking home, feeling exhausted. It was such a hot day; the weather had been in the thirties Celsius all week. We both slipped under the restricted barrier and scurried over to a pile of long rusted pipes. The height of the pipes was about ten feet, but, with pipes lining all the way to the side, we could easily climb our way to the top. We were generals of the opposing armies that day, so I sprinted in one direction and Lewis in another. I found a long dark pipe to hide in – it was perfect for my bunker. Not sure where my brother was but I was not willing to stay and find out. When sneaking inside, I smashed my head hard; I was not bleeding, but it hurt enough for me to wince and lean against the wall for a few minutes with my eyes closed. I felt dizzy when I opened my eyes again and just wanted to get out of the stuffy pipe. Bright light was shining at the other end of it, and that is where I instinctively walked to. Stumbling out of the pipe, I walked straight into a group of stranger boys, very unusually dressed, that turned to look at me with an utmost surprise on their faces.

They were wearing long cotton garments, sleeveless vests, and close-fitting coats with shawl collars and pockets on sides. Simple black belts were wrapped around their waists. Their dark trousers, in turn, were not too wide, reaching just below their knees. The bottoms were tied up and had broad cuffs that dangled just around their ankles. Their leather shoes had scarcely any heel, were almost flat. But the most peculiar part of their costumes that I was staring at was their black skull caps, kind of Mickey Mouse hats without the ears, from under which their long curly side locks of hair fell all the way to their jawbones.

“Hey boys”, I was first to speak up, “How did you guys get here? You are not from around here, are you?”

They stared at me bewildered. Nobody muttered a word; they all kept gawking at my soccer shorts and t-shirt perplexed.

“Reginald is my name, what is yours?”, I tried breaking silence again, “Why are you guys dressed like that? Halloween isn’t for another four months but great costumes, by the way”.

Finally, the tall skinny kid with long hair that looked barely familiar, though I could not put my finger on who he reminded me of, blurted, “Who are you, and why are you dressed so bizarre – *shanda*, have you no shame?” To my greatest amazement, he was not speaking English; it was Lithuanian.

“I am not dressed weird, you are! I am just coming home from my soccer practice. My name is Reginald Emanuel, we live down the road. Who are you all, and why are you speaking Lithuanian?”

The four boys giggled, “Do you want us to speak Yiddish, *schlemiel*? And you are the freak parading around dressed in some skimpy colorful underpants.”

“My name is Henrik Brodie,” the tall skinny kid interrupted the kerfuffle. “And these are my brothers, Alois, Chaim and Jacob.”

I looked around and for the first time noticed everything was different. There were no familiar fields, no pipes, just some cave behind me, where I must have crawled out from. I could not see my brother, and I bit my lip to stop the tears from falling.

“How did you get out of the cave?” asked Chaim, “It seems to be so dark and terrifying that we have been braving ourselves to set foot in it for months”.

“I did not come out of the cave!” I exclaimed, fear now overwhelming me.

“Something has happened, something is really wrong”, I mumbled in English.

“What are those words you are saying?” asked Henrik, “What tongue is that?”

“English, you, dumb turd”, I snickered, “Why? Don’t you speak it? How do you know Lithuanian, anyways? I never met anyone who would know it”.

“Durnius... What do you expect people to speak in Lithuania?”, again the brothers chuckled as they kept throwing stones at the cave. “Jews or not, we all speak Lithuanian – we live here! What a funny question.”