

Chinese Restaurant

FOSTER CITY, CALIFORNIA

I SIT OPPOSITE STEVE. THE SEAT USUALLY OCCUPIED BY MY FATHER IS vacant. This time I want to speak with my brother without being called a putz or a shmendrick. Not that I usually mind. In fact, I sometimes sign my name Todd P. (or S.) Diamond—an inside joke that puts a smile on my face each time I do it, although the hotel clerk or waiter may view my standalone giddiness as the mark of someone who's a little off. At any rate, I have a few questions for which I may already know the answer, but it's reassuring to hear it played back by someone else, someone on the inside. So:

TODD

Do you think we'd have survived his traumas?
Would we have had the balls to take the
chances he did?

*Steve tilts his head, then pushes his tongue through
his middle and index fingers.*

TODD

What's that look? Yeah, well, maybe I'm a pussy.
But I wonder how you or I might've been different
under the

PASS THE TRAUMA,

circumstances he faced. I mean, we can never really know in advance, can we? And if we survived without going off the rails, would anyone seeing us here today ever think we—or Dad—were anything but just folks who're out for dinner and had a hunky-dory American dream life? Let's face it, we're holograms to strangers; they don't see our history, and they can't understand what's going on inside. To the uninitiated, it appears to be all pretty normal. Drumroll. Pause.

Except that it wasn't.

STEVE

Maybe it was the farmer's daughter who set the tone. He was what, thirteen? I didn't get into the saddle until I was seventeen, and then, well, let's say I fell off it pretty quickly.

TODD

Dad always said that if you're a real man, you "die in the saddle."

STEVE

Who does he think we are, the Rockefellers? I bet Nelson's secretary felt awful about causing the tycoon's heart- stopping, traumatic orgasm.

TODD

Yeah, okay, but seriously . . . the Ghetto, pretending to be a gentile, getting away with it, being almost adopted by one of the few families who didn't think he personally killed Christ, just, well, surviving, making his way to Israel only to be caught up in another war, then coming here, starting over, a new language, culture, politics. And in the end, living, for all intents and purposes, a regular

life. I don't know. I'm not so sure I ~~could~~ could've survived if that shoe were on one of my feet.

PASS THE TRAUMA,

STEVE

It's not about surviving; it's about living. And you never know how you'd act or react. You can't project. Pass the pork dumplings.

TODD

On *shabbat*, no less.

STEVE

God said on the sixth day, 'you gotta eat, put some meat on your bones, not that you should be *zaftig*, mind you.'

TODD

Glory be to the Lipitor. Sure, Steve, we got his features all right, but did we get his balls?

STEVE

Can't say I've ever looked. And hey, just be thankful we were never in a situation where it was necessary to reverse the handiwork of a *mohel*.

Todd looks down at the napkin on his lap. Pats the family jewels—the cut Diamond.

TODD

Seriously, what do we inherit?

STEVE

You mean other than a ten-year-old Pontiac with less than 25,000 miles on it?

TODD

Do they make Pontiacs anymore?

TODD

STEVE

I always liked them because the mascot on the hood looked like Uncle Ike.

TODD

Minus the scar.

STEVE

Hey, I'll arm wrestle you for Dad's Lladro Moses figurine.

TODD

You think it's a sign that a big chunk of the Ten Commandments tablet broke off?

STEVE

I can't remember which one. Was it 'Honor your father and mother?'

TODD

Probably 'Thou shalt not kill.'
So what is it . . . gumption? Determination?

STEVE

Maybe it was naiveté or possibly bullheadedness. Not saying those are negative things, by the way.

TODD

So we're one half of his genes. Maybe that gets us 50 percent

of his perseverance. You know what that means? Our kids get only a quarter. Each generation dilutes the one that comes after. Maybe that's a good thing. At least in terms of trauma, anyway. I'd like to think that the *mishigas* that Dad went through doesn't have to

PASS THE PRALOMA, automatically passed down. We get to create our own and inflict that special damage on our kids. And so on, down the line.

STEVE

I know it took years to get “most” of his story, but Dad did us a favor by letting us in on what he went through.

TODD

I’m thinking it was a teaching lesson. One that I had to learn so that I can pass the test.

STEVE

The test of what?

TODD

Life.

Steve drains his scotch (on the rocks). Todd knocks back his scotch (neat). Neither brother makes a move to pick up the check.

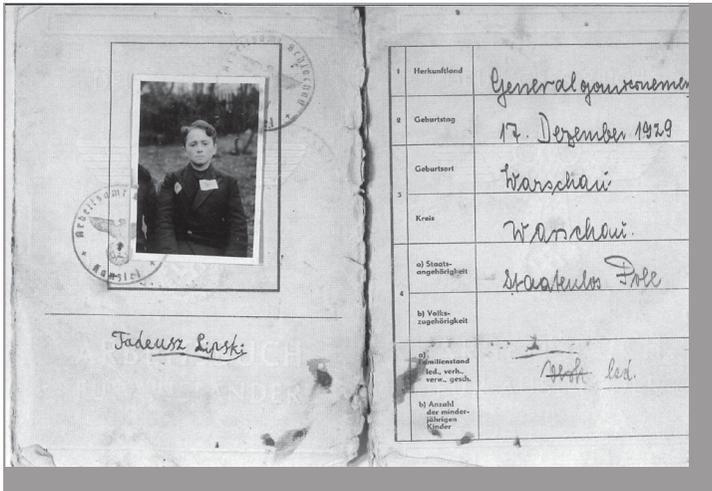


My father with his father.
Before being moved to the Warsaw Ghetto.

PASS THE TRAUMA,



My father in Warsaw before the war.



My father, a.k.a. Tadeusz Lipski, fake identity papers.

PASS THE TRAUMA,



David during Israel's War of Independence.



David (upper right) with friends from Kibbutz Ramat Yohanan, including Shlomo (bottom right).

PASS THE TRAUMA,



In 2023, my father received a special award from the Friends of the IDF. When I asked him what he did to earn such an honor, he simply said, “Really, putzface?”

TODD