THE TENTH SABBATH MIRACLE
By
Harvey Kay, New York, NY

I was twelve years old and I used to lie on my crude cot listening to the sounds of the night trying to distinguish what might have been a distant thunderstorm or the beginning of another American bombing run over Holland. My mother, that warm stable comforting blanket would come to my little sister and me and give us a ladle cup full of her strength and security.

"See the wind," she would say, "Picture a small breeze starting in America. Watch it blow past the Statue of Liberty, over and beyond the shores. See it skim the water, past the ships far out at sea. The ships," she would add, "that someday would carry us to America and to Papa and to once again being a united family such as we once had been in Germany." "See the breeze," she would continue, "as it blows across England and crosses the channel to the beaches and as it rolls past the countryside. It floats above the North Sea and follows the Dutch Canals winding its way through the maze of Amsterdam. See it, " she would command now, "as it hugs the back roads to a small Dutch farm and enters the pasture. Fences can't stop it, the war can't stop it, only God can stop it."

"Now, come close to this hole in the wall and feel the wind on your face. This wind, which has journeyed from across the ocean, this wind has come to call us home to Papa in America. Picture this - only this, and don't listen to the sounds of the bombs."

My little sister and I would cling to each other and to Mama and feel comfort in our wood storage shed hideaway on the Christian farm of Thomas and Kathleen G______, a few miles outside of Amsterdam. "Will the bombs stop soon Mama?" my sister would ask with her wide and frightened eyes. "Hush, picture only the gentle breeze that Papa has sent to us. Picture only the day that we will all be together again."

Mama's words softened the fear, but could not take it out of our lives or out of our hearts.

Papa had done business with Thomas G_____. He in Holland and my father in Germany. Soon, however, the war began to interfere with the normal channels of business and the German laws of racial purity turned our once normal and secure world upside down.

Jews must live here, Jews could not go to school, Jews could not associate with Aryans, Jews could not shop here, Jews, Jews, Jews. Papa sent us to his friend Thomas in Holland. It was only supposed to be long enough for him to make plans to get all of us to America. He never was able to join us. We heard he had made it to America but were never sure of this until after the war.

"Soon we shall be with Papa."

It was a statement from Mama, as much as a truth as I have ever wanted to believe in my entire young twelve year old life. We were not with Papa soon.,
because, even sooner, the German's invaded Holland and began to press for the round up of Jews once again.

Thomas and Kathleen who were Christian, created a small room in the back of the storage shed behind their ancient Dutch farmhouse. Thomas stacked the cut wood from the forests in such a way as to create a false wall that looked as if the shed was almost filled to the breaking point with stacks of wood for the winter. In his clever and quiet manner, he created a sanctuary for us. By just removing a few of the bottom logs we could crawl into the hidden room. My sister and I scrambled in as if we were rabbits scampering to safety. But Mama, with her size and dignity, could barely manage to squeeze through. She managed however, every time, and not once did I ever hear her complain about our humble shed or entrance way.

Just as she had done in Germany she set out to make our secret room our home. She cleaned and tidied every day. A small table was the centerpiece. Leah and I were allowed out at dusk to play and to join Thomas and Kathleen and their children. But... we were cautioned again and again, "No one must see you. If someone sees you, all of our lives will be in jeopardy."

Thomas spoke these words with quiet determination. He shared what food there was, kept us hidden, and in the process risked his life and the life of his entire family.

But these are hindsight. At the time Leah and I adapted to our new live, and our new set of rules, because Mama said that's what we should do, and that's what we did.

Leah and I shared the cot that was placed against the wall and on a quiet summer night I could hear the animals in the fields... or the bombs near Amsterdam. I could feel the breezes and smell the new mown hay. I could smell the breads that Kathleen baked. When she had the flour, and could get an extra ration of sugar, we would anticipate the sweet cakes Kathleen would bake for all the children, Leah and myself included.

Kathleen, with her sweet and gentle manner could soothe us in a way that I had thought only Mama could soothe me and Leah. These were the Christians who would risk everything for three foreign Jews. A family who could give them nothing in return.

More than two years would pass in this way. The Germans had occupied Amsterdam and Thomas found it increasingly more difficult to bicycle to work and to bring back rations. Often we would see German patrols coming down the road and Leah and I were admonished by Mama, urging us to be ever more careful.

"You must stay hidden. You must stay here in the shed with me. You can't go out."

"They are children. They must walk and play and see the sun. We will watch over them. We will be their eyes," Thomas said.

No one would ever believe that this man ever felt fear. Through all this, Mama never once let us forget why we were in hiding.

"We are Jews and we must always remember that we are Jewish. That is what
Papa would want and this is what I want. Remember this and keep it with you." Mama, even in this shed, amidst this world turned upside down, still managed to make Shabbos on Friday night. She had kept what candles she could in the drawer of the table.

On Friday night she would take out two candles, cover her eyes, and say the blessing. She did this in the same way as her mother had taught her to do it when she was a child, just as her mother had been taught, and her mother before that. It was an unbroken chain that went back hundreds, if not thousands of years.

Some times she would cry and hold her hands to her face, then press us to her side. Sometimes she would just repeat "Why" over and over again. It was the one day of the week, the one moment of the week, that Mama permitted herself the luxury of feeling something for herself as well as for her children. If there was a piece of bread than we would all quietly say the prayers.

One Friday night, when Leah went for the candles, and took two out, she cried out, "Mama, look...there are only four candles left after tonight. What are we going to do if we run out of candles for the Sabbath?"

"We will cut them in half, that will give us enough candles for nine Sabbath nights altogether. Now don’t worry. We have candles for tonight."

But it was almost as if our very survival rested upon having enough candles to last out the war. It was the cornerstone upon which Mama had built her faith. As long as she could light the candles and pray in her one private moment, she could keep all of us, Thomas and Kathleen, their children, Leah and myself, safe from harm and keep this nightmare away from us.

All of this was about to be shattered. In nine more weeks, whatever faith Mama held fast to so tenaciously might well be lost from her grasp. She wore the worry like a burden and I thought that my cornerstone was about to fall. But my mother straightened her shoulders, covered her eyes, said the prayers, and lit the Sabbath candles.

Each week Leah would ask with worry, "When will we get more candles Mama? Can Thomas get them for us Mama? Can he?"

She would cradle us and just gently whisper for us to be still.

"Shshsh, my children. Be still and let's think of Papa in America. SHHHHH. Soon this will all be over and once again we will be a family all together."

The bombing runs of the American planes became more frequent and the German's began to set up batteries on the outskirts of Amsterdam. There was more and more activity as patrols headed down the roads leading past our farmhouse. It had become too dangerous to leave our shed and even Thomas no longer admonished my mother to let us play outside.

Nine weeks had gone by since Leah had made the terrifying discovery that there were so few candles left. She got the last pair and handed them to my mother.

"There are no more left Mama. What are we going to do next Sabbath?"

"We will do."

The words both touched my heart and frightened me. For the first time I saw
The Tenth Sabbath Miracle

Mama as a person. A person who could not control the world or make it safe and perfect for us. She was, not in control of this nightmare, and I realized how alone we all were. Or so I thought. The days of the week seemed to slow down and it became one long day and one long night. The glow of nightly fires filled the distant skies as more and more bombs fell and the German artillery stations were brought closer and closer to Thomas’ farm. Mama grew more and more quiet as Friday night approached. How could she grow distant from us now I thought. Leah clung to me and I took strength from her small childish hands as I held them in my own. Friday arrived and Mama was in a world of her own. She cleaned the shed as if it had never before been cleaned. She tidied the table and asked Kathleen for a piece of bread for the Sabbath blessing. She then sat down at the table and waited for the Sabbath Queen to arrive. Leah and I, clutching each other huddled in a corner terrified at all we were losing in our lonely and lost world. When the sun began to set Mama rose from her chair and pushed it under the table. She straightened a small cloth and brought out two candleholders. She adjusted the piece of bread on a plate and took out a match. Leah clung to me and began to cry softly. I no longer could control my own tears as I watched my own world begin to shatter into ten thousand little pieces. But Mama had the most peaceful expression on her face. She was more at peace at this moment that she had been for the past two years. The last bit of light faded from the shed through whatever little light had passed through the holes in the walls from the setting sun. She took out two imaginary candles and placed them into the candlesticks. Mama intoned the blessing and struck a match. A golden glow filled the room and the look on my mothers aging face looked like that of an angel. Now she brought the tip of the match to where the tops of the candles should have been. She then blew out the match. Leah and I have often talked about what we saw that night. We looked on in awe. The room should have been plunged into darkness but instead a warm golden glow filled the room, illuminating Mama covering her eyes and rocking in prayer welcoming the Sabbath to our shed. Two lights flickered where the tops of two candles should have been, but were not. The only word I could make out was "soon". The light faded and soon disappeared leaving us in a total but warm darkness. We groped our way to Mama who drew us close to her as we prayed together. Within days the war for us would be over. The American army liberated Holland and we were free to wander about the countryside. My mother was able to locate Papa through a cousin in America. We have remained close to Thomas and his family who hid us for almost three years. But no matter how many times I asked Mama about what happened that night she would not, or could not talk about it. To this day, Leah and I call it the Tenth Sabbath Miracle.