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**The Crown:  
Reflections on My Zaide's Unintended Heirlooms**

At the Orthodox synagogues where my grandfather davened, it was not uncommon to see three generations of a family sitting together in the pews every Shabbat — and many weekday mornings, too. For a Toronto Jewish community that was literally built and populated by Holocaust survivors, this was an accepted and expected, way of life. Most kids I knew spent a lot of quality time with their grandparents. And, as part of that, we absorbed our grandparents' way of life in Europe, and the nightmare that destroyed it.

I sat with my maternal grandfather and father in shul, too. The difference was, when davening (and the kiddush, and maybe a family meal after) were over, the three of us would go home together, to the same house. It was like that from the time lupus took my maternal grandmother in the early 1980s. I was very young at the time, my sister just a baby, and we really only remember “special bubby” through pictures and stories. A short time later, my parents sold their house and moved my sister and I into my grandparents' place. We lived with my grandfather until he died, 18 years ago this past summer.



My grandfather had two tallises — one for weekdays, and one reserved for Shabbat and holidays. The former was standard-issue white with black stripes and a bit grungy, as things get when you use them every day while negotiating a styrofoam plate of tooth-picked herring and a plastic shot glass of Chivas Regal at 6:30 in the morning. The Shabbat-yontif tallis was always nicer, made of heavier material, and crowned by a silver atarah ringing the collar. When I was married in 2009, my parents asked if I'd like my grandfather's atarah for my own tallis. A few years later, I also started carrying it around in the bag he used to

use for his tallis, black velvet with his name in Hebrew, Yitzchak Zev HaLevy Woznica, stitched in gold diagonally across the front.

Neither the atarah nor the bag it continues to rest in are relics from the old country. My grandparents met in a DP camp after the war. He spoke Polish, she spoke Hungarian. They had nothing. Other than a few pictures that now hang in their children's homes, most of the household items — and in an Orthodox home, a tallis and its various accoutrements certainly count as household necessities — I associate with my grandparents, they bought in Canada, or maybe on a trip to Israel or New York.

That might explain why, after my grandfather's death, and again some years later when my parents moved out of the house we all shared, I wasn't particularly keen on adopting much of his stuff as my own. I have a pair of his cufflinks I rarely wear, and there was a set of wooden horses he'd received from a client or business partner that I assumed ownership of — and I really only wanted that because I was never allowed to play with it as a child. (Naturally, my kids aren't allowed to play with the horses either.)



In hindsight, perhaps I could have asked for my grandfather's electric shaver, the one that would switch on at 5:15 am every morning (except Shabbat and yontif) in the bedroom next to mine, signaling that he was up and getting ready for shul. But to me, most of those things only carried half-truths — they were replacements for his original stuff, the things taken away and lost forever to history.

When you live with someone for a long period of time, you get to know them pretty well. Maybe that's another reason I didn't feel the need to keep many of my grandfather's material objects. I have a wealth of lived memories, more than most, to keep me going. But the atarah and tallis bag — the zipper broke years ago, I haven't had the heart to replace it — are different: they're as close as I'll ever get to connecting to the part of his history that I can't touch, and never could. When I pulled my own tallis over my head on Shabbat mornings this past summer at a Covid-friendly outdoor minyan in a park, kids in tow and my father already arrived before us, I felt my grandfather on my shoulders.

