

*"Long ago, it must be, I have a photograph.  
Preserve your memories, they're all that's left you."*

- Paul Simon, "Old Friends"

The photograph is so old that I'm afraid it will crumble if I handle it one more time. The color has aged, so that the whole thing has a golden glow to it. Even my memory of our family seders seems to be washed with a golden glow.

Most of our social life when I was a child was with the family. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins all lived within walking distance of us, and we were together all the time – weekends, midweek, holidays – on special occasions or just on an ordinary day. My aunts and uncles behaved like additional parents to me and my cousins were like brothers and sisters. When we weren't at each other's houses, we were renting adjacent housekeeping cabins on some lake and sharing our vacations. This has to have been how it was in the old country for so many centuries: Families living within the confines of a shtetl and sharing every aspect of life with one another. This is a world that my children will never know. Of all the things that my family did together, the best were probably our seders.

So many vignettes compete for attention in my mind, snippets of seder happenings. Everybody dressed in new party clothes. My father, grandfather, and uncles reading through all the Hebrew as fast as they could – it sounded like a blab school to me, with individual words indistinguishable. My mother or grandmother proudly bearing the turkey on a platter into the diningroom, while everybody else oohed and aaahed. Opening the door for Elijah and then watching his cup carefully to see if we could detect any diminishment in the level of wine. The youngest child who had learned the Four Questions asking them, while the rest of us were

wistful that we were now too old. Searching for the afikoman and negotiating a prize. My brother and my cousins and me spilling outside whenever we were bored, just for a break. And oh, that Minnesota air after sunset in April would definitely wake us up again! My grandfather's massive Roman nose turning bright red from the maror that my grandparents made themselves in their basement, while the rest of us were drowning it in haroses and trying not to eat too much of it. Singing, singing, singing, every song in the Haggadah, sitting there till long after midnight because we couldn't miss any of our old favorites. My father's nasal voice and Ashkenazic pronunciations still ring in my head whenever I think of any of those songs.

Most of the people in this picture are dead now, and the rest of us are scattered across this continent. These memories are of a time and world long past. My children have never known a family surrounding or enjoyed a seder like I had all through my childhood.

