

On Holocaust Memorial Day our teacher Sara took us on bus Number 57 to visit the museum of Volhynia Jewry, and I felt very important. All the kids in the class except me, my cousin, and one other boy, Druckman, had families that came from Iraq. I was the only one with a grandfather who had died in the Holocaust. Volhynia House was very beautiful and posh, all made of black marble, like millionaires' houses. It was full of sad black-and-white pictures and lists of people and countries and dead people. We walked past the pictures in pairs and the teacher said, "Don't touch!" But I did touch one picture, made of cardboard, showing a thin, pale man who was crying and holding a sandwich in his hand. The tears came streaming down his cheeks like the divider lines you see on a highway, and my partner, Orit Salem, said she would tell the teacher that I touched it. I said I didn't care, she could tell whoever she wanted, even the principal, I didn't give a damn. It's my Grandpa and I'm touching whatever I want.

After the pictures, they took us into a big hall and showed us a movie about little children who were shoved into a truck and then suffocated with gas. Then a skinny old man got up on the stage and told us what bastards and murderers the Nazis were and how he took revenge on them, and he even strangled a soldier with his bare hands until he died. Djerby, who was sitting next to me, said the old man was lying; the way he looks, there's no way he can make any soldier bite the dust. But I looked the old man in the eye and believed him. He had so much anger in his eyes that all the rampages of all the iron-pumping hoods I'd ever seen seemed like small change in comparison.

Finally, when he finished telling us what he had done during the Holocaust, the old man said that what we had just heard was relevant not only to the past but also for what goes on nowadays, because the Germans still exist and still have a country. He said he was never going to forgive them, and that he hoped we would never ever go visit their country, either. Because when he went with his parents to Germany fifty years ago everything looked nice, but it ended in hell. People have short memories, he said, especially where bad things are concerned. People tend to forget, he said, but you won't forget. Every time you see a German, you'll remember what I told you. Every time you see German products, whether it's a television set or anything else, you should always remember that underneath the fancy wrapping there are parts and tubes that they made out of the bones and skin and flesh of dead Jews.

On the way out Djerby said again that he'd bet anything the old man never strangled anybody in his life, and I thought to myself it was lucky that we had a made-in-Israel refrigerator at home. Why look for trouble?

Two weeks later, my parents came back from a trip abroad and brought me sneakers. My older brother had secretly told my mom that that's what I wanted, and she got me the best pair in the world. Mom smiled as she handed me the present. She was sure I had no idea what was inside. But I recognized the Adidas logo on the bag right away. I took out the shoebox and said thank you. The box was rectangular, like a coffin, and in it were two white shoes with three blue stripes and the inscription ADIDAS on the side; I didn't have to open the box to know what they looked like. 'Let's put them on,' my mother said and took off the wrapping, 'to make sure they fit.' She was smiling the whole time, and had no idea what was going on. 'They're from Germany, you know,' I told her, squeezing her hand tightly. 'Of course, I know,' Mom smiled, 'Adidas is the best brand in the world.' 'Grandpa was from Germany, too,' I tried to give her a hint.

'Grandpa was from Poland,' Mom corrected me. For a moment she became sad, but she got over it in no time. She put one shoe on my foot and started to tie the laces. I kept quiet. I realized there was nothing doing. Mom didn't have a clue. She had never been to Volhynia House.

Nobody had ever explained it to her. For her, shoes were just shoes and Germany was Poland. I let her put the shoes on me and didn't say a thing. There was no point in telling her and making her even sadder.

I thanked her again and kissed her on the cheek and said I was going out to play ball. 'Be careful, eh?' my dad called, laughing, from his armchair in the front room. 'Don't wear out the soles right away.' I looked again at the pale hide covering my feet. I looked at them and remembered everything the old man who had strangled the soldier said we should remember. I touched the blue Adidas stripes and remembered my cardboard grandfather. 'Are the shoes comfortable?' my mother asked. 'Sure they're comfortable,' my brother answered for me. 'These aren't cheap Israeli sneakers. These are the same sneakers that the great Cruiff wears.' I tiptoed slowly toward the door, trying to put as little weight as I could on the shoes. And so I made my way gingerly to Monkeys Park. Outside the kids from the Borochoy neighborhood had formed three teams: Holland, Argentina, and Brazil. It so happened that Holland needed a player, so they agreed to let me join in, although they never accept anyone who's not from Borochoy.

At the beginning of the game I still remembered not to kick with the tip of my shoe, so that it wouldn't hurt Grandpa, but after a while I forgot, just like the old man at Volhynia House said people tend to do, and I even managed to kick a tiebreaker. But when the game was over I remembered and looked at the shoes. All of a sudden they were so comfortable, much bouncier than when they were in the box. 'Some goals, eh?' I reminded Grandpa on the way home. 'The goalie didn't know what hit him.' Grandpa didn't answer, but judging by the tread I would say that he was pleased, too.

55 From *The Bus Driver Who Wanted to be God & Other Stories*, (London: The Toby Press, 2004)