

Merav:

Welcome to the All of a Kind podcast. I'm Merav Hoffman.

Batya:

I'm Batya Wittenberg.

Merav:

We loved these books when we were kids, we love them now and we hope you do too.

Batya:

Today's chapter is the one where the girls visit Papa's junk shop. So this is a fun one. This has long been one of my favorite chapters. I know I'm gonna say that about a lot of chapters.

Merav:

We're already, I think, two for three on saying this is my favorite chapter.

Batya:

I think you're right, I think you're right. So this is yet another – (laughter)

Merav:

(overlapping) Favorite chapter!

Batya:

(overlapping) – of my favorite chapters. We get introduced to such a big swath of the world here that we didn't have before. Not to get ahead of ourselves, let's do the summary.

Merav:

The action begins after a brief narrative description of Papa's junk shop and his work there. Bored because it's raining, the girls go to visit Papa's shop and the peddlers there, including the intriguing Charlie. It turns out that the shop has recently taken in a load of books, and the girls spend a happy time looking through them to pick out some to keep. While returning home, they decide to spend the rest of

the afternoon playing “library” with their new books. It's time for What's on the Page?

Batya:

And what's not on the page?

Merav:

We meet a lot, (laughter) and I mean a lot of people in this chapter.

Batya:

Big cast. Yes, we meet Papa for the first time!

Merav:

Yes! And we also get like, a full-on description of Papa's work and what he does, and we also get introduced to the neighborhood –

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

– and all of the peddlers.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

I think let's start with Papa.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

What do we know about Papa from this chapter?

Batya:

We know that his work is hard physical labor. It's not what some would call unskilled labor, although that's a whole other thing. There's no such thing as unskilled labor. But there is a category of labor that is frequently thought of as unskilled. This isn't that, but it is hard physical

work that affects him, that affects his body, his hands specifically are mentioned. The place he works in isn't very comfortable.

Merav:

It's described as being down by the river, which just sort of innately gives you the idea that it's chilly. And also it's large. And so he's been sectioning off – we sort-of get this loving description of the basement where Papa works.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

And it's been sectioned off into areas and the key area is the area around the stove, which Papa –

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

– seems to be sort of slightly socially engineering a space for peddlers to gather, which is brilliant.

Batya:

Yes! What a thing. That is not a thing that I really grasped as important when I was a kid, but what it says about Papa that he makes a point of having a place for the local peddlers to sit and rest for a little while in a place that is warm in the winter and cool in the summer, that – like you said, social engineering, I did not spot that as significant as a kid, but it's so significant, it says so much about him.

Merav:

And it's kind-of a callback to the hospitality of the house.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

We haven't really seen Mama bring guests in yet, but obviously the house is always kept in a state of readiness to receive guests, in the same way Papa's places are kept in a state of readiness to receive not only the peddlers, but also the children.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

Who maybe are not frequent visitors, but at least show up enough that they have routines.

Batya:

They show up enough that they have routines.
They show up enough that they, the text describes the peddlers as their friends.

Merav:

Yes, and the peddlers absolutely recognize the children.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

And Charlie specifically, who we'll get to in a minute, greets the children expressly, in individual ways.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

You know, picks up one of the children and throws her up and down. I think it's Gertie.

Batya:

I think it's Gertie, yeah.

Merav:

And so there's this whole world of Papa's cellar, effectively, we don't really get a name for it, but Papa's shop. And what's interesting to me, and maybe this is not something that occurred to you either, is: How did Papa get into this sort of centralized world of being the person that peddlers bring things to? Because –

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

– in a way, it's not that Papa is himself a peddler, although he is almost like an aggregator.

Batya:

He sort-of organizes their work into a central location. He becomes, again, a not uncommon thing for Jewish immigrants in a bunch of different places to become sort of a – go-between is not quite – an intermediary.

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

To become an intermediary between the lowest classes of Gentiles and slightly higher classes of Gentiles.

Merav:

Mm hmm. And this is where we get into the idea of upcycling.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

Which is effectively what Papa is doing.

Batya:

Pretty much!

Merav:

I mean, we've talked about how we're going to discuss the economy of the junk shop. And –

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

– it really is the upcycling economy. If you've ever bought a, you know, a dress that was made out of old sweaters, or if you've bought a book that is retrofitted into being art, by gilding or cutting or paper cuts, all of those things are basically just the same thing that Papa is doing. He's reselling the neighborhood's junk by packaging it with similar junk and saying, here is a lot of woolens. So if you want to make a woolen quilt, you can go to Papa's shop, or you can have, you know, Papa's peddler comes by with woolens. You can then say, “Oh, I want the green one and the red one and the blue one,” or “I'm going to buy this package.” It's not

dissimilar to doing the thing that's called buying fat quarters, which is a thing that quilters do, where you have like a little pack of attractively colored items and you say, "Oh, I want that one that's in the Halloween colors and you buy it and make a Halloween quilt."

Batya:

So yeah, just taking in stuff that is junk when it comes in and is usable items when it goes out.

Merav:

Exactly.

Batya:

But it doesn't seem like he's doing something like you mentioned the books being turned into art; I have somewhere a purse made out of a book cover.

Merav:

Yes, I love that.

Batya:

It's a delightful little thing. It doesn't seem to me like Papa is doing anything like that, but he is cleaning, organizing, aggregating into lots.

Merav:

Yeah, I think the sorting is the primary work.

Batya:

Yeah, that's described. We see him doing the sorting.

Merav:

And the social stuff. You have the peddlers physically coming in. He is tending to their needs so that they stay loyal to him.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

Because they could absolutely go to some other aggregator and, you know, “I'm going to take my goods elsewhere.” And Papa is providing a warm environment for them, a cool environment in the summer. And he's also just giving them a place to talk about their troubles.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

Which I think probably serves as a form of therapy. Here is a little bit of a group kvetch where you can kind of come in and say, “Oh, my feet,” “Oh, my back.” “Oh, this lady wouldn't even buy from me and I stood in the rain for two hours.” All of those things form their lives and this is a place where they can talk about them. Papa is aggregating peddlers.

Batya:

And – didn't think of this until you said it, one of the favored places for working men to go to just bitch about their lives for a little while to other sympathetic working men is a bar. You can't go and hang out at a bar unless you can pay for drinks. Are you familiar with the term third space or third place?

Merav:

No, tell me about it.

Batya:

Sociologically – again, I haven't, like, made a formal study of this, so this is stuff I've gleaned from other people talking about it. But the idea is that people need to have a home space where they rest, usually eat, sleep; a workspace where they do their work, sometimes that's the same place and sometimes it isn't; and a third space in which they do none of those things –

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

— in which they can just relax. I've seen this recently talking about how for a lot of people today the internet forms a third space.

Merav:

Yeah, that makes perfect sense.

Batya:

Which I think is fascinating. And that's because, and this back to the book, what's already I think happening, in this early 20th century New York City, is it is becoming harder to find third spaces that you don't have to pay to be in.

Merav:

Right, because we're dealing with overcrowding.

Batya:

And so Papa is providing that. I mean, I think especially spaces that you don't have to pay to be in and that won't tell you to move along if you are visibly a homeless person.

Merav:

Right, and because the third space is also their place of work, albeit not directly their place of work, but it is related.

Batya:

It's Papa's place of work, but it's not really the peddlers' place of work exactly. When they're there, they're not working.

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

They come, they sell their stuff, and then they hang around because they're taking a break.

Merav:

Yes, this is their break room, effectively, their coffee space.

Batya:

Exactly, yeah.

Merav:

Yeah, and it's interesting because Papa provides this in a variety of ways. The main one is by providing a stove, which gives them the central meeting point.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

But the other one is by providing refreshment. There's always the little samovar bubbling on top of the stove.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

And I'm assuming it's a samovar. It's not actually called a samovar. That's not on the page. I pictured it as a samovar, possibly because of Papa's background and possibly because it's kind of constantly heating. And if it's constantly heating, it's not going to boil dry if it's a samovar, whereas if it was just a regular tea kettle, he would have to be constantly refreshing it. So yeah, it's definitely a third space. And I think that Papa is very clever to create this for the peddlers because otherwise he would just kind of be the man, right?

Batya:

Kinda, yeah.

Merav:

He would be the overseer and they might resent him. Whereas this humanizes him and gets him the loyalty and love of these peddlers and particularly of Charlie, who is described as being Papa's best friend.

Batya:

Best friend and right-hand man, I think, is another phrase that's used?

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

And the thing that fascinates me about Charlie being referred to as Papa's right-hand man is if you have a right-hand man it means you're a guy in charge. And that says something about how either the peddlers or the girls or both see Papa as being in a position of authority not just in the family but in the larger city.

Merav:

Yeah, I mean, Papa is, I think I said the man, but he is a kind, gentle version of the man. And I think that is really critical to his relationship with people who are effectively his workers, because this is similar to a sales organization.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

They're independent contractors. Papa does not pay them a salary. They are going out with goods. They are coming in with goods. Like, I actually don't know whether Papa is paying them a salary. My suspicion is that they're making sales, and those are commission sales. They keep the profits of the sales. They bring Papa things that they acquire. So Papa's cut is in goods.

Batya:

Yeah, I don't get the impression that they're salaried. He pays them for what they bring him.

Merav:

Right, exactly. So there's a degree of – Papa gets to keep the goods, they get money for the goods, and they take out goods to sell, and they probably get some kind of commission on what they sell. It's not really clear to me how goods leave the warehouse again. So whether the peddler is, “Hey, I have woolens, and do you have woolens to sell? Do you have moth-eaten woolens that you want to get rid of, and I can give you these nice new packaged woolens?” What is the actual system there? I assume that this worked out because clearly they become more and more prosperous.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

And it is definitely working for Papa to do this.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

And I think that it's interesting because we don't really know the duration of Papa doing this. Like we definitely know that in the old country, Cilly and Morris Brenner had a similar business.

Batya:

Well, we know this if we've read the biography.
(laughter)

Merav:

(laughter) I'm getting this from *From Sarah to Sydney*. And that world is something that's familiar to them when they come to the States. It's something that Papa is able to set himself up doing, whether he like went to the *Landsmannschaft* for a loan the way that my

grandfather did, or you know, whether he – and for people who don't know *Landsmannschaft*, *Landsmannschaft* is an organization from your town in the old country, in America. So you would go to – in my case in Canada, you would go to your *Landsmannschaft* and say “Hey, we’re from” – in my case, “Lugov, and we need a loan,” and other people from Lugov would say “Oh yes, I will stand you a loan.” And then you would pay it back to that person and they would, that arrangement would come through your *Landsmannschaft* because otherwise how would you find someone from your town?

Batya:

Exactly. And now, *schaft* is a word I don't know, but I know *landsmann* means literally landsman. It means a person from your country.

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

It's sometimes used in American Yiddish to generally mean anyone from, either from Europe or from your general area of Europe. In this case, it means someone actually from the same town. What's the *schaft* part of it?

Merav:

I think it's kind of like *bund*, which is like, it's –

Batya:

(overlapping) Oh, it's organization.

Merav:

(overlapping) – an organizational term. I don't know exactly what it is, but I think it's basically like, organization of people from my town. So hometown, hometown people. And it is extremely critical in this era because in the big city, how are you gonna get a loan? By going to people from your town, it becomes a lot easier to do that. And so those were a critical piece, at

least I know in the economy of Toronto, it was a critical piece of how people got set up in businesses.

Batya:

I mean, it makes sense, yeah.

Merav:

And we're getting sort of a picture of Papa's world. Despite the fact that Papa has not been on the page until this point, he kind-of arrives fully, you know, blown out with like the cellar, the peddlers, with Charlie. And then we have sort-of the segmentation of Papa's space and all of the things that he does to keep it orderly. Plus we get the hospitality of Papa. Papa sort of arrives on the page like Abraham, right?

Batya:

Kinda, yeah.

Merav:

You kind of get this –

Batya:

We get a sudden tight focus.

Merav:

Exactly.

Batya:

Down to a detail that I just love passionately about how his work affects his hands.

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

That when it's cold, his hands get chapped, the skin cracks and the dirt of what he works with gets into his skin. And no matter how hard he tries to soften his hands with oil and keep them clean, they're always going to be rough, they're always going to look dirty. And it's such a

shocking contrast to the well-kept home where Mama rules and the picture we have of Mama so far. This I think is the first real glimpse of poverty, in the lives of this family.

Merav:

And of course, it's made into a game.

Batya:

Yes, it's made into a game just like keeping the house is made into a game.

Merav:

Because they're children.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

And because that's how they perceive things. But it's also that their parents want them to see the best part of it and not have to deal with the

grinding labor. Which – it is actually on the page that they do help Papa to sew covers, they're called bale covers, for the rag bins so that the rags don't get dirty. And the girls are sort of helpfully part of Papa's world. They're sewing things, they're helping with the sorting, what have you. But to them, this is just normal, right? This is the world that they come from.

Batya:

It's normal, and their participation in it is a game, it's a thing to do that's fun and that's, “Oh, we're helping Papa.” It's not, “We have to do this or we won't eat.”

Merav:

Right, and I mean, it's, “Oh, let's go see the peddlers.” It's actually something they look forward to.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

So let's talk about the peddlers.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

We've talked about Charlie for a minute. Charlie is described as being aesthetically beautiful, right? He's blonde, he's tall, he's lanky –

Batya:

He's young.

Merav:

He's young, especially he's young. And Charlie clearly has a lot of energy, and he's a good helper to Papa. But he also has, and this is, I think, sort of the key to the story that will unfold about Charlie later. He always goes off for a week or so at a time and then comes back

being discouraged and not finding the thing he's looking for. And spoiler, the thing he's looking for is very nearby, but we're not gonna say what it is –

Batya:
(overlapping) Yes! (laughter)

Merav:
– if you haven't read the books before. So that is an arc that we're starting to see build with Charlie and Charlie is one of the few, what I would call arc characters in the series –

Batya:
Yeah.

Merav:
– where we sort of see him kind of go through this period of what might actually be depression.

Batya:

Might well be, yeah. I mean it's certainly –

Merav:

It's not described as such, but –

Batya:

– there is a sadness about him and there is unknown stuff about him, and that of course makes him mysterious and intriguing.

Merav:

Yes, Charlie is sort of the mysterious brooding hero of Ella's daydreams, right? We certainly are getting –

Batya:

(laughter, overlapping) Yes, oh gosh. That – it's mentioned somewhere that like, Ella at twelve years old is just starting to, I forget how it puts it, but it's like, she's finding herself staring at Charlie for long moments and hanging on every

word he says. She's got a crush and it's adorable.

Merav:

Charlie is the burgeoning of Ella's womanhood. "She's like, oh, boys are cute. Uh-oh." (laughter) That's great. And yet, you know, Ella is nowhere near ready to have a relationship with a man. She's twelve years old. But Charlie is a safe person to have a crush on. Right? Charlie is not going to decide that Ella is an appropriate person to bestow affection on. And certainly, it's within the sanctioned confines of Papa's work.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

So it's not as if Ella is going to get herself in trouble by flirting with Charlie, she's just going to be seen as, "Oh the kids are flirting with Charlie, isn't that sweet?" Right, because Ella is

still of a piece with the kids, even though she's twelve and has, as we'll see in a minute, pretty sophisticated reading taste for a twelve-year-old.

Batya:
Oh yes.

Merav:
So let's talk about our other peddlers, because this is where I feel like we kind of get into, I mean obviously this is the Jewish-Gentile world.

Batya:
Yes.

Merav:
But it's also kind-of where we get into stereotypes.

Batya:

We do. And this is a thing I wonder very much is – all the peddlers besides Charlie, are they specific individuals that young Sarah knew? Or are they sort-of an amalgam of a bunch of different people that the kids knew that she has simplified for animation, as it were?

Merav:

I think you're probably right.

Batya:

Charlie is clearly a real person. I don't know if the others are or not.

Merav:

I'm not positive Charlie is a real person. So –

Batya:

Hm.

Merav:

– we do discover, reading [*From*] *Sarah to Sydney*, there is a call out that Kathy the library lady is actually an amalgam.

Batya:

Oh!

Merav:

There was a similar, what I'm going to call arc plot, which, you know, if you've read the books, you know what I'm talking about as far as Kathy and her, her story and what happens to her. It actually is the story of an upstairs neighbor who was a friend of one of the girls, an older friend, someone who had a romance that had dissipated and didn't know any of the details about where her loved one had gone and then was reunited with the loved one. So we have that on the page as Kathy, which, spoiler.

Batya:

Yes. Also, we don't yet know that her name is Kathy.

Merav:

Right, so we have this whole initial encounter with the library lady. That story was given to the character of the library lady, perhaps to tie things together a little bit more neatly. It actually happened to an upstairs neighbor. So I'm not positive that Charlie really existed either.

Batya:

That's interesting.

Merav:

And it's interesting to me because Charlie is called out as the best friend of Papa and is such a big character in book one. And yet I kind of feel like he kind of evaporates from the series thereafter.

Batya:

Yes, after the culmination of his arc –

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

– I think all we ever hear from him in future is like, I think maybe they visit once?

Merav:

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Batya:

And there's a letter at one point. And I think that's it.

Merav:

Right. Which, I mean, still signifies that clear affection and still gives you that continuity of Papa still loves this person and this person still loves the family. But, like, I think you're right in that these are almost certainly people that have

been amalgamated together in order to give us this – I mean, this is the part of this that I find really awkward –

Batya:

It's uncomfortable. It's uncomfortable because there really are – racial and ethnic stereotypes happening here.

Merav:

Yeah, and we're given –

Batya:

And whether or not these individuals, these characters in the book, are really individuals, they are described in the language of stereotype.

Merav:

Yes, I mean, I think we get it very clearly right at the beginning. One of the characters is called Polack.

Batya:

Mm-hmm. Polack, which –

Merav:

And Polack is a person from Poland, but not in a nice way. So that's basically already kind of a slur.

Batya:

Yes. I remember when I was little, Polack jokes were a thing.

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

Because apparently – and my deepest apologies to people of Polish descent listening to this – (laughter)

Merav:

Hi. (laughter)

Batya:

– I did not put together until much later in my life that, “Oh wait, Polack actually means person from Poland and it's saying that people from Poland are dumb. That's the whole of the jo –”

Merav:

That's the joke.

Batya:

That's not nice! (laughter)

Merav:

I too grew up with a similar thing. We had Newfoundlander jokes in Canada –

Batya:

Yup.

Merav:

– that were sort of a similar, I didn't know anybody from Newfoundland. So everyone told them and I was like, “Oh, that's funny. I guess that's how it is.” And of course I eventually met people from Newfoundland and was like, well, this was very stupid of me.

Batya:

Now, it is also true that Polack is a surname.

Merav:

It is. And, I mean, it's possible that it's his name.

Batya:

(overlapping) – that there were people, there *are* people in the world whose name is Polack, and that could be the case here, but we don't know.

Merav:

I honestly feel like it's left a little bit ambiguous.

Batya:

It's also possible, now that I think of it, that someone from Poland could have a name that Americans have difficulty pronouncing, and so he says, "Just call me Polack, I'll answer to it."

Merav:

Right, exactly.

Batya:

And he develops a nickname that way, and it's not necessarily meant – by anybody – to be denigrating, but nonetheless. The rest of his description is not real flattering and it's not really, um – how to put it?

Merav:

Yeah, I mean, he's described as having a peasant body. Which, I mean, I have a peasant body, so I embody this.

Batya:

(laughter) Built to survive small famines!

Merav:

He's described as having a peasant's body.

He's wide. He's got thick hands. He has these ragged, ill-fitting clothes. Clearly, he's living in poverty. But moreover, he's described as being Other. This is definitely an us versus them, not in a mean way, just like "How do I distinguish this person from the other people sitting around the fire? Well, he's the one that looks like this."

And I can't tell if that's adult Sydney reading back. I can't tell if that's Sydney's editor or whether that's literally just how Sydney saw this man. "He was a big guy. He had big hands, right?" This is who he is. And again, because we don't know if this is an amalgam, we don't really have a good picture of who this was, so she paints a very simple picture. For contrast, we have Joe, and I noticed that all of the peddlers have one name.

Batya:

Yup.

Merav:

Which is similar to the main characters, right?

Everyone has one name. We never get a last name for the Brenner girls. And so we have Joe, he's the Italian. And again, stereotypically, he talks with his hands, they put his accent right on the page.

Batya:

Phonetically described accent, which was, to be fair, something everybody was doing at the time.

Merav:

Yeah, I mean, Mark Twain set a precedent.

Batya:

It was standard, it was not thought of as being insulting,

Merav:

No, they're just trying to get that sound of Joe's speaking. And I think we get that later when we see Guido as well.

Batya:

Yeah, Guido, somewhat differently. I think because we get a lot more dialogue from Guido and having all of it in this It's-A-Me-Mario kind of accent –

Merav:

Oh God, no.

Batya:

It really is like that! I tried – for my sins, I tried saying out loud bits of Joe's dialogue that we get. And it's not actually – even the people with Italian accents who do insert extra syllables that

sound like an “A”, that's not where they would go.

Merav:

I mean, as a Canadian who inserts A in all kinds of places, I have empathy for that –

Batya:

Different A. (laughter)

Merav:

But yes.

Batya:

But yes, you've seen, I have no doubt that you've seen people try to write Canadian and put the *eh*-s in the wrong places.

Merav:

Oh yeah. Writing a correct accent for someone who is not of your ethnicity is a very difficult task.

Batya:

It's dicey, yeah.

Merav:

So even if Joe or the amalgamation of people who were Joe did talk like that, Polack doesn't talk like that.

Batya:

No.

Merav:

It's just Joe. This is a characteristic that's been given to Joe to kind of flesh him out.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

Picklenose is our third peddler who isn't Charlie. And we, I mean, again, back to the nickname.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

This is body shaming, right? It's "Boy, does he have a schnoz."

Batya:

He's called Picklenose – he's got the big schnoz, and on that schnoz, he has a wart the shape of a pickle.

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

And that is why he's called Picklenose. And...

Merav:

Which is just such a yucky, body shaming thing, especially given that we're calling out Charlie for being attractive –

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

– we're calling out Joe for talking with his hands, Polack has thick hands and Picklenose, we just go right to his nose and we talk about his nose. And he chews tobacco.

Batya:

He chews tobacco.

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

Now this is, this I think is actually a little bit interesting, that Polack is racially marked on the page.

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

Or ethnically marked, might be a better way to put it. So is Joe. Picklenose isn't, which to my mind suggests either he's a white guy. or he's a Jewish guy –

Merav:

I agree more with he's a Jewish guy, because it might be called out like Charlie that he's a white guy.

Batya:

Or – the nose is so prominent that you don't notice anything else about him.

Merav:

I think that that's the reality. And I wonder if Picklenose was based on a real person, because it's clear that this is something very, I mean, it's possible she made it up, but it seems like a very strange detail to make up. It's possible that he really is just that distinctive in her memory, so that she basically stuck him into the story. Maybe he was particularly kind to them. Like we see his empathy.

Batya:

He's described as a sweet guy,

Merav:

Yeah, he's clearly very nice.

Batya:

Let me see if I can find – How is it put? He's cheerful even when things are going bad, he's sympathetic to other people when he chews

tobacco, he offers it round to everybody else before he takes any for himself.

Merav:

Yes. And that's a smaller hospitality.

Batya:

He's a nice guy, and we like him and we don't mock him, or the narration does not mock him, for his pickle nose.

Merav:

No.

Batya:

It pities him and sympathizes with him for it, because we like him.

Merav:

We like him, but also the tone is, "We're so sorry you're ugly."

Batya:

I mean, that's definitely it. That the nose is so, the nose and the wart on it are so very prominent and that can't be easy.

Merav:

This is very much before cosmetic surgery, or at least competent cosmetic surgery was a thing. So this was just a feature that Picklenose would live with for his, you know, his entire life.

Batya:

Well, and also Picklenose is clearly sufficiently impoverished that the likelihood he would have access to cosmetic surgery isn't great, even if it were a thing.

Merav:

Right. And that's, I think, the painting of these people who are in the cellar with Papa, is most of these people are here because they really have nowhere else to go.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

This is a profession they can do with limited English. And it's also, it's clear that they are living in rather more dire poverty. We have this whole thing where Joe is trying to fix his shoes because the soles have worn through.

Batya:

No, I think that's Picklenose.

Merav:

Oh no, it is Picklenose, you're right.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

So, you know, Joe is having a bad day. Picklenose, meanwhile, is being proactive. He says to Papa, “Can I get some cardboard?” He goes and cuts out cardboard soles for the interior of his shoes, and he tucks them, and he's basically making insoles for his shoes. Presumably his feet hurt, right? This man is walking around all day. It's been raining, and you know how uncomfortable it is to walk around in –

Batya:

(overlapping) His shoes are full of holes, his socks are wet –

Merav:

Right. If he has socks.

Batya:

And when he puts the cardboard soles in his shoes, he says, “Well, that'll have to do till I get me some more money.”

Merav:

Right, exactly. So this is clearly like a down period for him. He needs the support of these other peddlers. And Papa is providing this.

Batya:

And of Papa, yeah. And it's significant I think that like that cardboard is Papa's stock in trade.

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

He'd be selling that. And he doesn't so much as hesitate before saying "Ueah, look in the paper room, take whatever you like from there –"

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

Rather than, “You can have that for a couple of pennies.”

Merav:

Right, Papa is making sure that his peddlers stay in good shape.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

And – both emotionally and physically. I think that calling out both the physical support of, “Hey, here's a resource that you would otherwise have to pay for.” And also just this camaraderie the –

Batya:

Trust.

Merav:

The trust. They're creating this band of people. I almost said band of brothers, but we don't know what the assumed gender of these people was. Where they all kind-of come to each other and look for comfort. And I'm sure that there were more than four of them.

Batya:
No doubt.

Merav:
I'm sure that there were probably maybe dozens. We don't know how big Papa's operation was.

Batya:
There was very likely a rotating cast, people who came for a while and then either moved on or, you know, didn't live.

Merav:

Exactly. So now we have Charlie, who's sort of our last call out. Charlie is –

Batya:

He is different from the others. Right there on the page, this is not a thing that the reader is left to conclude, right there on the page the girls perceive, in their youth, in their inexperience, they nonetheless perceive: there's a difference between Charlie and the others. And they, they don't have the vocabulary to express it in terms of race or class.

Merav:

They do talk about it a little in terms of class, in that it's mentioned that Charlie might have come from money. And they at least understand what that means. That Charlie has background and privilege –

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

– that is not innate, but has been given to him. And because of that, he behaves differently, he presents differently. And he isn't sunk as low as these other peddlers, possibly because he has money coming in from the side, possibly because this is something he doesn't have to do. I always think of the Pulp song Common People, where you have the rich heiress who's slumming it and everyone around her kind of resents her for doing it because they know that she could call her father and it could all be over and she could just go home.

Batya:

Yeah, it does not seem though that Charlie is resented for not being the same kind as them. They like him.

Merav:

No, because Charlie works hard.

Batya:

Yes. He's a hard worker and he seems to be a cooperative worker as well. So they don't say, "Oh, here's this rich guy who doesn't need the work and he's taking work away from us." They seem to treat him as one of them.

Merav:

Yeah, and I mean, the fact of Charlie's whiteness, and I mean, I would assume white Anglo-Saxon Protestantism in the case of Charlie, because we don't actually know.

Batya:

I think that's fair to assume, given everything else we get.

Merav:

Charlie is the only person in this room who is actually white. At current standards in the time, Jews are not white, Italians are not white –

Batya:

Jews are not white at this point. We don't know about Picklenose –

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

– but if Picklenose is white, he is disqualified from a lot of the basic acceptance of whiteness by virtue of being –

Merav:

Poor.

Batya:

Poor and ugly.

Merav:

Yeah, I mean, the ugly probably plays into it too, but really it's about the poverty, but it might be

that is a cycle that created itself because he was unattractive.

Batya:
Might be.

Merav:
But he does seem to be intensely kind. So I can only hope that we at some point in future chapter that I have not encountered find Picklenose a bride. (laughter) I feel like that happens, but maybe that was just a fantasy I had as a child, that everyone was happy.

Batya:
Honestly though, if it was, it's a good one.

Merav:
Yeah, I like that. So let's talk about the girls and their interaction with, first, the neighborhood, right? We see this initial description. We don't get this when they walk out. And I know from

reading *Sarah to Sydney* that there was a fight that was had about the opening chapter. The editor wanted to go right into in media res, “Let's just do what's going on and get on with the action.” And Taylor was like, “No, I need to introduce the neighborhood.” The neighborhood is a character. And they had a fight about it. And the editor won. The opening of the books that we have today is the editor's version of the opening. Which we love.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

And it was a good choice editorially. I suspect that some of that introduction of The Neighborhood got scraped into this chapter because we suddenly are introduced to The Neighborhood a second time.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

Like we've seen it, running past to go to the library. And now it's like, "Hey, by the way. There are slate sidewalks here. There are cobblestones." And there's this very interesting sort of piquant, like – "There is no creek to play in." And I was like, well, where does the creek idea come from? Is this something Mama or Papa had in Poland? Is this something that Sydney is projecting backwards from like watching her daughter play in a creek where they live, when she's raising Jo? I don't know.

Batya:

Yeah. Yeah, what are we contrasting this with when we say "There's no grass, there's no flowers –"

Merav:

There are no trees.

Batya:

Although what I'm going to point out is the opening line of the chapter – and I understand why an editor might not want to start a book like this. The opening line is: “The East Side was not pretty.”

Merav:

Right, which is a great line.

Batya:

And like that, as the opening line of a book – to me as an adult is intriguing like, “Oh, we are entering a space that we don't necessarily like, or that if we do like, we are very aware of its flaws, we're meeting its flaws first.” As a little kid, I might've seen that and been put off.

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

As a parent bringing a book to a little kid, I might see that and be put off, like, why am I reading my kid, or giving my kid to read, a book that starts with something that's, the first thing we see is "It's not pretty."

Merav:

Right, and I mean, if this was Taylor's original, and we wouldn't know until we saw her papers, like if this was her original introduction to the books, I can absolutely see why the editor would have been like, "Let's save this for later."

Batya:

Exactly.

Merav:

So now we get the contrast –

Batya:

So you are wondering, is this being compared to a specific thing from Mama's childhood or is it being compared to a specific thing in Sydney Taylor's present? I'm wondering, third possibility, is this being compared to just a hypothetical – what *would* be a pretty place for a child to grow up in?

Merav:

Right. The idyllic. “What is a great place to raise a child?” Who knows? I mean, she was at the time that she wrote this, raising a child. So maybe that was something she thought about in terms of Jo's childhood. Like, “Am I providing well enough for my kid?”

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

So then we get this description of the house being a four room apartment, which I think we talked about a little bit.

Batya:

We did, yeah.

Merav:

I think I had read this chapter in tandem with chapter two, and I had remembered this detail. So we talked about that a lot in the last episode. And then by contrast, we get this dangerous staircase going down to the smelly basement. And then we encounter this little segment of the basement that is this little around the stove gathering.

Batya:

This little haven.

Merav:

But then the rest of it is this vast, you know, space, which Papa has organized into segments, which is sort of, I think, giving us, before Papa's even really on the page, the orderly tidiness of this man who is sorting his rags. And there might be Jewish connotation to sorting the rags. I was thinking about this in terms of *shatnez*, which is the idea that you should separate linen from wool.

Batya:
(overlapping) Oh.

Merav:
If the clientele that he's selling to is predominantly ethnic and some section of it is Jewish —

Batya:
He's gonna need to know.

Merav:

You're not gonna want to mix in your linens and your wools.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

So he needs to do that. But also, like, people want to buy [the] same fabric together, because if you're going to make a rag something, then you're going to want to make it all of one fabric so that you know how to launder it. Or not launder it, in the case of wool.

Batya:

Just a quick side explanation for anyone who isn't already really familiar with the concept of *shatnez*. It's about not having wool and linen in the same item of clothing. Whether it's woven together or a wool thing with a linen lining or vice versa. So yeah, Papa might well be doing that. That's not actually mentioned –

Merav:

It's not on the page.

Batya:

But maybe he's doing it.

Merav:

But in this chapter for the first time we actually do get Judaism on the page and it comes very suddenly.

Batya:

We do!

Merav:

Like we just get this very quick, "Hey, you know, you're gonna have to do this when the Day of Atonement comes." And what it is, is we're talking about "What are we going to do today?" And they're like, "Oh, why don't we go over to Henny's friend's house?" Which is interesting, is

the idea of like collective friendship with one person's friend. Like all right, she has a house that we can go to, and it's raining, so "Henny, go lean on your friend so we can go hang out there."

Batya:

And Henny says, "No, we're mad at each other."
(laughter)

Merav:

Right, and so what is the big argument? Fanny called Henny a tattletale. So the question to my mind is what did Henny do? Right, like what did Henny do to get them in trouble? And why did Fanny tattletale on Henny for doing whatever it was Henny did? But fascinatingly, this is just kind of left to the side, like they're clearly friends and frenemies all the time. They can't go to Fanny's house. It's off the table. But Ella brings up that she's gonna have to make up with Fanny at *Yom Kippur*. And this is the first

indication we've had, we've talked about like places it would have been clumsy to introduce Judaism. Suddenly Judaism is on the page because it's just there. It comes out of someone's mouth and it gets preserved on the page and suddenly these kids are Jewish.

Batya:

“You'll have to make up with her when Yom Kippur – parentheses, day of atonement – comes, you know everyone must forgive each other on that day.” And Henny says, “Oh, it's a long ways off to Yom Kippur. What I want to know is what are we going to do today?” And it's just there and gone. The narration doesn't go into any detail about what the deal with *Yom Kippur* is.

Merav:

It's just there, as if everyone knows what *Yom Kippur* is. And I can't imagine that everybody in the audience did know what *Yom Kippur* was.

And for people who are listening who don't know about *Yom Kippur*, *Yom Kippur* is one of two big, what we call High Holy Days in the year. This one takes place right after *Rosh Hashanah*, which is the official new year. We have a couple of new years in our calendar. But it's the official new year and there's a ten-day period of repentance, where you kind of think through your actions from the previous year and you spend time kind-of going to the people that you might've hurt and saying, "Hey, how are you doing about the thing that happened between us? Let's talk it through."

Batya:

And you apologize, and you ask for forgiveness.

Merav:

And you don't necessarily get granted forgiveness —

Batya:

No.

Merav:

But you make the effort.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

And obviously, this does not work in every case. There are absolutely situations you should leave alone. But there absolutely are also situations where a little talking can mend a lot of hurt. So this is what Henny and Ella have as background context for this on-again, off-again friendship between Fanny and Henny. And it's just part of their lives.

Batya:

And I also do want to point out that the High Holidays are in early-to-mid fall, and in the last chapter it was November.

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

So it is nearly a year probably until Yom Kippur. When Henny says that's forever away – for a kid, that is forever away.

Merav:

Yeah, I feel like we're in the early rainy part of winter in this chapter. So now we have kind of an order of the day where the kids are going to do the things that they're going to do before they can actually leave. It's Charlotte who says, let's go visit Papa and the peddlers. And then they have to do their chores. And then they have to practice the piano, which we have alluded to in the previous chapter by the

presence of the piano and the idea of lessons; here we actually see the girls doing the thing, and actually playing the piano. And then they get to basically go out and do the thing that they wanna do. We now come into contact with our army of peddlers, and we get the amazing news that Papa has brought in a load of books.

Batya:

Yes. We had in the very first chapter the rarity of books in their lives, and the importance of books in their lives.

Merav:

And this is clearly treasure, right?

Batya:

(overlapping) Yes.

Merav:

Like this is the girls happening to – like, Papa did not say to the girls, oh, come into the shop

this morning. Because Papa probably gets up at five or six in the morning to go to the shop, may or may not see the girls in the morning. That's supposition on my part. But they may not have known that books were gonna come in. Someone brought these in from, it said a rich man is getting rid of some of the things in his collection. And there are some children's books among them. So the girls are like, "Yes, let's go see the books!" And Papa gives them this very tantalizing promise of being able to keep some of the books, not just to look at and to touch, but to keep and have for their own.

Batya:

And once again, he finishes that introduction by saying that he expects to sell off all the rest of them today. This is taking away from his shop's profits.

Merav:

Yes, definitely.

Batya:

That he's going to give some of these books that are briefly his to his kids, to keep.

Merav:

But he is investing in his family.

Batya:

Rather than sell them with the others to make more money, also for the kids. Says no, the books are important. The kids having books is important. I don't know what he would have done if they hadn't come in that day, because the books came in that morning, he would have sold them off the same day. There's no phone.

Merav:

I mean, it's possible –

Batya:

He's not gonna call home and say, Mama, send the kids.

Merav:

No. I mean, he could have sent one of the peddlers, right?

Batya:

(overlapping) He could have.

Merav:

I mean, he could have had that set up.

Batya:

He could have picked some out himself. But this is serendipitous.

Merav:

This is serendipitous and it's presented as an adventure.

Batya:

(overlapping) Yes.

Merav:

And I think that that's what's great about it is Papa's investment in his family. And then suddenly there's this adventure of "Now we're gonna go see the treasure." So we get the girls running over to the paper section because they know the lay of this land very clearly.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

Like they spend a lot of time at Papa's place. So they're gonna go over there. And we now get real descriptions of the girls interacting with the books.

Batya:

It's so great. I love this bit.

Merav:

And what's funny is Henny, who's really very passionate about everything, is not all that into it because what she's doing, choosing to do when the books are there is she's choosing to throw them back and forth with Charlie like a ball.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

She's picking up a book and throwing it to Charlie and then continuing this action. She's flirting with Charlie.

Batya:

Little bit, probably.

Merav:

I mean, maybe not consciously, but like she wants his attention.

Batya:

She wants his attention and what she is choosing to do is what a boy would do.

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

Remember we talked before about how Henny likes doing things that are generally the purview of boys?

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

Tossing stuff like a ball, tossing a ball with an older man is a boy thing to do, mostly,

Merav:

(overlapping) It's a boy thing to do.

Batya:

And Henny doesn't care about that. She's just, this is what's fun.

Merav:

No, she's really just like, Sarah and Ella will pick out the books and whatever they pick, I will like.

Batya:

She says that straight out. "You're good pickers, I'll be satisfied with whatever you get."

Merav:

She trusts her sisters that she's going to get good books out of that. The only real conflict we get is – we get Ella discovering a set of Dickens. And what really like cracks me up about this chapter is Ella looks at the Dickens and goes, "Oh, there's some I haven't read or even heard of." And she picks out two that are basically like collections of effectively short

stories and like scribblings of Dickens. I mean maybe it's just that she's heard of all of the other titles, but that indicates that Ella has, like, more than a borderline familiarity with Dickens because I can't even necessarily rattle off all the titles of Dickens in my forties.

Batya:

I absolutely could not. And if I were to try to rattle off all the Dickens titles I knew, *Sketches by Boz* would not come into it –

Merav:

No.

Batya:

– except it would right now, because I've just read this chapter.

Merav:

And I mean, *Sketches by Boz*, Boz was Dickens' nickname.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

Which I happen to know from, I don't even know where. But effectively, these are almost like chapbooks that have been included with this box set of all of the available Dickens at the time. And I think at this point, Dickens is deceased. So this is probably a complete set of Dickens. And the amazing discovery of like, "Wow, all of Dickens right here," and there's stuff, there's extra material, bonus content, right?

Batya:

Bonus content. (laughter)

Merav:

And Sarah's piping up and saying, "But I can't read that yet," right?

Batya:

“They look like grown-up books,” she says.

Merav:

Sarah is eight. Sarah is not gonna be digging into the Dickens anytime soon. She's going to want to later. And she's clear on that. She's like, “But for now, I would like books of my own.”

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

Because this is an amazing thing, but like you see Ella like coming out with the box set and everyone's like, “Oh, Ella's gonna get all the books and we're not gonna get any and we're gonna have to grow into these books.”

Batya:

Oh, Charlotte has already found her book of fairy tales, so she's happy.

Merav:
Yes.

Batya:
Gertie can't read yet, so she's happy with a – she finds a magazine with pictures in it.

Merav:
Yeah, and she's just flipping through. Like, as at the library, Gertie is just kind of like, let me absorb media into my brain.

Batya:
Mm-hmm.

Merav:
And she's not gonna take that magazine home. But then the miracle happens.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

They find a book called *The Dolls That You Love*. And it is described as having dolls. Five dressable dolls – I went and looked this up, and this is gonna be our deep dive today – with costumes.

Batya:

It's paper dolls.

Merav:

It's paper dolls. And the girls go nuts. Here is a game, a toy, and a book all in one.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

This is the most amazing thing ever. They must have this book.

Batya:

“They might have dreamed about such a book, but they had not known that one like it even existed.” They've never heard of books of paper dolls.

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

That's not a thing.

Merav:

And I mean these, these are not in their world. This belonged to probably a rich family. We get that on the page. And here they are discovering it. And they're like, “Oh, wow, we have found The Thing that we wanna take home. Papa, Papa, can we have this?” So Papa, very

magnanimously, like, sees everyone kind-of holding their own book and being like, “Yes, I found my thing!” And he says, “Just take them all. Take all the books.” Like he can't part the children from their treasure. And he doesn't watch the process of the kids picking out the books, Charlie is supervising that.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

And yet Papa immediately recognizes the love of reading and learning and playing the children are describing.

Batya:

Of course.

Merav:

You know, like “We want these books!” Papa is not going to take them away. So he's like, “Yeah, just take them all.”

Batya:

And they say, “Really? We can keep them? We don't have to bring them back?” “Yes, you can keep them, you don't have to bring them back.”

Merav:

Yeah, for real, they get to keep them. And immediately, what I think is fascinating is not just like, “Yes! We have books! It's, oh my God, we have a library.”

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

Right? Like this is the beginning of our library and we're going to go home and play library. And then they start squabbling about who will

be the library lady. And, uh, one of the things I think is really an interesting detail here, there's two of them actually, one of them is the older girls are sort of admonishing Gertie not to start cutting out the dolls. Because I looked this up and it is actually cut out from the page, it's not punch-out. You would have to use scissors. Gertie's four.

Batya:

Mm.

Merav:

So presumably, Gertie is already using scissors with a degree of, I don't know about expertise, but, you know –

Batya:

Confidence.

Merav:

Enough that they are afraid that she will start cutting out the dolls without them.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

Because it's a toy, and toys are usually given to the younger kids. And then the second thing is when they're fighting about who will play the library lady, is they say, "Oh, we can borrow Mama's skirt that's just like Miss Allen's, the old black skirt that swishes around the floor." So our mystery from the previous chapter about what's Miss Allen wearing under the desk is solved. It's a swishy skirt that brushes the floor.

Batya:

We have the length of Miss Allen's skirt. Solved!

Merav:

Yes, solved. Mystery solved.

Batya:

There is a wonderful little detail, by the way, in when they're talking about playing library, that I noticed on this reread that I had not been aware of before. They're saying, "Comb your hair with a pompadour like hers, I'll wear Mama's old black skirt and it'll swirl all around the floor." And Charlotte says, "and I must come and ask you if you have a good book for me and you must smile and say, yes, of course." The use of you-must and I-must was habitual of that period's pretend games.

Merav:

Mm-hmm.

Batya:

That – this was not a thing we did when I was growing up. We said I do this and you do this, but the specific phrasing you-must and I-must. If you used that phrasing that already meant

you were talking about pretending. I've encountered this in cartoons by Jules Pfeiffer. He's got one where there's two boys playing at war movie and it's, "I must be the good guy." And it's also in, have I brought up Sam Levinson before?

Merav:

Not on the podcast.

Batya:

I don't think so. Jewish comedian who wrote a handful of books about growing up in tenements in the Lower East Side, just about this same era. And he has in one of his books, which is called *Everything But Money*, as in that's what we had, he writes about, these were the games that we played, and one of the games he says, is Yumus and Imus. Which is, you must be the doctor and I must be the lady ...

Merav:

Yeah.

Batya:

And so having encountered it in those places, when I encountered it again here, I'm like, oh I see, that is the childhood ritual phrasing of “we are playing pretend now.”

Merav:

Yeah, I think when I was a kid, it was “let's be.”

Batya:

Let's be, let's be pirates.

Merav:

Right? Let's be princesses. Let's be whatever we want to be. “Let's be” was basically the “I must and you must” of that era. Let's pretend we're in Oz, and I will be Ozma and you will be Dorothy.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

Right? That was the play of my childhood.

Batya:

So if we were doing it at that time in that place, we would have said, you must be Dorothy and I must be Ozma.

Merav:

Right, except that I don't think that there was Ozma yet, because it's only 1912.

Batya:

Well, no, there wasn't. They wouldn't have had those books.

Merav:

But it is interesting. These books come down to these girls, and presumably the rich person

who's clearing these out either had a daughter or has a daughter who has outgrown these things. And I hope that it has outgrown and not has died. But these things are coming to the children fairly untouched. This is an uncut book of paper dolls.

Batya:

(overlapping) Oh, yeah, I – that's a book of paper dolls that no one ever played with.

Merav:

Yeah, so either she has a plentiful amount of toys and she just never took to this book, or she might be dead.

Batya:

Or she was too old for them by the time she got them ...

Merav:

Right. Or, I mean, there's any number of things that could have happened that intervened with her playing with paper dolls.

Batya:

For sale, paper dolls, never cut. (laughter)

Merav:

I know, right? It's a little tragic. But I mean, it's, it's such a windfall for the girls.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

And when we get to the deep dive, we'll talk about the value of that book today, which is quite, quite astronomical. So we've kind of gone through a little bit of our usual what's on the page, what's not on the page.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

I do think that there are bits and pieces of historical context sort-of buried in the chapter. And I think that we have just kind of a picture of the era from what this economy is, right?

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

Like, why is there an economy of junk? You know, how does this affect the people in the neighborhood? How does this help people build up their lives? And, you know, the fact that they can, you know, buy woolen goods, that they can buy metal, Papa has wood, other things in the shop that they're going to need in order to do DIY, right?

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

Like, this might be the era of the handyman, but if you don't have money to hire a handyman, you're gonna do it yourself.

Batya:

So are we up to the deep dive?

Merav:

I think we are up to our deep dive.

Batya:

Awesome.

Deep Dive Theme plays, it's *The Desecration Rag* from 1914 played by Felix Arndt.

Merav:

So today's deep dive is paper dolls! We're gonna talk a little bit about *The Dolls That You*

Love, which is the book that the girls actually encounter in the chapter. And it's by a person called Loulie Richmond Stebbins Henderson. That's kind of a mouthful.

Batya:

That's a lot of name.

Merav:

It's a lot of name. She actually wrote under L. R. S. Henderson. And she wrote a bunch of books about aviation, probably because it was a hot topic in the time that she was writing. She wrote a book called *The Flight Brothers*, and another one called *The Magic Aeroplane*.

Batya:

Oh, that's amazing.

Merav:

And you can find copies of her books online looking up Henderson, L. R. S. Henderson, or

Loulie, L-O-U-L-I-E, Richmond, Stebbins, Henderson. And I'm going to put that in the show notes. But what was really interesting to me is that there were a huge number of *The Dolls That You Love* available on the internet. I did a little research to sort-of figure out – it's described as five dressable children plus a nurse. So you have six dolls, which nicely parallels –

Batya:

Nurse in this case being like nursemaid.

Merav:

Nursemaid, exactly.

Batya:

Lady who takes care of the kids.

Merav:

Like a governess. And so we have dresses for an adult woman, which I think a lot of the girls in

our chapter are going to be really interested in, because they're on the verge of womanhood. And they are certainly studying women's fashion, in and around the neighborhood. They're certainly looking at what Mama is wearing, at what Miss Allen is wearing, and certainly the neighbors. And then beyond that, there are five children, just like there are five children in our story. Some of them are boys. But they get a variety of costumes for the book. And the book has a huge number of things to look at and cut out. So I discovered looking at this that you can buy a cutup copy. Sometimes people will say, you know, "hat is missing." There was one that said "watercolor replacement hat included" –

Batya:
[soft gasp]

Merav:

where somebody had clearly created a paper doll to replace a piece of the paper dolls that was missing, and they had watercolored by hand, presumably, a hat to replace. And I certainly feel this because I was a major paper doll fan when I was a kid.

Batya:

That's so great.

Merav:

And I would be remiss if I didn't mention Tom Tierney paper dolls.

Batya:

Yes, we were not huge paper doll collectors, but my little sister and I had, what was the title of it? *Great Empresses and Queens*, paper dolls in full color by Tom Tierney. We had those particularly. We loved them. They were gorgeous. And of course because we were who we were as people, we colored on some of the

paper doll clothes to change them to our tastes. This dress is just white, what's the point of that? It's not even a wedding dress, we're going to make that more colorful. (laughter)

Merav:
Excellent.

Batya:
So we could not have resold those. (laughter) I have no idea what became of them. Very likely they just got junked in one of our moves when we were too old for them.

Merav:

I had quite a lot of paper dolls growing up, a lot of them were inherited. I think some of them may have belonged to aunts or cousins and some of them were already cut out and came with dolls. And I would sit and sort of match up like, okay, here's a bag of paper dolls that came in and like, you know like a little Ziploc bag of

paper dolls. And I would sit and try to figure out, okay, this body goes with this clothing and then sort-of know in my brain, like categorize, you know, whose clothes were whose.

And then I would usually name the paper dolls, so I could distinguish them so that I was playing with, for example, Orit, who was on our last episode, I could say, you know, hand me that doll, you know, specifically with the name, so that we had something to refer to them by. And it was kind of stuck in my brain, although I don't remember them now. And then there were just books of paper dolls that people bought for me. Memorably, the cantor from our synagogue was kind of a second grandfather to me. And we went on a picnic one day, and for some reason, we went into the mall, and there was a spinner rack of paper dolls. And I, of course, stood there absorbed while he was browsing the store. And eventually he sort of came over and looked at what I was doing and kind of picked

the paper dolls out of my hands and took them to the cash register and bought them for me.

Batya:

Aww.

Merav:

So those were some of my favorites. And I think that was the 1930s collection that had a bunch of dresses worn by actresses in plays.

Batya:

Oh, that's lovely.

Merav:

So I had sort of a visual for what were people wearing on stage in that era. And I thought that was amazing. And I learned the names of many musicals that I didn't then hear until I was an adult. I didn't go pursuing them, but – I was a big musicals fan as a kid, but I didn't know those musicals specifically because they were

older. But I definitely had quite a lot of paper dolls as a child. I mean, I think the most famous one I had was I had the Princess Diana wedding book, which had all of her outfits from the courtship, as well as the wedding and the bouquet, I spent I think three days cutting out with my mother's nail scissors, which I was not supposed to take.

Batya:
(laughter)

Merav:
I was not supposed to take the nail scissors. I would sneak them out of the bathroom and cut out the paper dolls. And then I would ADHD away the fact that I had taken the nail scissors and forget. My mother would say, have you seen my nail scissors? And I would surreptitiously put them back. So I probably dulled the heck out of those nail scissors, cutting out the incredibly elaborate bouquet.

Batya:

I'm pretty sure that Princess Diana was the last figure in the Great Empresses and Queens book, which – the way the paper dolls in that book were set out was, rather than having the doll naked or in underwear and then multiple dresses to put on them, each queen, empress, princess would be presented in one set of clothes and then there was a different set of clothes that you could put over the first set and fold down the little paper tabs. So there'd be two iconic looks for each queen. And I believe that Princess Diana, this has been a very long time, but best of my recollection, the doll was presented in fairly sleek, close to the body, modern clothes. And the piece you could put over it was the extraordinarily elaborate wedding gown.

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

Because of course, the base dress had to be something that could be completely covered. I seem to recall there was also, oh gosh, I do not remember which queen it was. It was one of the ones that was famously put to death, so it might have been Anne Boleyn or it might have been Marie Antoinette, whose base dress was in prison clothes. And then the dress you put over that was the extremely elaborate royal clothes.

Merav:

That's really interesting, like, from just a sociological perspective.

Batya:

What a choice. (laughter)

Merav:

Yeah, absolutely. And I mean, certainly those were not the only things those women were famous for, but I mean, Anne Boleyn was –

Batya:

But if you gotta pick two iconic looks –

Merav:

Yah, she was a reformer. I mean, I would have loved one with a Bible.

Batya:

(laughter)

Merav:

But yeah, I mean, that being said, yeah, absolutely. Like the stereotypes of who people are definitely play into their portrayal, and paper dolls are literally two-dimensional. So you really don't get –

Batya:

Literally two-dimensional! And there's only a limited number of looks you can give them.

Merav:

And there's only so many words you can print on the page and leave room for accessories.

Batya:

Also that.

Merav:

So one of the things I really liked about the Tom Tierney books is you really did get a sense of history –

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

Especially when they were real people. And these are real clothes, these are recreations of real clothes, they're drawings. And it's just kind

of fascinating to sort of in the wild, see, like a gown that was worn by somebody and go, “Wait, I had a paper doll of that.”

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

I sometimes go to the FIT Museum, the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, and they had a Halston exhibit and I'm like. I had that dress as a paper doll, right? Like there was this one particularly gorgeous green dress and it was like, “I know that one!”

Batya:

There's like one specific painting of Queen Elizabeth the First who is in The Dress that was the overdress for that doll –

Merav:

Exactly.

Batya:

Like, oh yeah, that one.

Merav:

Right, because you spend time when you're cutting it out, to look at the curves of the dress and to sort-of see it, your brain sort of takes a picture of it and keeps it to a degree. And then when you see it again, you pattern match and you recognize it.

Batya:

Now these paper dolls that the girls have, they're not representing specific real people, they're characters that you can project on and be.

Merav:

Exactly.

Batya:

Which is a very different thing.

Merav:

And I think that adds play value in a way,
because –

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

– there's only so much play value you can get out of being Marie Antoinette unless you have a book about her. But if you're a loving family, which is what these dolls are meant to be, is their loving siblings being watched over by their nurse, which presumably there is a happy pair of parents somewhere in the background, one hopes. But they're clearly, these are wealthy children. So the girls are sort of playing up, socially.

Batya:

That's true, yeah.

Merav:

Because as they play, they're depicting wealth and privilege, but like a comfortable level of wealth and privilege where you don't have to think about it. And so by allowing the children to have this, Papa is giving them aspiration, whether he knows it or not, that Mama would approve of. Right, because there's that sort of gently social climbing thing that we see Cilly doing with the front room, with the reality of the pristinely kept dresses and all of the other things we've pointed out in prior episodes.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

I think that that nicely wraps it up. I think that we covered most of everything we were going to talk about.

Batya:

Thanks so much for joining us this time. I'm
Batya Wittenberg.

Merav:

And I'm Merav Hoffman.

Batya:

And we're really glad you're here.

Merav:

Tune in next time when you'll hear Charlotte
say:

Batya:

"Mrs. Bloomberg, could we buy a quarter of a
cent's worth of candy?"