

Batya:

Welcome to the All-of-a-Kind Podcast. I'm Batya Wittenberg.

Merav:

I'm Merav Hoffman.

Batya:

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

Merav:

Today's chapter is the one where the girls buy Papa a birthday present.

Batya:

Okay, so this is a shortish chapter, but there's lots of fun stuff in it. Basic summary of what happens: Ella calls a secret meeting after bedtime to plot a birthday surprise for Papa. The girls gather and pool their pennies and try

to find the perfect birthday present. But will Papa like their gift? They have to wait until dinner to find out.

Merav:

This is a really short chapter and it's interesting because it precedes what I think of as a very long chapter, which is the Purim chapter. And we're gonna get to that next episode, but this is really kind of like a little bit of a prelude. It kind of gives us a glimpse of December. And then we get into, you know, the world of Purim, which is actually significantly after this. So we do get kind of a time gap after this chapter. This chapter dates for the week before January 5th, which is Papa's birthday.

Batya:

Yes, and I think, I'm not sure, but I think this is the first actual date we've had since Dusting is Fun, which was November.

Merav:

Yes. So now we've had about a month's worth of, you know, things going on in the family.

Batya:

Two months' worth.

Merav:

And now we're up to, yeah, up to a significant date, which is Papa's birthday. I noticed there's not a Mama's birthday chapter –

Batya:

You know, you're right?

Merav:

– probably because it would have been too repetitive. Yeah.

Batya:

But like not in this book and not in later books either, I don't think.

Merav:

Right, and that's just sort of interesting to me is like the, what is the gender balance of realizing that, oh, well, Papa has a birthday. Possibly it's because Papa is out of the house more and this is an immediate way of showing affection.

Whereas Mama is always there to receive affection, whether or not Mama is there to receive affection emotionally.

Batya:

I getcha, yeah. It could be that, it could also just be that, because again, these are dramatized memories. It could be just that adult Sydney had this particularly vivid memory of the time we bought that one thing for Papa's birthday. And otherwise the parental birthdays just don't have the same kind of memory weight of what

happened this year, what happened this other year. I know that we got presents and did special things for my parents' birthdays when we were kids, but I cannot recall a single one of them specifically. I just know it was a thing that happened.

Merav:

Yeah, I agree. I definitely, we bought presents. I think we used to get my dad an umbrella practically every year –

Batya:

(laughter)

Merav:

– but it's hard to buy for my dad. Telescopes are not in a child budget. But ultimately there is no year that specifically sticks out. So I think you're right that this is a callback to something that really happened. And it actually matches up

with what we know about the timeframe, because there was a cup and saucer craze. And in fact, both my maternal and my paternal grandmother collected what I would call unique cups and saucers, where each cup and saucer was itself of the same pattern, so the cup and saucer would both be bright pink roses, and then every other saucer and cup in the collection would be different from it.

Batya:

Yeah, so like if you were bringing out all of the cups and saucers for say a tea party – which I cannot see Mama hosting a tea party, that doesn't seem to be her vibe at all. But nonetheless, if one were to host a tea party and would bring out all the pretty collectible cups and saucers, everybody would have a matched set and nobody's would be like anybody else's. And that, I think that was on purpose. I think the point of that was like you could admire each

others' and compare them and the spread would be in itself a conversation piece.

Merav:

Exactly, and it's sort of, you know, like collectible trading cards, you know, Oh, I've got two of this one. Rose, do you want to trade for mine? That kind of thing.

Batya:

Oh, ha! I wonder if they did that.

Merav:

I don't know, but it is a really interesting idea because so few of these things are aimed at women. And I think that it's interesting that this fad existed in this period, probably because women had a little bit more spending money because they were working in factories.

Batya:

Very likely.

Merav:

And so creating a market for things that women would want to buy was something that the china manufacturers were like, hey, this is taking off. We're selling single set cup and saucers as opposed to an entire set for tea.

Batya:

Oh, that's right, because another advantage of that for a poorer family would be you don't have to buy them all at once, and it's not just okay, but a selling point that they don't all match.

Merav:

Right, you accumulate your collection over time.

Batya:

And so you only need, as we know from the Samuel Vimes "Boots" Theory of

Socio-Economics – look it up, folks – the wealthy can afford a big chunk of money at one time, whereas the poor can afford small chunks of money over a much longer period of time. Makes a difference. Fifty dollars over five months is not the same thing as fifty dollars at once.

Merav:

Exactly. And in fact, Papa's thoughts at the end of the chapter really, really echo that.

Batya:

(overlapping) Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

Merav:

We get Papa's interiority in this chapter. Hey, Batya, you know what time it is?

Batya:

Hey! That's right!

Merav:

It's time for What's on the Page.

Batya:

And What's Not on the Page.

Merav:

So for the first time in this chapter, we get an actual interior thought from Papa. And it's because in this scenario that's played out, the girls have saved their money and they've bought this cup for Papa, we get to actually see what Papa is thinking. And it's exactly what you were talking about.

Batya:

Which is not what he says.

Merav:

Which is not what he says, which I think we'll

get into a little bit later, but like he absolutely is thinking about that same theory of economy.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

And let's just kind of talk about how that came about before we get ahead of ourselves. So Ella calls a secret meeting. And I think this is really interesting that it's called out as being a secret meeting because the girls actually have a tremendous amount of freedom after bed, right? They're not usually moving about from bed to bed.

Batya:

Mm-hmm. That was talked about earlier, that once the door is closed, Mama does not generally check on them. She's okay if they stay up talking or whatever. She says they're

resting their bodies anyway. Which chapter was it in? That was a really early one.

Merav:

It's very early. So we basically have this concept baked into the world. And beyond that, we now have this idea. It's really cold. Like it's been emphasized a couple of times that getting out of bed is an experience in being very cold, like possibly freezing. And they're all piling into one bed, which does generate some heat, but there's actually friction between the sisters –

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

– because Henny decides that she's gonna lie down. Right? The paragraph says it like something like that, you know, all the five wiggling girls go up against the one wall with

their pillows.

Batya:

Yes. And Charlotte says, stop humping up your knees. You're letting all the cold air in.

Merav:

Right, because Henny is lying down and sticking her knees up so that her feet are under the cover.

Batya:

Ella's the one who calls that out.

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

That like – “Well, Ella's toes don't stick out.”

“That's because I'm sitting up and Henny is lying down. You stop trying to be so comfortable

and sit up like the rest of us.”

Merav:

Which is funny because I don't know about you, but if I was sitting in bed with my sisters and I was lying down and they were sitting up, I would feel like they were kind of like looming over me and I wouldn't be comfortable at all. Whereas Henny is like, you know, I'm gonna be indolent and lie in the bed and all y'all can sit up.

Batya:

This is such a recurring thing about Henny that I genuinely love, it's going to sound like I'm being either sarcastic or ironic, but no, I actually love this. Henny is selfish.

Merav:

Yes, and it's painted very clearly.

Batya:

Henny is also generous and giving and loving, but Henny is selfish in a way that a lot of the other girls don't let themselves be because they wouldn't feel good about themselves if they were. And Henny is like, nah, I'm gonna lie down and be lazy, cause I want to.

Merav:

Mm-hmm.

Batya:

And only when that gets called out, like, no, that is why you are having the problem of your feet being cold. If you sat up, your feet wouldn't be cold. (sigh) Fine. (laughter)

Merav:

Yeah. (laughter) I think it's actually interesting because quite a lot later we see Henny being very industrious.

Batya:

Oh yeah!

Merav:

Right? Because anytime Henny is challenged, she will 100% rise to the challenge and do the thing.

Batya:

Oh yeah.

Merav:

But it's *only* when Henny is challenged. And it's interesting, like the pattern that is being established with Henny in book one, which is sort of this like, oh, no, no candy for an entire week? Because when Ella makes her proposal that all the girls save their pennies, right, Henny is like, I can't buy myself anything for a week?

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

And that does really sort of focus the attention of the reader on Henny's selfishness, right?

Henny wants to lie down. Henny wants to spend her money on herself. Now, these are not things that are normally selfish. This is lying down time.

Batya:

Right.

Merav:

Henny is doing what she would normally do at this hour, which is lying down in her own bed.

She doesn't have to share a bed with people.

So if she wants to hump her knees up –

Batya:

– she doesn't affect anybody else.

Merav:

Right, she doesn't have to share. She doesn't have to think about it. Right? So Charlotte's like, wait a minute. This is not OK. And Henny is like, wait, well, why isn't this – oh, I guess it's not. Fine, I'll sit up. So I thought this was really an interesting point, given that we just had the Sabbath chapter. The girls are accumulating their pennies, right? They make this plan in bed. They're like, we're going to not tell Mama, which is already a whole thing. We're not going to tell our parents that we're doing this. It's a surprise.

Batya:

(overlapping) That's got to feel just deliciously wicked. We have a secret, we have a secret.

Merav:

Right, ooooooh, we're going to do a thing. We're rubbing our hands together.

Batya:

Which is also, just to jump back a little bit, this is also part of the fun of Charlotte and Gertie's game with the candy –

Merav:

(overlapping) Mm-hmm. Yes, exactly.

Batya:

– is where we're having this delightful secret thing that nobody knows about. Mama knows.

Merav:

Of course she knows.

Batya:

Mama is fully aware. But so long as they don't know Mama knows, that is a big part of the fun.

And I think keeping it secret –

Merav:

Well, it's also called out as wriggling and giggling.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

And I would assume that these beds creak.

Batya:

Oh, probably.

Merav:

And so Mama probably knows that wriggling and giggling is going on. And she's not coming in to check on them. She trusts her girls. Right?

They're getting up to something. She knows Papa's birthday is coming. She probably

doesn't immediately assume that that's what's going on. But this is within the remit of things that are permissible.

Batya:

Exactly, yeah. She trusts that if her girls are up to something, it's something that she wouldn't disapprove of. It's something that she doesn't have to worry about.

Merav:

Exactly. And so long as no shrieking is going on, everything stays in the bedroom.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

So now we have, again, sort of the economy of the family pennies. Sarah has the ongoing commitment to the library. So when Ella says,

everybody give your penny, Sarah has to actually bring up. What about the library? She actually has to bring it up with her sisters. And she kind of gets pooh-poohed. Right? Like one of the sisters is like, oh, can't we skip a week? You know, "Aren't we done paying for that old book yet?" says Henny, which is a line that has stayed with me because it's only been a few months. But because it's basically a tax on their income –

Batya:

It is, it is. (laughter)

Merav:

– Henny is, Henny is ready to be done.

Batya:

And also, I mean, when you are – how old is Henny? Ten? When you are ten, a few months is forever.

Merav:

It is forever. It's a lot longer emotionally. And so, you know, eight-year-old Sarah is incredibly responsible because she does feel like, you know, maybe they're still gonna revoke my library privileges. Maybe they're still gonna send me to prison, right? Like she's got that, you know, to call back to the first episode.

Batya:

(laughter) But she doesn't say, but we could lose library privilege. She says, but I promised.

Merav:

I promised.

Batya:

She takes her promises seriously.

Merav:

And I think that this is really ... one of the things I really see probably Sydney Taylor's editor doing here is keeping the library lady on the page and keeping Charlie on the page.

Batya:

Mmm.

Merav:

Like in this chapter, both Miss Allen and Charlie get invoked.

Batya:

They're both invoked, yeah.

Merav:

Even though they're not there. And we'll see Charlie again in the next chapter, but when they are invoked, it's calling to mind that these characters exist even though they're not in the chapter, right?

Batya:

We don't want to forget about them, yeah.

Merav:

Make sure that you keep Miss Allen in mind. And it's also continuity, right? Like this is where Sarah's life is right now. Her interiority is partially consumed by this debt that she owes to society and to the library and that hangs over her relationship with Ms. Allen, right? Like she doesn't wanna cheapen that relationship by being a debtor. So she's definitely thinking about it.

Batya:

So now she has two commitments going in two different directions, or rather one commitment that she's bringing up because of the prospect of making another commitment of we're all going to pool our pennies this week. And what

she does, I love this so much. She says, all right, I have a third commitment which is just to myself, which is she's saving up for a doll. She says, I've got a lot saved up, I'm just going to take five pennies out of that.

Merav:

Mm-hmm. Yes.

Batya:

Because that is a way that she could use money that doesn't let anyone else down.

Merav:

Exactly. And I think that that's not only the maturity of Sarah, but also the, the realization that holding her sisters to this commitment will make it less fun for Papa and less fun for the rest of them. So she is taking it on herself to take that burden, which her siblings have taken, you know, and redistribute it onto herself for

one week.

Batya:

Yeah, yeah, and she doesn't say, well, our Friday pennies are already spoken for, we'll just have to get Papa a present for five cents less. She doesn't say that. That doesn't occur to her.

Merav:

No, and it's really interesting because it's so Jewish.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

Right? Like the idea of lessening your own joy while something else joyous is going on. Like when we're at a wedding, the groom breaks a glass in remembrance of bad things that have happened to the Jews, specifically the

destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. And in this case, Sarah is saying, and this is a very small example, I will take away from my own joy in drops, sort of like when we're at the Seder, there's a part of the Seder –

Batya:

The pouring out of the wine, yeah.

Merav:

– where you pour out wine for the things that happen to the Egyptians because they're people and we care about them.

Batya:

Just in case anybody doesn't know about this, because the phrasing is ambiguous, this is pour out, not in the sense of pour into cups, but pour out of our cups, spill out wine that we then don't drink.

Merav:

Right. In my family, we use our fingers and we put like a clean pinky finger into the cup and take out ten drops. And then there are other traditions where you do different things with actually pouring.

Batya:

Yeah, some people actually pour out of the cup. Some use a spoon to dip out, but yes, we lessen our own joy, as you say.

Merav:

And this is why white tablecloths and seders are a bad idea.

Batya:

(laughter) Yes.

Merav:

But Sarah is doing that exact thing. She is

basically, I mean, maybe subconsciously, but doing this very standard Jewish thing of, all right, well, I won't get my doll as soon, but Papa will be happy.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

I'm taking away from my own joy, and I'm giving that portion of my joy to my father. And what could be better than that?

What's really interesting to me is the allocation of the pennies. So I came up with this while I was reading because we get a call out very shortly after the scene goes on, the girls vow that they're going to give all their pennies to Ella. We finally find out that pennies officially are distributed at lunchtime by Mama. And that's really interesting to me. I had always sort of assumed that they were given out in the

morning. I don't know where I formed that opinion. It probably is just that lunch is the end of the morning and I read these books when I was little and I just assigned them to a specific timeframe.

But they get their pennies, they turn them immediately over to Ella so that they're not tempted to carelessly spend them. Ella keeps them in a pill box, which is described as like overflowing with thirty-five cents. And I got to that number, thirty-five cents, and went, wait, that doesn't work. Why do they have thirty-five cents?

Batya:

Well, there's five girls ...

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

... and seven days for the week. That should be thirty-five, right?

Merav:

It's thirty-five cents, but being from a Jewish background, I immediately assumed that days of the week were either six days, not including the Sabbath, which we just talked about in the last chapter –

Batya:

Hmmm.

Merav:

Right? No handling money on the Sabbath. Or just the days of the week, you know, Monday to Friday, work days, right? Like if you're getting allowance and you're getting it for doing chores, which is not a direct correlation in the books, right? It's not, you know, if you don't do your chores, you don't get your penny. We talked

earlier in a different episode about the social contract, they're getting a penny a day. So we don't ever actually get clarity on whether a penny is given out on the Sabbath or whether they just get two pennies on Sunday to make up for the fact that they don't get a penny on the Sabbath or what.

Batya:

Well, it's not two pennies on Friday, which is what I would have guessed, one for today and one for tomorrow, because we know they get one penny on Fridays. That's the one they give to the library lady.

Merav:

Right, exactly. And I mean, I think also that would sort of be rewarding ahead, which is sort of against the social contract that they have.

Batya:

Whereas two on Sunday would make sense.

Merav:

It would make sense.

Batya:

But yeah, that honestly hadn't occurred to me that it should be twenty-five cents for just work days or twenty – or thirty cents, I can math – thirty cents counting Sunday, but it's thirty-five cents, which suggests that there is a penny for Sabbath.

Merav:

So that's just kind of interesting to me. As someone who grew up not handling money on the Sabbath –

Batya:

Same.

Merav:

– it just occurs to me that like, that's not a thing, right? Of course you weren't getting a penny for something you did on the Sabbath. But then I thought about the allowance system I had as a kid and I realized that in fact, even though I wasn't being paid for things done on the Sabbath, I still got accumulated tasks if I did them on the Sabbath, like put your laundry in the laundry basket was a five cent task. Did I do it on the Sabbath? Yes, I did. So when I did the tally at the end of the week, did I check the box for Saturday? I did. So technically I was getting paid for things done on the Sabbath, but my dad is also a rabbi. And technically he gets paid for things he does on the Sabbath too. But in reality, the money is allocated around that so that you're not technically being paid for Sabbath work.

Batya:

Yeah, exactly. I once had – my sister and I once had a quote-unquote job, very off the books thing, when we were teenagers, of running groups for the little kids during Sabbath prayers at our shul, at our synagogue. And I asked about that, like, how is it that we can get paid for something we do on Shabbat. Isn't that straight up not allowed? They said, well, there is basically a legal fiction that says what you are getting paid for is the preparation that you do ahead of time.

Merav:
Correct.

Batya:
And any sort of work you have to do afterwards, after Shabbos, to, like suppose you have a bag of books you bring, at some point you have to unpack that bag of books. Anything that you do preparatory or afterwards. That is, even if it's

not very much, that is the part you're getting paid for. The part that you're doing actually on the Sabbath –

Merav:

Is volunteer labor. Yeah.

Batya:

Is considered that it's volunteer. And it's hair-splitting, but you know, vast amounts of Jewish halacha are based on very, very fine detail like that. So...

Merav:

And Batya, tell our readers what halacha is.

Batya:

Halacha, sorry, thank you. Halacha is a Hebrew word that literally, it's based on the word *holech* that means to go or to walk. So you could say it literally means “the way.” Yes, that makes it a

precise analog to the Dao. I learned that in college and was delighted by it.

Merav:

Or “the Way” from the Mandalorian.

Batya:

I have seen people say “This is the Way” talking about halacha, that delights me. What it refers to is, practice of Jewish law, of Jewish religious law, in all of its manifold, very, very widespread ways. And interpretation of halacha varies wildly across time and space. So when we talk about things like at the end of the last chapter, it was the last chapter, wasn't it? The Sabbath, where it says, “No light could be struck on the Sabbath. That was the law.” You might also say that's the halacha.

Merav:

Exactly.

Batya:

So that's what that means.

Merav:

All I can say to that is, you got paid?

Batya:

(loud laughter)

Merav:

(laughter) I ran a junior congregation for years. You didn't get paid. I guess my supervisor probably got paid, but I did not. I was volunteer labor and I think I was given a nice book at the end of my junior congregation career.

Batya:

Oh, but that's nice.

Merav:

Yeah, but it was given to me by my supervisor out of his own budget.

Batya:

(overlapping) Ah. Yes, I think we got something like five dollars or ten dollars each a week.

Merav:

(overlapping) Oh, that's luxury.

Batya:

It was not even what would have gone for standard babysitting rates in that decade.

Merav:

No, definitely not. I was a babysitter in those days.

Batya:

But they didn't want us to stop doing it.

(laughter)

Merav:

That's really fair. I mean, it's a really critical service. And I mean, this doesn't get brought up in the books, but because the children are not regular synagogue goers, which we're going to see in the next chapter. Synagogue is kind of a holidays and special events thing for the children in these books. But Batya and I grew up in congregations where children were included. And as a result, the adults would be in a three or four hour long service and the children, the smaller children would get bored, right? And they would fidget or cry. And so there were frequently these services where people would bring their kids to some older kids and the older kids would either – and in the case of what we were doing, we would actually run a miniature service complete with a Torah reading and, you know, teach the kids the prayers so that when they were, you know, in Hebrew

school or in synagogue, they would understand what was going on. Show them where they were in the prayer book and figure out like, hey, this is the English, this is the Hebrew, this is what we're doing, and explain all that stuff. But also there were like what we would call story groups. And story group was literally where you would have a couple of teenagers or a couple of adults reading stories to children and just try to keep them in a, you know, an engaged frame of mind on Jewish themes.

Batya:

We would also do storytelling, we would play games with them. It was primarily keep them occupied when they need to leave the room where the actual services are going on and keep them from making too much noise right outside the room where the services were going on.

Merav:

Exactly. And critically, keep the blood sugar up.

Batya:

And critically, yes, snacks, snacks were crucial.

Merav:

Snacks are crucial. We did a whole formalized service where we actually did the entire service. And then we had a collation at the end, what we call a kiddush, which is just snacks and a little bit of grape juice to symbolize wine and little bread rolls to symbolize blessing the bread and all of that stuff so that the kids would also learn this blessing.

Batya:

That is really nice. The big difference, I think, between that period that this family is growing up in and the period that we grew up in – it's less "are kids included" and more "are the

women going to shul.”

Merav:

Exactly.

Batya:

It is when the women go to synagogue that the problem arises who is going to be watching the kids while the women pray, because before that it's the men pray, the women watch the kids.

Merav:

Yeah, and it's interesting because it does get called out in the next chapter that women are infrequent visitors to the synagogue.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

And so we probably have ritual visitation. Like if

somebody's parent were to die, then it's possible.

Batya:

Oh well of course, yes.

Merav:

Well, not necessarily of course.

Batya:

No?

Merav:

In many cases in this era, saying the prayer for the dead was allocated to the nearest male relative.

Batya:

Huh.

Merav:

So if Mama's mother was to die – I don't know the status of Mama's mother at this point – Papa might have been the one to say Kaddish as the son-in-law.

Batya:

Or Hyman, Mama's brother.

Merav:

Or Hyman would say it, right. So the obligation would not fall on all of the children, it would fall on the male children. And so that's another thing that we take for granted today, is that women will always say the prayer for the dead for their own parents, but in this period, there was definitely a gender bias. So things have changed significantly.

Batya:

Practices have changed, yeah. So we have wandered a bit from what's in this chapter –

Merav:

(overlapping) We have.

Batya:

(overlapping) – to what's in next chapter. Sorry about that.

Merav:

We have, but I think there's a lot to unpack in next chapter. And so it's definitely interesting to me that even though there's this whole kind of a quiet implication that the pennies are maybe being given out on the Sabbath, the shops aren't open.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

They live in a Jewish neighborhood. They're

about to go to the shop, and they can't go on Saturday because Saturday is not a shopping day.

Batya:

But Sunday, when the shops would be closed in a mostly Christian neighborhood, because everyone is going to Sabbath services on Sunday –

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

– in this neighborhood, the shops are open. Because I'm fairly sure – I could be wrong about this. I'm fairly sure that standard shops being open on Sunday is a relatively recent thing.

Merav:

So the girls are about to go shopping.

Batya:

And we meet a new character. Who I don't think returns.

Mera:

No.

Batya:

But I love him. Mr. Pinkus.

Merav:

Yes, Mr. Pinkus is very vivid on the page. We get that he's bald, he has a big beard, and he has what Gertie calls a stomach what sticks out.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

So this is clearly a depiction of a large, bald, bearded, fat man. And he's got an accent. So this is very vividly drawn on a very quick burst of language. It's a little fat-shamey, which I don't love.

Batya:

It's not really, it's not really shamey very much. They don't laugh at him.

Merav:

No.

Batya:

For having a stomach what sticks out.

Merav:

On the page.

Batya:

And I do wonder if Gertie is saying he has a stomach what sticks out because she doesn't want to say he's fat.

Merav:

Or possibly just because she's observing it, right?

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

Like that's how you describe someone. Like he's, you know, which shopkeeper is it? Oh, that one. So we again get the sort of stereotypical Jewish old country accent as he's sort of bustling around his shop trying to help the girls find the perfect present for Papa.

Batya:

The phonetically rendered accent.

Merav:

Yep, exactly. It's a little much in this day and age, but it gives us that color of the way that he says things. And some of the things he refers to, it's either antiquated language or it's old country language, or possibly just the language has shifted. Like, he suggests for Papa a pocketbook, which when you say pocketbook, I picture a purse. But I think what he actually means is like a little wallet.

Batya:

I think so too, which interestingly and ironically, wallet used to mean something much more like a purse.

Merav:

Yes, and I looked it up and 1910 wallets are starting to be kind of like modern wallets. You still have the coin purse, which of course

persists to this day, but you also have the beginning of kind of the folding wallet and some of them actually had a little strap, like a tiny suitcase. So it sort of looked like you were taking a tiny suitcase out of your pocket, and I thought that was kind of fun. So it's possible that it's one of those. We don't really get a description.

That gets rejected as being too expensive. We get a pocket knife, but Papa already has a knife. They hit on fancy garters for the shirt sleeves, right? The fancy garters that come in different colors, but they can't pick a color. I say, why not red to match the handkerchiefs? It's been established that handkerchiefs are red. Why not red garters? Maybe that's too flashy. I don't know. The tie, which is almost a winner, right? The tie costs \$0.25. They can afford it. But then there's the question of what do they do with the other \$0.10?

Henny's like, we're going to redistribute this

money back to the girls, and we're all going to go and get candy. She's already got a plan in her head.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

Right? And all the other girls kind of shame her back into, no, this is to be spent on Papa.

Batya:

No, that's too much for us and it's too little to buy something else with. It occurred to me at one point, why don't they want to buy Papa some candy? Does Papa not like candy?

Merav:

I don't know whether it's that they think candy is for kids, though we certainly see the parents eating sweets at various points, but candy

seems to be the domain of the children.

Batya:

I think you're right. There's a perception that candy is for children, which is unfair! Adults should get to have candy!

Merav:

(laughing) Agreed. And I mean, maybe if they had seen like an expensive little box of like chocolates or something, they would have been like, oh, that's the thing. But I think it's also at this point, chocolate is equated with romance. And you know, they're not going to buy a romantic gift for Father, they're going to buy a dignified gift for Father, you know, because I really see the practicality and what they're doing. Like, it's interesting, because they do ultimately land on something that's not super practical, but is fancy. They're trying to buy Papa something that he can use. It's this the

William Morris principle, right? Beautiful and functional.

Batya:

Yes. Yeah, they don't want it to be something that ... Something to eat will just be gone. They want him to buy something that he can keep, admire, use.

Merav:

Yes. And that will remind him that they love him.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

Which is, I think, the core of this piece of the story is that we see the girls, we see their affection for Papa. We see Papa in his workplace. But now we get to see Papa at home, not on the Sabbath. What can we give

him that he can enjoy every day? And so they don't buy the tie, for obvious reasons. And then the shirt is out of their price range. They can't afford a shirt. We don't even get a price for the shirt. So Mr. Pinkas goes to all of this trouble. The girls are having him schlep things up and down off the shelves. He's sweating. But he's not like, girls, you're making trouble for me, girls, you're taking too long to decide. He's just continuing to present them with items. Right, he's going to solve the problem.

Batya:

He's taking them seriously as customers, and I love that.

Merav:

Yes. Well, they're coming in with money and they're coming in with earnestness. And it doesn't look like anyone else is walking into the shop.

Batya:

No, it doesn't talk about other customers. And, as will come up in a little bit, he knows their father.

Merav:

Yes, so he definitely has—

Batya:

This is a small neighborhood. It acts in its way like a small town. He knows who they are. He knows who their parents are. He's not going to be rude to the Brenners' children.

Merav:

No. And also like they're there en masse. And the last thing he wants is to have crying girls in his shop.

Batya:

Oh good lord, yes, that would be awful.

Merav:

Right, like imagine that he wasn't kind to them and, you know, Gertie began crying. He probably doesn't know what to do with a crying kid. Or maybe he's got a ton of children and he's like, these are children. What if my children came into the shop? How would I want them to be treated? We don't have a picture of his family, but we get a sense that he's willing to treat with them as customers.

Batya:

Yeah, and just, I point that out because I have seen, both in real life and in a lot of other literature, adults just point blank refusing to take children seriously.

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

Like, if there's anyone else in the shop, the adult gets the attention, the child has to wait no matter what order they came in in. I just happened to, just happens that I just reread *The Neverending Story*. Which begins, of course, with little ten-year-old Bastian stumbling into a bookshop and the shopkeeper telling him, I've got no use for children, I can't abide them. I don't have any children's books and I wouldn't sell you the other kind, be off. Just utterly unwilling to engage with a child on any level except "you are a pest, go away."

Merav:

Right. I mean, it's really interesting that our generation has evolved "take my money!" as a rallying cry, right?

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

Like, oh, you know, you want to do something awesome, take my money! And like, maybe it's sort of a retaliation against the idea that my money isn't good, right? Like, because I'm a kid.

Batya:

Yeah, pretty much. "My money will spend like anybody else's" is a long running thing in American history.

Merav:

Exactly. And I think that that's something here. We've got a very small bit of children's rights. But the kids are confused at this point. They are really kind of floundering. And Ella says, we should have asked Charlie.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

So this is where we get –

Batya:

(overlapping) Which is two things!

Merav:

We get two things, right? Exactly, go ahead.

Batya:

As you said before, we get a reminder to the reader that Charlie exists and Charlie is Papa's best friend.

Merav:

Mm-hmm. And would know Papa's tastes and what Papa wants.

Batya:

And that's a guy we could have gotten – She doesn't say, we should have asked Mama. They can't ask Mama. They're keeping it a secret for Mama. But oh.

Merav:

But I mean, I feel like they'd be more willing to bring Mama in on the conspiracy if they thought that they were going to hit this stumbling block.

Batya:

That's true, if they had considered that this would be a puzzler, they might have said, we could ask Mama what Papa thinks, but that's not what Ella thinks, and that's the second thing.

Merav:

(overlapping) Right. No, and that's what's really interesting.

Batya:

(overlapping) We are reminded also not just that Charlie exists, but that Ella has a little baby crush on him.

Merav:

Ella has definitely impressed on Charlie. And we have this moment of like, oh, if we had just brought Charlie into the conspiracy. And I think that that's actually very attractive to Ella. Like this sort of plays into the whole romantic fantasy of Ella and Charlie as compatriots, where she can just be like, Charlie, Charlie, tell me what my father needs, right? Like bringing him into the conspiracy is almost romantic. And that is the kind of crush idea.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Batya:

Yeah, we don't get a lengthy fantasy sequence from Ella here, but you can imagine it.

Merav:

Oh yeah, it's right there. It's just slightly off the page.

Batya:

It's not on the page, but it's like hovering just behind the page.

Merav:

Exactly. And so Ella, the oldest, is suddenly despairing and Gertie, the youngest, immediately pipes up, what's that? Right?

Batya:

Look at the pretty cup and saucer! Yes.

Merav:

Right, exactly. And this is fascinating to me. Like we've had multiple instances of Gertie can't read. Right? In the first chapter about the library, Gertie can't read yet. She looks at the picture magazines. In the most recent chapter, she is being read to by Charlotte.

Batya:

Because she can't read yet, yes.

Merav:

Even though everyone else is reading silently. So clearly she's still not reading. And yet she still manages to pick out an item that has the word Father on it. So is this just a very like subtle, hey, Gertie is learning to read? Or is it just like magical serendipity that she happens to pick out a father-specific item in the shop? Because it's up on a high shelf, so who knows if she can even see the words.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

But the shopkeeper brings this thing down. And I love the description of this, because ...

Batya:

It's so lovely.

Merav:

It's so lovely, but it's so ungendered. It's pink and white, right? It's gold. We don't, at this time, associate those colors with men, but at the time, pink for men was actually kind of a thing coming out of Victorian and Edwardian eras. More on the British side.

Batya:

We hadn't yet ...

Merav:

We haven't gendered pink.

Batya:

Yeah, we had not yet got the very, very strong notion that pink is a girl color.

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

Because this is a mass marketed item. It's pink and white china, and gold lettering on it – it says, “marched proudly uphill,” I love that phrasing, “to spell out the name Father.”

Merav:

I'm trying to picture what that even looks like in terms of the letters marching proudly uphill like whether they're kind of going up the side or whether they're like in a hill shape I've never

been able to really picture it, but clearly this is a designated item to buy for your dad.

Batya:

I sort of picture it as on a left-to-right upwards diagonal, which is an odd choice, but sure, that's a good way to fit it on one side of the teacup where you can read the whole word at once.

Merav:

That makes perfect sense. And I have definitely seen stuff like that. And even in the modern era, I think I have a cup from my cousin's bat mitzvah where it's like logoed on one side and it's a stylized dancer and she's kind of got one leg up in the air. So she fits on the side of the cup. Yeah. And I mean, this is clearly a somewhat luxury item, and Mr. Pinkus takes it off the shelf and is like, wait, it's even more perfect – cause he does know their father. Your

dad has a mustache.

Batya:

Mm-hmm. And it's got the little mustache guard that he points out to them.

Merav:

And so it's just an interesting idea. Here is a man's cup, right? In its beautiful pink and gold beauty, a man's cup that holds the mustache. And it's practical. So the girls are like, beautiful and practical. Papa will love it.

Batya:

Exactly what they want. And like you said this is a luxury item, but like let's be clear. This is a bargain store luxury item.

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

This is, this is not something that they would get at, uh ... a boutique where rich people shop for other rich people.

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

You are not going to get this pretty pink and white and gold leaf or gold painted ... china World's Best Dad mug.

Merav:

No, and I mean that is effectively what it is. Like this is kind of the equivalent of like a Woolworths or a dollar store at a very small scale.

Batya:

Mm-hmm. But for their context, this is, as you

say, a luxury item. It has no purpose but to be pretty, to be pleasant, to drink tea out of, but you can drink tea out of anything.

Merav:

Yes. Right, and that is exactly what happens, is they bring home this lustrous, beautiful object, and they present it to Papa in the most ornate way that they can, which is that they wrap it, and they place it at his place at the table. Papa comes in, and the narration is omniscient, and it gives us the reality that Papa has had a bad day. Right? He has had a difficult day. He's exhausted. He just wants to eat supper.

Batya:

Long hard day, not a very profitable one. It says there's very little business done.

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

And he's just exhausted. And dispirited, he's in poor spirits.

Merav:

Right, and I mean also like the emotional exhaustion of being the moneymaker, right? And so now we have this expectations mismatch at the extreme, where the girls are like vibrating with excitement and Papa comes in, he's dragging himself up the stairs, he's washing, Mama's like, "Supper is ready." The girls rush to the kitchen because they want to see Papa's reaction to the reality of the gift, not what it is, but that it exists.

Batya:

That they got him a present.

Merav:

And Papa is surprised.

Batya:

Completely.

Merav:

He's just like, oh my god, the girls are getting me a present. How does this work? And it's really interesting because he absolutely does not expect it. Like, he loves that they remember his birthday. And that's exciting. It's always great when someone remembers your birthday. But he doesn't expect this additional level of devotion because they're small girls. Right? Ella is twelve. She is not going to have a bat mitzvah because we don't have bat mitzvahs in this period, where you know she's confirmed as being a woman in the eyes of Judaism, that doesn't happen for another forty years. Longer, I think. So we don't have that ticking over into womanhood. And so as a result the idea of his

daughter as the ringleader of a, you know, “let's get Papa a present” scheme, doesn't occur to him. And so here are the girls, they've presented Papa with a present, and Papa goes oh no, what – what is happening? Right? Like what, oh, okay.

Batya:

It says, “He couldn't quite believe it.” He's just turning over the wrapped package in his hands.

Merav:

And the girls are like, aren't you gonna open it? Like, it's a present. And it's really interesting because this is very child-perspective versus parent-perspective because the adult enjoyment of a gift is the anticipation.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

It may not be what's in the package, but the fact that you got me a present is in some ways more important than the fact of what it is.

Batya:

What it is barely matters at all. He is still processing. They got me a present.

Merav:

Right, my girls got me a present. Like they're old enough to do this. Like, oh my God, am I missing their childhoods? That doesn't go on the page, but it's kind of there.

Batya:

(overlapping) Oh. No, that's not on the page, but that's, this is a kind of a life-changing thing in a way. Or, life-changing is not the right word –

Merav:

But it is a change of life thing, right? Like, “my girls are getting older,” is the realization.

Batya:

That's what I was trying to say, yeah, this is an indication. This is a signpost.

Merav:

Of the passage of time.

Batya:

Life has changed when I wasn't looking.

Merav:

Exactly.

Batya:

My little baby girls are old enough to do this for themselves, for me.

Merav:

Yes, exactly. It's not like Mama bought the present and said it was from the girls. The girls bought the present. Mama is very clear on that.

Batya:

Oh yes, a present from your daughters, she says.

Merav:

Right. She might not even know what it is.

Batya:

We don't get much of a sense of how Mama feels about it.

Merav:

We don't. In fact, Mama is elided almost entirely from this chapter.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

It's a very Papa-focused chapter. And we do get that, like sort of the Mama-focus, Papa-focus shifting a lot as we go through chapter to chapter. We don't get Mama's interiority at all. We don't get, Mama helped us wrap the present. We don't get, Mama gave us paper to wrap the present.

Batya:

I think actually Mr. Pinkus is the one who wraps the present.

Merav:

Right, so we effectively have this mystery package. So Mama is almost disavowing it because she doesn't know what's inside.

Batya:

Right? Says, nope, your girls did this.

Merav:

Right, and good or bad –

Batya:

And it is that way that parents sometimes have of saying –

Merav:

Your daughter –

Batya:

– *your* children instead of *our* children.

Merav:

(laughter) Yes, *your* child came home with the mud pie.

Batya:

There's different reasons you would do that and it's often framed as like, oh, I had nothing to do

with this. I am in a way blaming you for what your kids did.

Merav:

Your genetics are responsible.

Batya:

But in this case, I think it's less, oh, this was something that I'm mad about and so I'm disavowing it. It was, this is something that I want to give all the credit to our girls. So I'm not even going to say *our* daughters. I'm going to say *your* daughters, who love *you*, bought you this present.

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

I feel like Mama's pleased.

Merav:

I think so too.

Batya:

But also like...

Merav:

But maybe a little surprised.

Batya:

Holding back. That this – she wants to make clear that she didn't do this.

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

She didn't organize this. This was all them.

Merav:

And I mean, we definitely get that continuing in

subsequent chapters where the girls start to do things. We're seeing them age up and become, you know, if not adults, at least more confident children. And so here is the present. The presentation of the present is quick, right? Like, here's the present, open it, open it. And Papa's like, wait, a present. Oh, my goodness. So he does open it. And then we get the interiority crashing down. Papa is surprised, but he's like, oh no, they spent money on this?

Batya:

Yes, that the first hint we get of how they feel, how he feels is the children going, what made Papa's face look so sorrowful? Like just that he's sad.

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

And then we get Papa is thinking, “so much money spent on a fancy cup and saucer that I could just as well do without. Don't we have enough cups and saucers? I have to work so hard to make money for the things that we need. And, what if the amount they spent wouldn't help much? It's little spendings like this that add up.” It's hurting him.

Merav:

It is, it's hurting him that –

Batya:

– that money that could have gone for something they need went for something, A, just for him, B, that he doesn't need at all. We have cups.

Merav:

But the interesting thing is that is their pin money, right?

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

And so it would have gotten spent on candy, or it would have gotten spent on a doll.

Batya:

If it had gotten spent on candy or dolls, exactly. It wouldn't have, this was not money that was part of the household budget.

Merav:

Well, it's interesting because it is part of the household budget. It's part of the budget that goes to giving the kids joy.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

And Papa realizes that the equation is, is altered, right? He's taken joy out of his children's lives and they have given the joy to him. And now he realizes that he has a way to give the joy back. And that is to lie.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

So Papa tells the gentlest of lies and he tells the girls how much he loves the cup. And in fact, a bigger lie, which is that he's always wanted something like this.

Batya:

Yes, yes, that's the great thing. Not just, oh, what a lovely surprise, but I've wanted something like this for so long. How did you think of it?

Merav:

Right, right, and it's a redemption of the bad feeling. Like he says he was in shock because they found the thing that he'd always wanted. And that is a fascinating lie. Or maybe it's rooted in truth. Maybe he really did want something, you know, fun. And silly.

Batya:

A li'l fancy.

Merav:

Right, because I mean, this is Morris Brenner. Morris Brenner is an artist. And while we don't see a lot of that on the page, if you read *From Sarah to Sidney*, you definitely get this picture of teenage Morris Brenner doing incredibly elaborate papercuts. And papercuts is an art style. It's not something you get on your hand after you handle too much paper in Papa's

shop. It is incredibly elaborate and just absolutely gorgeous. And he does this huge, like beautiful ritual papercut when he turns thirteen. And so this is a man with a soul of an artist. He might be cringing looking at this cup. He might think, oh, this is a mass produced, you know, tchotchke.

Batya:

He might think it's tacky.

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

Or as you say, he might really think it's pretty.

Merav:

Exactly. Like we don't know.

Batya:

But he can't let himself enjoy owning something beautiful that he can't justify economically. The only way he can let himself accept this is by thinking of it as, it would be cruel to deny the girls the pleasure of giving me a present.

Merav:

I mean, it's interesting because similar to what we see with Mr. Pinkus, Papa could tell the girls to take it back.

Batya:

Huh.

Merav:

It would be completely out of character, but like, we don't have a lot of Papa's character at this point. This is an establishing moment for the story of who Papa is, right? And Papa chooses to be kind.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

We absolutely could have had a situation where Papa's like, no girls, I can't, we can't afford this, take it back to the shop.

Batya:

And that could have been done in so many ways too. He could have been angry.

Merav:

Absolutely.

Batya:

He could have been, oh, I love you all so much. This is such a good thought. I'm so sorry to tell you we can't afford this. You have to take it back.

Merav:

But it's also funny because they can afford it.
And maybe that's the other realization. Right.

Batya:

They can! They did! They afforded it!

Merav:

Right.

Batya:

They took the money that was for pleasure and frivolity, which kids are allowed to have. They have enough money for the kids to do that.

Merav:

Which he and Mama have been carving out of their savings or whatever.

Batya:

Exactly, all this time.

Merav:

All this time. To make sure that they have that joy budget.

Batya:

But the moment that that comes back to Papa, he's like, no, I shouldn't have this. This isn't practical.

Merav:

I don't deserve it.

Batya:

I think 'I don't deserve it' might be a bit of it, yeah.

Merav:

Yeah, I mean, there's just such a crushing moment of like, why is this being lavished on me? And like, he's literally dragging himself up

the stairs. He's literally washing oil out from his hands. He is emotionally and physically exhausted to the point where a beautiful gesture is a shock.

Batya:

And it hurts.

Merav:

It does, it really hurts Papa. And he turns it around on a dime. And I mean, that really is, I think, Ella gets her theatricality, maybe a little bit from her father, right?

Batya:

Ha, oh I never thought of that, but you're right. Just the ability to turn this into, okay, now I have to give this to them. I have to make sure that they feel good about getting me a present because that's all they wanted. And then he just throws himself into, this is so wonderful, I was

just, I was speechless with delight. Mama, pour me a cup of coffee right now. I can't wait to use my beautiful present.

Merav:

Coffee, at 6 p.m. Right? He's gonna be up all night.

Batya:

(laughter) Coffee in the evening is not unusual though. Coffee in the evening was not unusual.

Merav:

(overlapping) Okay, fair. It might actually perk him up, too, which is probably something that he desperately needs right now. But moreover this little performance, this little improv that he does, is immediately rewarded. His audience goes wild. The girls are hugging and kissing him, he is swarmed by girls, and that is the episode end. That's where we leave the scene.

The girls are swarming Papa and kissing and hugging him to the point where he can't keep track of who is everywhere. Right, like, oh, look, all my girls. Right, and it's an amazing spot to be because –

Batya:

There's so much love in this room.

Merav:

Exactly, the joy circle is like a circuit. It's completed because they've given him something and he's given them something, which is his real gratitude, not for the thing that they got him, but for the thing that they did.

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

And he is able to accept it for that reason. I

really, really wonder if Papa continues to use the mug.

Batya:

Hmm, I would hope so.

[cut dialogue effect]

Merav:

But I do think it's really interesting how democratic the girls are because it is Gertie who kind of saves the day. And I mean, it's interesting because a lot of the motivation in these chapters kind of comes from, you know, Ella or Sarah and, you know, very occasionally Henny and sometimes even Charlotte, but Gertie tends to be the one who's like, I'm observing, I'm observing, hey, wait a minute.

Batya:

Gertie is mostly the follower, but this time she is

the one who points out the thing that – I do agree that the girls are awfully democratic. There's not very much bossing.

Merav:

No.

Batya:

There is, okay we're all gathering for a meeting and we're all going to agree on something before we go ahead with it.

Merav:

Yes.

Batya:

Rather than Ella saying, here's what we're going to do and you all have to listen to me because I'm the oldest.

Merav:

Right, which is totally, it wouldn't be in character for her, at least not as she's set up in these stories.

Batya:

For her, no. It's a thing that happens in other fictional and real families, that the older siblings feel very much that it is their job to be the boss.

Merav:

Oh, absolutely. And maybe if Charlotte had been the oldest, but like ...

Batya:

You know what? Possibly if Charlotte had been the oldest, she would very much feel it her job to be the boss.

Merav:

But I also get a really strong sense of consent, right?

Batya:

(overlapping) Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Merav:

Like, Gertie and Charlotte have this relationship where Charlotte makes the rules and Gertie follows them. But if Gertie were to earnestly say to Charlotte, I don't wanna do this, Charlotte would say, okay, then we won't do it.

Batya:

Probably.

Merav:

Like, if Gertie chose to opt out in the middle, I don't think Charlotte would be like, no, Gertie, you're doing it because I say so.

Batya:

I, yeah, I think you're right. I think if Gertie were

to say, no, this isn't fun, Charlotte wouldn't say, but you gotta, it's the rule, or you have to do it cause I say so, or if you don't, I won't play with you anymore.

Merav:

Right. I don't see that on the page.

Batya:

There's nothing to indicate that that's a facet of their relationship, yeah.

Merav:

Yeah. Obviously, these are idealized pictures of these people, because, obviously based on the real Brenner sisters, but in the book, definitely there's more of a consent between the two of them. It's almost like a little bargain, right? I'll make the rules and you'll follow the rules, but it has to be fun. We'll stop doing it when it stops being fun is a really good rule.

Batya:

It's a good rule at anything, I think.

Merav:

Exactly.

Batya:

And Henny ... Henny likes very much to go her own way. She doesn't like to take orders. She also doesn't like to give orders. That's not her deal mostly.

Merav:

Yeah.

Batya:

We do see a little bit more of Henny the organizer in the later books.

Merav:

Yes, definitely. But Henny organizes, but she's not bossy about it. She can be a little bit dictatorial, but it's more of a, if we do it my way, I have a plan.

Batya:

Yeah, it's like if we do it my way, this will work. And there's also... I can already tell everybody here wants to do this. I have an idea for how we can do it.

Merav:

Right, exactly.

Batya:

Henny is a leader, but seldom a dictator.

[cut dialogue effect]

Merav:

This is a really just beautiful little chapter. And

like the cup, it's kind of a luxury, right? We just have this little moment of joy in the family that is entirely manufactured, right? Like if they hadn't gotten Papa a gift, he would have had a gloomy birthday. If Papa hadn't accepted the gift, it would have been a sad day with the time that Papa didn't take the birthday present. Right?

Batya:

if they had decided, oh, we're just going to use our school supplies and make Papa a card or a sign that says, Happy Birthday Papa, it would have been very pleasant, I'm sure, it would have been nice, it would have maybe brightened his day a little bit, but it wouldn't have been –

Merav:

Maybe not memorable.

Batya:

Yeah. And this chapter is, in a way that very few of the preceding chapters have been, except a little bit the first one, this chapter is about money.

Merav:

Mm-hmm.

Batya:

And about not having it.

Merav:

Exactly. And it's a very nice way of saying it, too.

Batya:

Yes.

Merav:

It is a gentle way of reminding the audience that money is still a really big concern. They're still

paying off the library book all these months later. And that makes daily financing a little bit tight.

Batya:

And Papa works really hard for really very little money, and worries about it.

Merav:

Mm-hmm.

Batya:

And he's ... like, the kids are not consciously aware that the necessary things in their house are like, that there's a very thin margin between do we have enough to eat and do we not.

Merav:

Yeah, definitely.

Batya:

And that's just not part of their regular consciousness because their parents work hard to make sure it won't be.

Merav:

Exactly. And I mean, the girls are being raised in a middle class mindset in a poor household.

Batya:

In a big way, yeah. Yeah.

Merav:

And that's something I really relate to. Like growing up, we absolutely had hand-me-downs. We absolutely had, you know, canned food and food that was in the freezer and whatever. And part of that was the reality of growing up away from kosher food, but keeping kosher. But a large part of it was that, you know, we were a one-salary household until you're, you know, well into my childhood. And so that reality of

dressing well and presenting well while not having a lot of resources is a reality for me. And I definitely resonated with that growing up. So, you know, the idea of having your pennies to spend, for me, it was at the drug store. I would go and I actually still have like a little china cat that I bought when I was about seven and started getting an allowance. And just recently a friend of mine came with his two year old and they were at our house and she picked it up and she just played with it and had a really wonderful time. And I was like amazed, a, that she could handle china without dropping it, but also that she gravitated to it the same way I did when I was a little girl.

Batya:

That's so delightful. I love that.

I know that when we were growing up, we were ... we were not hurting for money, but we definitely had to be aware of it. And when I say

we, I mean my parents, because similarly, they did a lot to make sure that we did not feel like we were poor. We weren't poor. But we were... we had to be careful, I think is possibly the best way of looking at it.

Merav:

Exactly.

Batya:

We did not have large amounts of money for casual expenditures. And one of the things I remember not really getting until much, much, much later was there was a period of time when we didn't have meat in the cholent on Shabbos. For those of you who don't know, cholent is a very common Shabbat food. It is a slow-cooked dish with usually meat and/or bones. Most often potatoes, beans, barley. Immense, immense amounts of variation in that. You put it up on a very low heat Friday before Sabbath begins,

and you eat it for lunch the next day. This goes back to long before there were slow cookers or electric cookers at all. One of the most common ways they used to do this in ancient times was everybody would bring their own personal pot to the village bakehouse, where the fires never went out. And then everybody would have their pot marked with their own family name so that you wouldn't accidentally take home someone else's cholent.

Merav:

And our current name for cholent actually comes from French because *chaud* is hot and *lent* is slowly.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

Lentement. Right, slowly. And so you have

chaud-lent, slow-hot.

Batya:

Chaud-lent, yes. Yeah, that is one theory of the etymology and I think the strongest one.

Merav:

It's pretty strong. I mean it's clearly not the only name this dish has had.

Batya:

Yeah, yes, in I believe one of the Sephardic names for it is *hammin*, which comes from the Hebrew *cham*, which is hot. I don't know what the *-min* suffix means. It might just mean thing that is hot. Hot dish, basically. But it might have a specific meaning, I'm not sure.

Merav:

I feel like *-min* actually has a specific meaning and I'm gonna have to look that up and put it in

the show notes.

Batya:

Yeah. But in any case, we usually had meat in the cholent and then for a long time we didn't. I say a long time, I was like eight. I don't know how long it was. It could have been only a month or two and it's in my brain as a long time because a month or two is an incredibly long time when you're eight, as I said earlier.

Merav:

Absolutely.

Batya:

But it did not occur to me until years and years and years later, oh, was that because we couldn't afford beef? I bet it was. And I talked to my parents and they said, yeah, we were trying to cut down on spending during that time.

Merav:

Right, exactly. And I mean, there are little things that, you know, especially because Shabbat is so ritualized, as we really talked about in the last chapter, there are so many little rituals that we do that are every week we have the same whatever, so that you would notice if the meat is missing.

Batya:

Mm-hmm. Would notice a change, yeah.

Merav:

Exactly. So that's something that I think Mama and Papa are very much trying for the consistency so that the girls don't feel like things are missing. And ... I think Papa's, I would honestly call it guilt.

Batya:

Guilt is not a bad word for it, yeah.

Merav:

Over the idea that the girls are spending ... he feels bad about it, right? The girls are spending their joy money on me. You know, how do I rectify the situation? And it's also like, he doesn't say, oh, this has got to be a one time thing, girls, you may never get me a birthday present again. Like he doesn't do that.

Batya:

(overlapping) Right, right. He does not want them to feel poor, I think, is a big part of that. And he doesn't do what so many people would do, which is lash out because he feels bad.

Merav:

Right, exactly. Instead he pulls it in.

Batya:

He pulls it in and he transforms it.

Merav:

And that is really like ... Sidney's love for her father really shines on this page.

Batya:

(overlapping) So much.

Merav:

Like this is, I love my father so much. Now this could be fictional. We don't know that this really happened, but like the feeling we get from the chapter is the girls love Papa. Papa is to some degree their hero.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

Right? Like he is the one who does the work so they can play. And he is just constantly focused

on their happiness. And this is really kind of like a one-time thing where they're like, we really need to make Papa happy. And we have the social contract, obviously. We're being good girls, we do our chores, what have you. But that is in many ways a contract with Mama.

Batya:

True, because the home belongs to Mama.

Merav:

And so it's when they go and help Papa at the shop that they show love. So this is the first time we've gotten a callback to that since we saw the chapter with the books. Papa has rewarded them with books that he could otherwise have made money off of, right?

Batya:

Yeah.

Merav:

So it's not like he hasn't given them presents on the page, right? We've seen this like explicitly, like here, I'm taking this out of my own pocket and giving it to you on top of your money that you get. And now he feels bad that they got him one cup and saucer. So the unfairness of that is definitely sort of in my head of like, well, of course they're giving you a present. You deserve it.

Batya:

Right. And I feel like the key word in a way here for Papa's whole everything this chapter is *gentle*.

Merav:

Mm-hmm. Yes, definitely. Papa's sweetness.

Batya:

His smile is described in that second to last,

“Papa smiled his wide gentle smile.”

Merav:

Exactly. And that's, I think that's where we leave it, right? Like Papa has blessed the lives of his girls with his joy.

Batya:

And with his gentleness. And the sadness he is able to turn around, and say to his children, No, of course I'm not sad. You have made me so happy.

Merav:

Yeah, and I mean, it's ... My friend says, my friend has this phrase, good mood by force of will.

Batya:

Oh, that's a good phrase.

Merav:

And I think that that's such a useful concept in modern life because, okay, I have to get up, I have to go to work, everything is awful, my thermos exploded, I can't handle it – good mood by force of will. I'm going to find a way to be happy. And I'm gonna find a way to put that happiness into my environment so my bad day does not redouble on everyone around me. And I mean, it's actually like a lot of cognitive load to do that.

Batya:

Mm-hmm.

Merav:

But he's surrounded by joy and it's a lot easier to keep joy in yourself, even if it's false joy, when real joy surrounds you. So by borrowing the girls' joy, he is able to keep the situation from teetering into something melodramatic and

sad.

Batya:

Yes, it's let them enjoy this thing. And because he said let them enjoy this thing, and gave that to them, it comes back to him. And he gets to

...

Merav:

He gets to enjoy it too.

Batya:

Even though I think – like we are not back in his head at the end, we don't know if he was like. really buoyed up by that or if he was just faking it for the rest of dinner, and inside feeling just sad and having to hide it, but I think it's likely, I think it's likely that even if he didn't stop being sad he was also joyful. Cause you can do both at the same time, you can do both at the same time.

Merav:

Yeah, and I think that that's, again, very Jewish, right?

Batya:

(laughter) Very Jewish. Yeah.

Merav:

You know, sadness and joy together.

So, I think that nicely covers Papa's birthday.

Batya:

I think so. That's about it for this chapter, with a little piece of the home.

Merav:

I will definitely want to come back to this when we do chapter illustrations because the black and white illustration that I have in my book is of someone brushing her hair and I literally can't

tell which daughter it's supposed to be and it's attached to this and I don't understand why and I've never understood why and it bothers me.

Batya:

Oh gosh, you're right, the very first ... the chapter heading. I'm pretty sure that's supposed to be Ella brushing her hair, but I'm not sure why Ella brushing her hair is attached to this chapter.

Merav:

I think they just had an extra illustration left over.

Batya:

Could be.

Merav:

Honestly, like it should be the girls in the shop or something. Or just a picture of the present on

the table. Like that would be much more iconic for this chapter. But we'll talk about that when we talk about illustrations.

Batya:

Yes, so for now we're wrapping up. I'm Batya Wittenberg.

Merav:

And I'm Merav Hoffman, and we're really glad that you're here.

Batya:

So tune in next time when we'll hear Mama say, "Henny, I don't think all of that bouncing is good for the bed springs."