

A Piece of Her World

As a young woman, my mother, Estelle, picked up an old Guild guitar, and joined the folk music movement then sweeping the country. She looked and dressed the part, with long brown hair and peasant dresses. Over many decades, as her hair greyed, she replaced the peasant dresses with mumu dresses. The old Guild went with her most of the time. She never hesitated to pull it out, to strum and sing.

I own that old Guild guitar now. Most of the time it sits quietly in its battered case. The case is held together with rusty hinges, frayed tape along its seams. The guitar strings have loosened over the years since she's been gone, and the guitar needs tuning. Occasionally, when my brothers or uncle visit, they bring the guitar to life again and we have a hootenanny in Estelle's honor.

In her later years, Estelle learned to play the spoons too. She kept those spoons in her pocketbook, and never went anywhere without them: two mismatched, tarnished, kitchen spoons. They were easier to carry around than her guitar. She'd pull them out anytime there was music, often playing from the audience, and sometimes ending up in the spotlight, getting an appreciative nod from the actual performers to "Take it away, Estelle."

Mom wasn't religious, and she would have preferred to be cremated. But before she died, she acquiesced to my brother Moshe's request to be buried instead. As a Hassidic Jew, it was important to Moshe to have her grave to pray over.

Mom's favorite folk song was "Passing Through". The refrain goes:

Passing through, passing through,
Sometimes happy, sometimes blue,
Glad that I ran into you,
Tell the people that you saw me,
Passing through.

We sang that song at her funeral, as well as the mourners' Kaddish, the traditional Hebrew prayer for the dead.

In Jewish tradition, people are buried the same way they arrive in the world: naked except for a simple shroud, without jewelry or other worldly accessories. However, when Mom died, the Jewish funeral home that prepared Mom's body, granted to my one request. I wanted Mom to take a piece of her world with her into the next, what ever that world might be.

So Mom was buried in Jewish tradition, wearing a simple shroud, but in her hands, were her two mismatched, tarnished, kitchen spoons.

Oh, just don't tell Moshe.