son after person who will offer a meal; watch a child; reach out in friendship, counsel, and support; extend a handkerchief; write a check. I share the enthusiasm of the young adults, adventurous and committed, who prepare to make *aliyah*, becoming citizens of Israel under the Law of Return. At the *sukkah* party, born-Jews and converts all lift their glasses and say, "*l'chaim,*"—to life! The ideals of Sinai continue in that humble room called my *shul*, in the warmth of congregants' homes, in the offices and classrooms of my rabbis, in my daughters' vibrant Israeli apartment, and in the very way Jews see the world. For the convert whose soul was at Sinai, home can be a precious place indeed.

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Until the Last Anti-Semite Dies: Dilemmas of an Agnostic, Ethnic Jew

Paul H. Elovitz—Clio's Psyche

At ages 12 and 13, when most Jewish boys are preparing to and becoming a Bar Mitzvah as a step toward manhood, my resolution to the issue of my Jewish identity was to determine that I would be a Jew until the last anti-Semite died. Below I will describe this identity struggle, my subse-

quent Jewish identity, and provide some analysis of it.

Jewishness Defined by Anti-Semites

The bullies at school demanded, "What are you?" Nervously, I responded, "An American." This answer never satisfied them, so they demanded, "Where're your parents from?" My response, "Poland and the Ukraine," were equally unsatisfying. The next question was, "Do you go to church? What's your religion?" With a sigh, I would respond, "I am, uh, a Jew, uh, Jewish." Although this was far from an every day occurrence, and the physical abuse involved was usually only some pushing and shoving, the psychic pain inflicted on me, a bookish Jewish kid in a tough neighborhood of an industrial city, was considerable.

"Am I even Jewish?" I thought. "Don't Jews go to synagogue and believe in God?" My father was a vocal atheist and my mother, from a family of outspoken Communist atheists in far-off Minnesota, told me she didn't know if there was a god. Both my parents were quite aware of the ethnicity and religion of people they and their children associated with. If I mentioned a girl my father would ask, "Is she Jewish? A *shiksa*?" People who came into their little store were spoken to in Yiddish, Russian, Polish, and English and subsequently were categorized in terms of ethnicity or religion. In school, the teachers said everyone was equal regardless of ethnic background or religion, except Miss McCourt, who favored those sharing her Irish heritage and never missed a chance to denigrate Italy and Italian kids in a school comprised primarily of the children of recent Italian immigrants. She treated me very well because I loved the history she was teaching and she was a customer of my father. However, I disliked her for her anti-Italian prejudices since I embraced the ideal of equality.

On the Jewish High Holidays my non-believing parents dropped me off at *shul* (synagogue), "out of respect" for

my grandma (Bubbi), but this confused me. The only adult male Elovitzs who went to *shul* were my grandfather (Pa), who nobody in the family liked, and my Uncle Louie, who read the sports section of the local paper rather than the Torah reading. Pa prayed in Hebrew, a language I knew not at all, and most conversations were in Yiddish, which my parents discouraged me from knowing. I could not even sit with my sister since girls and women were separated from males—in fact, few attended.

In the Elovitz family the Bar/Bat Mitzvah equivalent was when my brother, sister, and then I refused to go to *shul*. Wonderful "old country" holiday food at Bubbi's house was devoured with or without attending services. While we waited for the delicious food on Passover, Pa read endlessly in English from the Bible about God slaughtering the enemies of Israel. Pa slurred his words as he droned on, having drunk too much of his homemade Passover wine. God's bloody retribution against those who rejected him and his chosen people by killing disgusted me, since my mother taught me people should not kill. I was riveted by my father's contempt for his father and the religion a Chassidic rabbi had tried to beat into him as a boy in Poland. He always insisted that he only attended these holiday rituals for his beloved mother.

Even at school I could not get away from religion. Weekly denominational religious training, usually at a religious institution near Webster School, was part of the life of almost all the kids, but not mine. My parents refused to sign the standard permission slip allowing children to attend, declaring this practice a violation of the Constitution's separation of church and state. Consequently, while the other kids happily got out of school one afternoon a week, I joined a small group being read at from the Old Testament by a hated and feared teacher. Anything that brought attention to religion at school made me nervous and, like most kids, I hated to

be separated from those in my class. It only made matters worse when my atheist parents had the family stay home on the major Jewish holidays since it did not "look good" to Christians if they did not appear religious.

If only I could be a fearless, fighting Jew like the Israelis or my father during war and revolution in Poland! When two anti-Semites mocked the trembling concentration camp-surviving proprietors of the candy store across the street, declaring that Hitler had not killed enough Jews, my father physically defended the terrified couple. Subsequently, Dad boasted that the judge punished the bullies and refused to charge him with disorderly conduct because of the righteousness of his cause. This frightened couple afterward looked at my average-sized father as if he were ten feet tall, which was how I viewed him throughout my childhood.

Dad said, "Fight the bullies! You just have to bloody them and they will find someone else to pick on." He told me to raise my arms and make fists, as he punched the air with the authority of the legendary Joe Lewis. But I had a terrible sinking feeling inside me, and he walked away complaining that Mom had babied me because she didn't want me fighting.

Aside from worrying about the restrictions on the number of Jews the Ivy League colleges I was applying to would accept, I do not remember knowingly facing any anti-Semitism in high school. In the U.S. Army I did run into a quite physically abusive soldier from Alabama, but as an adult I have not otherwise faced overt anti-Semitism.

Reflections on My Struggle with a Jewish Identity

From the perspective of having been analyzed, analyzed others, written about my early experiences, and taught courses on childhood, I see things differently than I did when I let those who hated and feared Jews define my Jewishness. As an adult, I am a proud Jew who identifies strongly with

my people as having achieved much despite being only about 15 million people in a world of almost seven billion.

Reflecting back on my temporary decision to be Jewish only "until the last anti-Semite died," I smile. My early adolescent crisis focused on my confusion as to what constituted a Jew and my reluctance to physically fight. Although I idealized my father throughout my childhood, wanting to be a courageous human being and Jew, I much more strongly identified with my mother and her values. She raised me as a secular Yeshiva *bochur* (a Jewish scholar of the torah with minimal practical knowledge of the world); consequently, I felt impotent at times in the face of Gentile aggression. As a prematurely born youngest child, who had also been extremely close to death at age five, she sheltered me and rightfully feared the dangerous neighborhood where we lived. When as a small, sleepless boy I was terrified by the noise of the rats running on the metal ceilings over my bed (as well as our flat being burglarized and my sister sexually abused, which I would not "know" about), she would soothe me with images of "a world with a fence around it," which she said she would make for me. In retrospect, I realize she was translating her Communist family's dream of a perfect society into an understandable image for her frightened child, awakened from nightmares confused as to what was reality and what was nightmare.

Mom was an autodidact who only had a few years of night school in America and worked to imprint on her youngest child her dream of pursuing education and ultimately becoming a professor. Although I loved the education part of school, I dreamt of an adventurous life like that of my father. Seeking to please him, I decided I would become a physician until I became openly rebellious in my sophomore year of college.

Rebelling was a way of asserting myself and of indi-

viduating from my family, although it came at a high price of guilt since amidst it my mother ultimately lost her four-year battle with cancer. Serving overseas in the army as a draftee was an important developmental experience for me, since I needed to break loose from the cocoon, the emotional hot-box, of my family. Counterdependency was a vital issue for me and, I would later realize, my father. As an adult I take great delight in both my scholarship and being a practical man who could single handedly build an apartment—my tool collection still gives me great joy. I have stood up to fight bullies, most readily while defending other peoples' rights. My book chapter, "Family Secrets and Lies My Parents Told Me: The Impact of Immigrants on Their Son," covers many aspects of my relationship with my parents.

My rebelliousness had little to do with my Jewishness because by the time I went on to college, although I feared anti-Semitism and had some ambivalence about identifying myself as a Jew, I became quite proud of being Jewish. Being a Jew meant holding up high ideals involving consideration for others, education, enterprise, thoughtfulness, toleration, and survivorship. It did not require believing in God, going to synagogue, being a Bar Mitzvah, or speaking Hebrew or Yiddish. It required brains far more than brawn.

As a result of my Jewish identification, I married a Jew, although my second wife is a nonobservant Roman Catholic, and our grandchildren on reaching age 13 have become Bar or Bat Mitzvahs.

***Paul H. Elovitz, PhD**, is editor of this publication.*

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