

**As long as we speak about them and see them,
they are with us
by Solly Kaplinski**



**Monchik: Our zayde, the
grandfather we never knew**

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Growing up in a home with Holocaust survivors, Benny and I soon learn at an early age what subjects are taboo at home, what we don't talk about, what we hush up, what we avoid.

We never talk about the parents of our parents - the grandparents we never had and who could never spoil us. It's a subject too painful to even hint at because the loss for our parents - and their obsessive need to over-protect us, is so great and unbearable and brings on tears and sobs when they think we aren't looking, or we can't hear. And we take our lead, our cues from them about what's permissible in conversation, about what emotional boundaries we dare not cross.

So, in order to protect our parents, and to be the parents of our parents, we as young children with an over developed radar system, learn to live a lie, take a vow of silence, an omerta, and exist conspiratorially. And because we can't ask, the puzzles on our family tree are incomplete with lots of blanks and it pains us that our family history is so threadbare.

Until yesterday.

Through a shidduch via an extremely talented archival researcher, I receive an email from a newly found family member Viktor Gornstein in New York, with an attached photograph of my mother's father, zayde, our grandfather - the first time I have ever seen him since we don't have a single picture of him - and I'm in meltdown. I lose it. I am overcome with emotion and as I process this, I have so many misgivings about why I never asked my parents the questions I needed to ask, about not knowing even that my zayde, Salomon, after whom I am named, was affectionately called Monchik, that he had 9 siblings, some

of whom survived the Shoah - and that worst of all, Sima z''l, our late mother, a single child, believed that she was the only survivor in her family. And that our newly discovered family members thought she had perished in the Shoah....

And now, I can't even begin to imagine the pain and grief she must have felt at the loss of her first born, a little girl, in childbirth - with no daddy - nor mommy to hold and comfort her.

And there is more - but I can't bring myself to talk about it.

And we, the brothers of our unnamed sister of blessed memory, the keepers of the silence, couldn't even utter a word...

All we have left now is this solitary, so very precious photo of our zayde Monchik, whose blood lies mingled with the earth of the Ponar forests killing pits, and cries out, "Solinka, mein grandchildren, this is your zayde Monchik אאייניקלעך and Benelah, my two beloved who loves you dearly. I so yearn to hug and embrace you - just once. Please don't forget me, bobba Feige and especially our precious daughter and your dedicated and utterly devoted mother, Sima, who had not a thing of value in her home nor on her person, but who called you her 'precious diamonds'."

Zeyde Monchik stares back at me in the photo. At the very least I have that.

Shabbat shalom from Jerusalem

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