



### Max Brooks

I was born in Philadelphia on February 6, 1924. We lived at 4942 Chestnut Street in West Philadelphia, and later we moved to 46<sup>th</sup> Street

My grandmother, Ida, my father's mother, lived with us. My twin brother Dave and I lived on the third floor, front bedroom, and she lived on the third floor, back room. What I remember most about her was that every Friday night we would have to go up and say the prayers. We had our heads covered with a handkerchief that she gave us. It was dusk, and Dave and I would go up to her room and say the blessings. I had no idea what I was saying, but my father wanted us to be with her, I guess, to keep my grandmother happy. She was rather religious, and we always had bacon, but my father had a stove put in the basement to avoid the fumes going up to her room so that she would not know that we were cooking bacon.

Although my grandmother wasn't that old according to how long we live today, I think she was in her seventies when she died, but she was extremely old in appearance, and I always thought of her as being very old. She dressed in a very old style—with long dresses---usually very dark colors.

I remember that I would find empty rolls of toilet paper in the bathroom. They were stuffed with paper inside. And not knowing why it was there, I would take the papers out and throw them away, and then I realized that it was because it was Friday night and she didn't want to tear paper.

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My mother was very quiet. She did everything that my father wanted. My father stopped working when I was fairly young because of health reasons—and my mother went to work in the pawnshop. He wanted her to keep an eye on the business. She would go along with anything he wanted, and she never expressed anything for herself. In fact, my father would take vacations in Florida, and my mother would stay home and go to work. He would go fishing in Florida—he took Dave and I once, I think we were twelve, but my mother stayed home and worked in the store.



When my twin brother and I would get into a fight, Dad didn't think that was the right thing. He thought we were actually like one—so close that we should not fight. If I did something wrong, my father would talk to me, rather than take physical force against me. I remember I would stand there listening to him. He would tell me that he came from Europe and he wanted a better life and all, and he didn't want anything like this to happen. He'd go on and on. And I remember thinking; *I wish he would slap me and get it over with so I can leave.* I don't ever recall him hitting me.



My life has been so beautiful that I wouldn't want to change anything. Bernice was the first serious girl that I fell in love with, and I was fortunate enough to have her marry me. I guess it made my father happy that I was marrying a Jewish girl because my two older brothers did not, and my twin brother Dave was still single. Dad liked her very much. The problem was that during the ceremony, my father made a toast, and he toasted me as his favorite son. I felt like dropping to the floor. Oh, I was so embarrassed. And then, later, things happened that gave me the feeling that I was right for being so embarrassed. Years later—in fact, just a few years ago, I was talking to my twin brother, and I'm not sure who brought it up, but Dave said he always felt that Dad liked me better than he did Dave.

I said, “To tell you the truth Dave, I had the same feeling, too, and I feel so uncomfortable.”

Dave said, in a way, he was happy to hear me say that because it changed everything for him. It made him feel so much better.



I can remember always wondering what it would be like when my grandmother passed away in the house. But when it did happen, it was just another thing—just the normal course of life. It didn't have a scary effect on me. I was fifteen or sixteen. I wasn't afraid. (continued...)

When my father passed away, I always wanted it to be a nice day. But when he did pass away, the weather was awful-- it was rainy, and it didn't make a bit of difference. All the things that you drum up in your mind that you think will be scary or awful-- most of them never happen.



The one prayer that I miss knowing is Kaddish. To me, that's the most important prayer. In temple, I find myself trying to keep up with it, and I lose my place. My brother Jules said he would like me to say Kaddish for him when he passed away. Well, I was never able to do it. I would have, even though we had our disagreements, but I just didn't know how to say it. I couldn't.

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Growing up in West Philadelphia, I had a lot of friends who weren't Jewish. Remarks would be made (about Jews), and I would say, "I'm Jewish," and they would say, "But

you're different." The phrase came up often: *But you're different*. That agitated me, but I never made a big deal about it.

I was always proud of being Jewish. It seemed logical-- not being afraid of God. In the other religions, it sounded like if you didn't do something, you were punished-- you wouldn't go to Heaven. Judaism always seemed more accepting. As a kid, Judaism seemed freer.



**Max Brooks** joined Larchmont Temple four years ago, when he and Bernice moved from Philadelphia to New York. He is happy to say that—after many years of trekking from Philly to Larchmont to celebrate holidays and family simchas at the temple with his children and grandchildren—Larchmont Temple is finally his home, too. He has become a Chevra Torah regular and loves “learning more and more about his religion.” Max said, “The more I learn, the more Judaism makes sense to me.”