

## Pocket Watch

(In memory of Peter Sarasohn)

Saturday, October 2, 1999

This morning, a little before 8 am, Peter died. I was at home. During the night I had disturbing dreams. I was in an undefined place. A series of shops and, or, in my parent's apartment in Chicago. I was trying to buy a large pocket watch, but every place I went, I could not get one. I could purchase a housing in one place, a crystal in another, or some part of the mechanism in yet another place. (My mother, long dead, seemed to have a watch, and was settling into her apartment). I awoke. When I finally fell asleep again, I again found myself dreaming of trying to buy this pocket watch. Just then the phone rang. Half asleep, I refused to open my eyes. I sensed that Sara was not in bed, so I did nothing, expecting her to pick up the phone downstairs.

The phone kept ringing. I picked it up. I heard Sara's voice, as if from a great distance, telling me that Peter had died a few minutes earlier. She was unable to sleep, so early in the morning she drove to the hospital. She was there only a few minutes, saw Peter, and she went to get some tea for Patty. When she returned, she saw Anne or Patty calling the nurse. Peter had stopped breathing. A week after being admitted to the hospital, he ended his life's journey with Patty and Anne at his side.

I was a cold entity, no emotions, an automaton getting dressed. When I arrived at the hospital, the family was there, waiting for Peter's body to be taken to the funeral home. I walked into the room. Peter was on his side, appearing to be asleep with both eyes open. I walked out.

Anne and Amy were holding Adam, who sat between them, shivering under a thin white blanket. I sat by the window. It was only after seeing the kids that I found the ability to cry. The day was clear and sunny. They took Peter away, and the next time I saw the room the bed was stripped. Vivian told us that around three in the morning, in her sleep at the house, she heard him cry out for her, and she woke up. He may have done so, and, as his mother, she may have heard him. Life in the ward continued in its quiet way. Another tearful family, sitting in a waiting room near the elevators, looked up at us as we were leaving. We shared a silent understanding.

My dream's meaning became obvious. I was trying to buy some time, but no matter how hard I tried, and no matter where I searched, I could not succeed.

Friday, October 8, 1999

Sara is in Chicago again. Her father is doing poorly, his health on a downward slide. Evie is there also, having flown in from Toronto. I stayed up most of the night. Pure mental exhaustion brought sleep. I dreamt that I was entering a gigantic El Al plane for a flight to Israel. It had incredibly wide isles, with six or seven seats between each isle. Since I always sit at a window seat, I was trying to find one that was free. None were. As I walked toward the front of the plane, it was apparent that I was too late. All seats, as they came into view, were occupied. Finally, when I reached the front of the passenger cabin, where the side of the plane curves inward towards the center and the windows are facing forward, I saw it. A entire empty row of seats to my right. In front of me, was the most perfect window seat. On the seat beside it, someone had left a leather briefcase, the kind lawyers use to carry their papers. It was as if someone had reserved the seat and left for a while. The seats, however, looked like adjustable hospital beds without linen, the waterproof turquoise mattresses exposed. Somehow, I felt comfortable enough with the fact that the window seat was mine without reservation, so I didn't sit down.

I found myself outside the plane, which now was parked at Lod Airport, facing East towards Jerusalem. The runway was in the middle of a long valley. The valley was dust dry, but had palms and cypress trees growing among the scattered houses. Along the tops of the ridges on both sides were new apartment buildings. I felt some dread, but a disembodied voice told me that it is now OK for Arabs to build on high ground. I felt intensely that I was in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. I feared no evil, for the voice assured me that things were all right. I began walking toward the plane and saw a big red clapboard house to my left. It looked spacious. It would make a great studio I thought, but when I got close, I realized it was just a tiny dilapidated shack, totally useless to me.

I was on the plane again, but now I stood in what looked like the upper level of a giant 747. The whole area was covered by a curved hangar-like roof, not unlike the inside of a coffin, with five round skylights. On each of the airplane's wings was a hospital wing. As I looked into each compartment, to the right and to the left, there were tens upon tens of hospital beds lining the top of each wing, IV drip bottles hanging beside to each bed. Just then, a doctor and an assistant wheeled in a large chestnut-brown Barc-a-lounger. I stood, or more accurately, hovered just above and to the right of the prone figure in the chair. It was Peter. He lay on his side, dead. His mouth was open, as were his eyes, but he made no move. The doctor, still wearing surgical greens, and being a relatively young man, lifted Peter by his armpits and raised Peter's body on the recliner.

Peter came to life, adjusted his body to a very comfortable position and, folding his arms across his stomach, leaned back. He closed his eyes as a wide grin of contentment overtook his face. I had seen him do that so many times, in life, when he was about to relax after a busy day at the firm.

I thought to ask the doctor, in English, about Peter's condition, but before words came out of my mouth I felt the urge to speak in Hebrew. In Hebrew I asked the doctor, "What is wrong with this man?" "He is suffering a little from motion sickness." the doctor answered. Just then I realized that Peter's recliner was on an elevator platform which was to carry him down to the main cabin. The doctor was starting to lower him through the floor. I looked around for a doorway or staircase, something, to see if I could also return to the cabin below. There was no other exit except for the elevator. I asked the doctor if I could take the elevator down with Peter, and he gave me a sharp quizzical look, as if to say, "No. Are you kidding?" The phone rang and woke me up.

At that moment, I remembered a fully conscious, eyes-wide-open vision I had at the Shiva yesterday.

The room was crowded with mourners and people paying respect to the Sarasohn family. As I stood in a corner of the room I saw the Angel of Death dancing frantically among us, as if right past and through the people present. Then, inexplicably, I saw the Angel of Muse, the Angel of Love and the Angel of Peace, dancing. There was also an Angel of New Souls, dancing with the others. (How the hell did I know that this animated being was an Angel of New Souls? Has any theology conceived such a thing?)

The swirling, dancing figures entwined with the people filling the house. There were so many angels dancing that, with their presence, they clearly overwhelmed the Angel of Death.



Peter Sarasohn in front of Station 8 Chelmno and Station 2 Babi Yar. Arie Galles' studio, Summer 1997.