

A U S T R I A G A L I C I A N S H U L

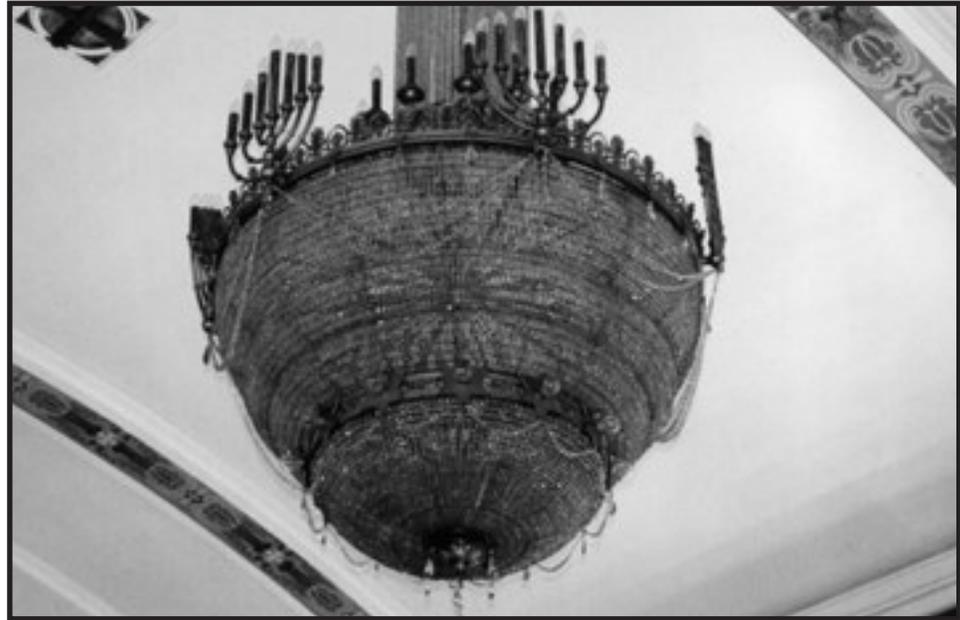
This was 1948 and I was 10 years old, Ronnie's big day was finally upon us. On the mild May morning of his bar mitzvah, our family walked in silence to the Austria-Galicia shul on California Avenue. My brother was wearing the new suit that Mom had finished shortening the night before, and I was in a stiff green dress with a Peter Pan collar and puffy short sleeves. We followed behind our parents, and watched – hoping that this time – they might hold hands for the stroll. But Dad, in his double-breasted herringbone suit, held a cigarette in one hand, and used the other to remove bits of tobacco from his lips. Mom, outfitted in a gray silk shantung dress that shimmered with each of her high-heeled steps, kept her gloved hands tight on her pocketbook. With her black felt hat and veil (the "rooftops of Paris look"), Mother was the unquestionable beauty of the bunch.

Once inside the synagogue, Ronnie and my Dad proceeded to the men's section on the first floor and Mom and I went upstairs to join the women. After a long, tedious morning service, my brother at last climbed atop a wooden Coca-Cola crate to reach the bimah. Our grandfather stood at his side, and using his one good eye and a yad pointer to track the squiggly alphabet guided Ronnie through his biblical passage. As I watched my brother, radiant in his spot before the Eternal Light, his yarmulke adding authenticity to his boyish body, I gave a sidelong glance at my mother. A woman who was sitting in the row behind us placed a gloved hand on my Mom's shoulder and said to her, "Such naches, Min, Mahzel Tov."

"Such naches, pride, I thought. I could feel tears about to blur my vision, so I turned my face back to the stage, and scolded myself for my erupting envy. I loved my brother, that was for sure, and was also proud of his performance that day. But as I watched my mother's blue eyes sparkle through the veil of her hat, I wished her love for me would flow as easily as it did for him.*

Elaine Shapiro Soloway, age 67, 2005

* Excerpt from "The Division Street Princess," a memoir by Elaine Soloway. Copyright 2005



Austro-Galician
1357 N. California
1911
Plaster Star of David over stairwell



Austro-Galician
1357 N. California
1911
Chandelier