

My Spiritual Journey To Who Am I ? To Do All That Is Right

ClaraGee Kastner Stamaty Ziment
Presented April 17, 2012 to the MCWRET

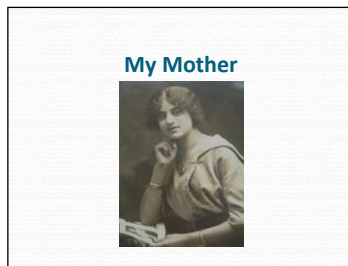
In my ninety-two years, I have been a daughter, a sister, a granddaughter, a niece, a cousin, a public school student, an art school student, a friend, an artist, a stylist in a department store, a government worker, a lover, a fiancée, a wife, a daughter-in-law, a sister-in-law, a free lance artist/cartoonist, a mother, a teacher, a Reform Jew, a partner in a successful 35-year interfaith marriage, a widow, a partner in a 26-year successful (so far) second marriage, a stepmother, a step-grandmother, a step-great-grandmother, (many of these simultaneously), and probably a few more things could be added. Each and every one of these roles and every experience of my life has shaped and formed me into what and who I am today and where my spiritual quest has led me.

Garden of Life



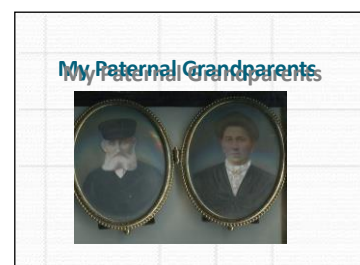
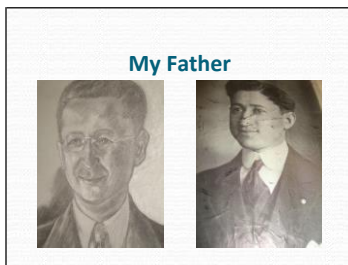
MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY has to be the story of my life. Almost everything that has happened to me weaves together to form who I am and what I believe.

I've been very lucky from birth. Born in Piqua, Ohio in 1919 of Russian immigrants, I could not have chosen a more wonderful family. My Mother, born in Kiernisofka, Russia (near Odessa), came to this country with her parents and most of her immediate family when she was 11 years



old. She was one of 7 daughters and also had an older brother. Her brother and his wife had come to America earlier. They all settled in Cleveland, Ohio.

My Father, born in Tulchin, Russia was 17 when he left. An older brother had come earlier and earned enough to bring my Father to Dayton, Ohio where they both were employed. Together they raised enough money to bring over another brother. The plan was to earn enough to bring over 2 more brothers, a sister, and their parents. But, World War I broke out and they lost contact. When they were able to renew contact, quotas were in effect and they could not get the required permits.

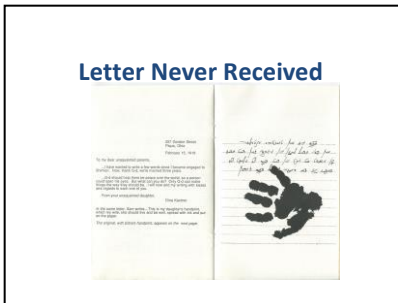


Reasons for leaving Russia were similar for both of my parents. Life in Russia was very dangerous for Jews. My Mother remembered being hidden in a closet under piles of clothes during Pogroms when Cossacks would ride thru the countryside killing Jews at random without any penalty of law. My paternal Grandparents parted with their sons at great emotional hardship because the boys would have been conscripted into the Russian Army without any of the same rights as the non-Jews. I never met my paternal grandparents.

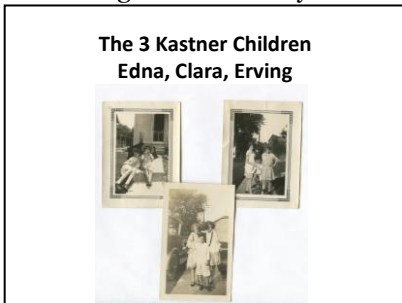
Introduced by relatives, my Father went to Cleveland and met my Mother's family. He fell in love with my Mother and they were married in 1915. Had they lived to October of 1990, the year they both died, they would have been married 75 years.



For my parents' 70th Anniversary, my nephew produced a souvenir pamphlet. Researching for this he found an old wooden trunk in their attic. In it, among other memorabilia, he discovered a packet of letters written in Yiddish and sent during a four-year period during which communication with Russian Jewish relatives was nearly impossible. The letters, still unopened, had been returned by the Russian authorities, having never reached their destination. To me, the most touching one was written by my Mother trying to introduce her first child, my sister Edna, to her Russian Grandmother with a print of her hand. My Grandmother never received that letter.

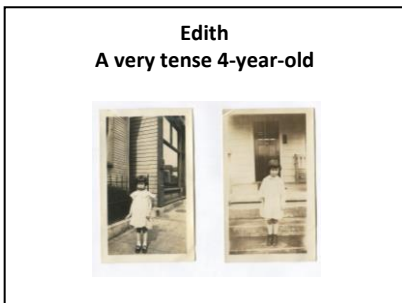


My parents settled first in Sidney, Ohio where Edna was born and then my Father joined my Uncle's business in Piqua, Ohio where I was born. 2½ years later my brother joined us. (An interesting side note – my Mother couldn't vote the year I was born. Women didn't get the Vote until 1920).

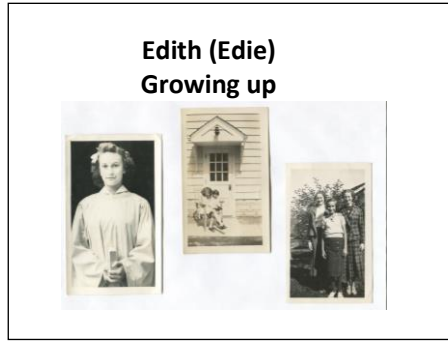


When I was about 5, an aunt died, leaving 6 children whom my Uncle could not raise while struggling to make a living. One daughter went to live with my maternal Grandparents and another daughter, with her 3 brothers, went to a Cleveland Jewish Orphan Home. The youngest, Edith, was an infant, too young to be accepted in the Home. Another aunt who had no children at the time wanted to adopt her. Edith's Father wouldn't allow that as long as he lived, and my aunt said in that case she couldn't take Edie because she would fall in love with her and then my Uncle could take her away.

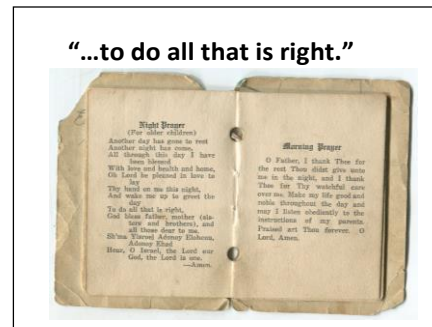
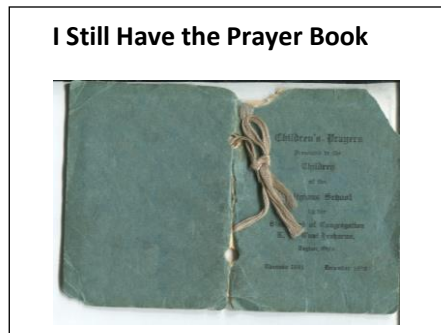
Meanwhile, my Mother, in Piqua, Ohio, 200 miles away, was having nightmares about her dead sister, who would seem to want to give her something and, as my Mother would reach for it, Aunt Bessie would disappear. I remember vividly my Mother screaming in her sleep and waking in the night crying. When I was 9, my Mother went to Cleveland to visit her family and saw that Edith was being shunted from one relative to another and was a very unhappy and tense 4-year-old. Mother packed her up and brought her to live with us as our sister. She never again had that nightmare.



We adored Edie. Her father and brothers and sisters would come and visit us almost every summer. They were like an extension of our immediate family. Her father died when she was about 15 and my Dad gave her the choice to be adopted because legally he could do more for her as adopted Father than as her Legal Guardian. She chose to be adopted. That made our family complete.



Mother and Dad were both brought up as Orthodox Jews but, living in this small town, the only organized Judaism available was the Reform Judaism of the German Jews who had settled there earlier. We belonged to that Congregation but we also kept as much of the Orthodox tradition at home as we could. We couldn't be entirely Kosher because travelling 30 miles to Dayton for Kosher food without a car was difficult. My Uncle had a horse and wagon for business and he would go there and bring back Kosher provisions for the major Holy Days.



I learned my first Jewish prayer before I could read or write: "Another day has gone to rest, another night has come. All through this day I have been blessed with love and health and home. Oh, Lord, be pleased, in love, to lay thy hand on me this night, and wake me up to greet the day, to do all that is right. God bless Mother, Daddy, Sister and Brother and all those dear to me. And then the traditional Sh'mah: 'Sh'mah Yisroel, Adenai Elohenu, Adenai Echod.' Which means, 'Hear, Oh Israel, the Lord is our God, The Lord is One!'

Sh'mah means 'Hear' H-E-A-R but I couldn't read so I thought I was saying H-E-R-E which I interpreted as meaning that wherever it was said God was THERE because God was everywhere. So I just knew that God was everywhere...even I could make God be there! Later when I learned that Sh'mah meant 'H-E-A-R' and, much later, that it also meant 'Listen,' it only added new dimensions for me. I never could give up the 'H-E-R-E' that meant God is everywhere! The phrase in that prayer 'wake me up to greet the day to do all that is right' had a profound effect on me. To this day I struggle to figure out the ethical and religious right thing to do in any given circumstance and I suffer great guilt when I've made a bad choice.

Sh'mah

H-E-A-R	H-E-R-E
	GOD was THERE
GOD	EVERYWHERE
	"Listen"
"wake me up to greet the day	GOD
GOD	to do all that is right"

Religion in Public Schools



- I am very much opposed to Religion in Public Schools.

At Public School, I was the only Jewish child in my class as were my sisters, brother and cousins. I was very shy and too naïve to be aware of anti-Semitism but there was always an undercurrent of being aware of being 'different'. Like being asked to explain to the class, from age 6 on up, some nuance of Judaism. Or, if I wore a green hair ribbon on St. Patrick's a teacher would remark, "Well, look who's wearing a green ribbon today." Never mind that almost all the other girls were wearing green ribbons.

There was a practice of teaching Moral Education. This was strictly the teaching of the Christian Religion. To show how 'broadminded' they were about it, they excused the Jewish children during that time.....BUT we were sent to sit on the bench outside of the Principal's office until that class was over. That bench, otherwise, was reserved for children who had misbehaved. To this day, I am very much opposed to Religion in Public Schools.

We had to avoid or run from the Catholic children as we walked to and from school. They went to Parochial Schools and used to throw stones at us and scream that we killed their God. They were taught that in their Catechism. They really didn't know any better. We were taught that there is only One God, so it was a big mystery to me how they thought children like us could possibly kill God.

Christian Holidays

Easter



Christmas



And then, there were the Holidays. Easter and Christmas were difficult. Easter, because the Crucifixion story was read and always renewed the misrepresentation of the Jews' responsibility for the death of Jesus. Christmas was difficult because we were in the tiny minority who didn't observe it. My sister and I understood that. We knew there was no Santa and we were very obedient about not revealing that to our Christian friends. My young brother, Erv, however, was a different story. Being a mischievous little boy, he couldn't be trusted with the secret, so for his years of belief, he always hung up a big flour

sack. Amazingly, it was always miraculously filled with toys and goodies. When Edith came to live with us she too enjoyed the privilege of believing in Santa.

Chanukah was not a major commercial holiday as it is now and our family lighted the candles and said the prayers but rarely exchanged gifts. We really didn't feel deprived, but the lack of gifts was sometimes hard to explain.


Chanukah



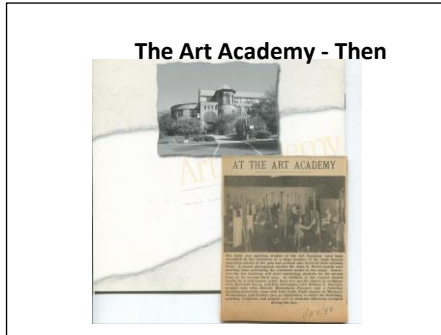
I remember one time returning to school after holiday vacation and required, in Art Class, to draw a picture of a favorite gift. I loved Art and had an excellent imagination and I could have made up something and drawn it, but I was also extremely conscientious. Remember my prayer, 'to do all that is right' so I couldn't lie. I belonged to a club at the YWCA and they had had a little gift exchange where I'd received a handkerchief. I drew a picture of a square handkerchief with a little flower in one corner. That

prayer has been an enormous influence in my life.

Eddie (Edna) -Then and Now



So, fast forward to High School graduation. It was the tail end of the big Depression and my sister was already in college. I had to wait 2 more years until her graduation before my Dad could afford to send me to school even though my annual tuition turned out to be \$125.

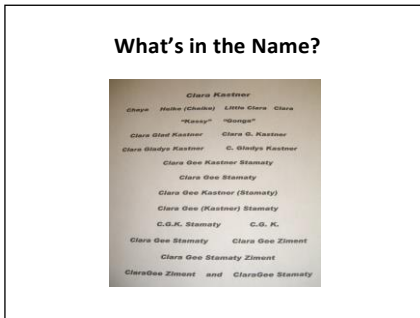


I had chosen to go to Jack Storey's Cincinnati Academy of Commercial Art. My Mother suggested that since I had no Jewish friends it might be a good idea to request a

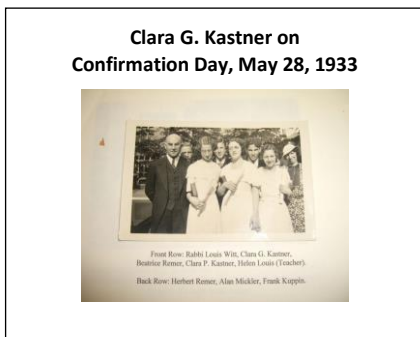
Jewish room mate. I had already been accepted.....but when they received that request they responded that they "did not encourage Jewish students to enroll" in their school. That actually turned out to be about the best thing that ever happened to me. I applied to the Art Academy of Cincinnati which, as it turned out, offered a much better foundation in Art education than my earlier choice.



A little digression here: About my name: My parents had named me Clara Kastner....no middle name. It happened also to be the name of my cousin, a year older than I. The family called me 'Little Clara' and my cousin 'Big Clara' but I grew bigger than she. I also looked like my sister. So, from Grade One on, every new teacher would say, 'Hello, Edna.' I'd say, 'I'm not Edna, I'm Clara' and they'd say, 'You can't be Clara, I had Clara last year.' I didn't have my own face or my own name....who was I??....it was very traumatic.



I tried using the initial 'G' from my Mother's maiden name, Glad (shortened from Kladofsky at Ellis Island) as a middle initial. No one paid any attention. I tried 'Clara Glad' which also didn't work. My cousin had a middle name 'Pauline' which she hated and she didn't want to be called 'Clara P.' for obvious reasons. AND she had the name first.



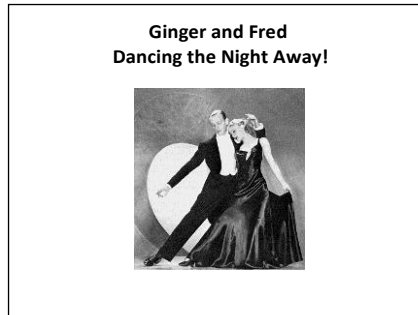
When we were both in High School our grades were being mixed up. Mine were better than hers. So I changed Glad to Gladys and became C. Gladys Kastner. That's how I'm listed in my yearbook. I hated being called 'Gladys'.....the nickname that went with Gladys was 'Happy Bottom' for 'Glad Ass'. Being very sensitive, that was a large burden. When I graduated I dropped Gladys and became ClaraGee 'G-E-E'.



At the Art Academy I really grew into my own self. No one knew my sister or my cousin so I finally had my own face and my own name. I was ClaraGee from then on and was accepted as ClaraGee and was

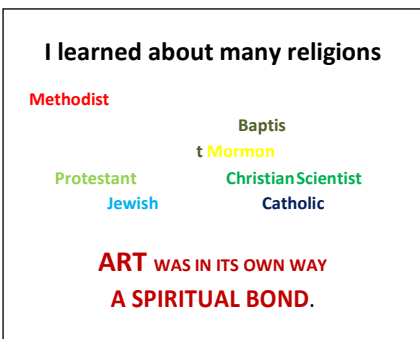
very happy to finally have my own identity. The Gee is still very important to me.

And it was at the Academy that I met Stanley Stamaty. We were introduced at a dance by a friend who used the introduction as an excuse because she wanted to dance with him. Stan said "Hello" to me and promptly asked her to dance. But, not long after that, he called another friend of mine, at the Three Arts Club where I lived, and asked her to a Greek dance. Because she was a devout, committed Methodist, she was not permitted to dance and had to refuse. He asked her if she thought I would go and that's how our courtship began. I had never really learned to dance but somehow on that first date I was Ginger Rogers dancing with Fred Astaire. Stan was an excellent dancer and, by some miracle, I fell into step with him as if I'd been dancing every day of my life. I also fell in love that night.

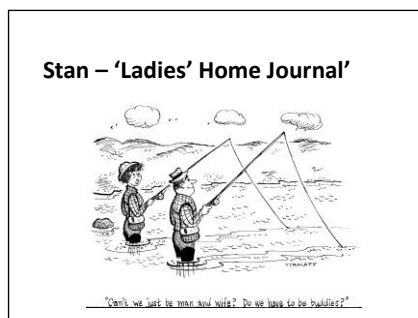


I knew Stan was Greek but I didn't know that it was a religion as well as a nationality. At a party at his home, there were foods that I had only seen in Jewish

homes, never in homes of my non-Jewish friends. Black olives, herring, halvah, etc.... He and his friends looked much like my relatives and Jewish acquaintances.....so, for a while, I thought he was Greek Jewish. By the time I learned about the Greek Orthodox religion, I was already in love.

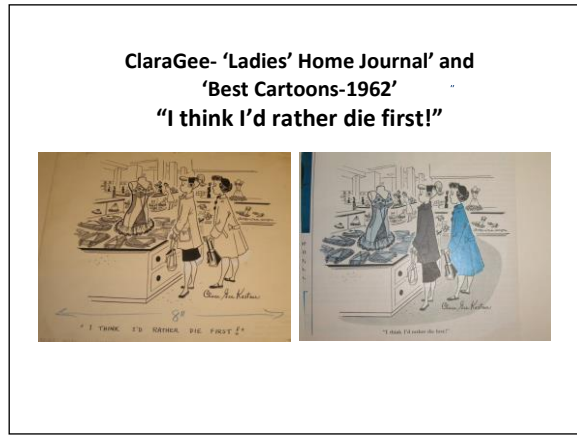
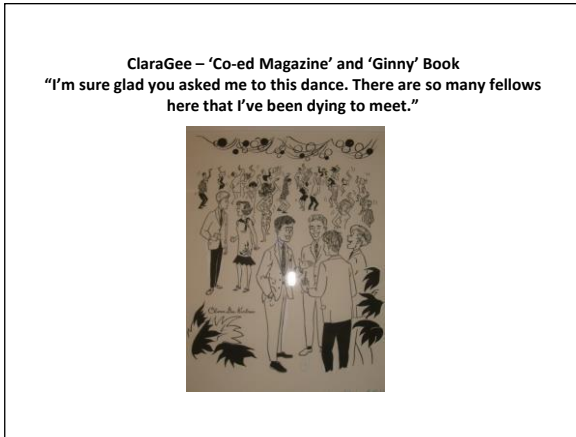


At the Academy and the 3-Arts Club, where I lived, I learned about many religions....my close friends were Methodist, Jewish, Mormon, Baptist, Protestant, Christian Scientists, Catholic, etc....It didn't matter.....In a wonderful peculiar way we had so many values that we shared..... Especially as artists.....Art was in its own way a spiritual bond.

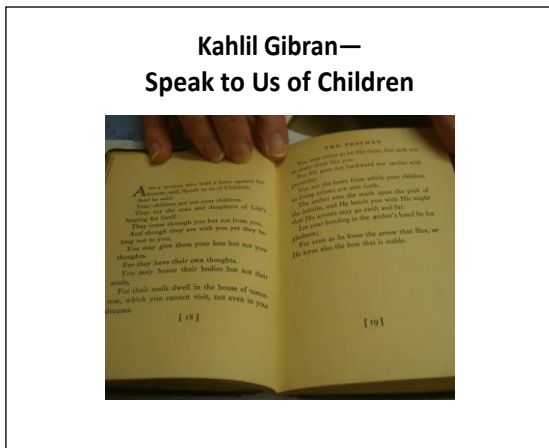


While still a student, Stan had sold his first cartoons to Saturday Evening Post before we met. Although I

had a good sense of humor, it would not have occurred to me to be a cartoonist before Stan was in my life. Cartooning was not specifically taught as a subject at the Academy but drawing from life was an important tool. We had to learn to draw anything and everything. I had been drawing my room-mates and other friends, putting funny captions on them, so with Stan's encouragement, I sent a batch off to a (brand new at the time) teen-age magazine, Seventeen, and they bought 4 or 5 of them. It was the beginning of my cartoon career.



Meanwhile Stan and I were trying to sort out the problem of our difference in religion. At age 10 or 11, I had made a promise to my Father that I would never marry anyone who wasn't Jewish. I was almost 20 when I met Stan and felt quite bound and disturbed by that promise. My parents had met Stan and liked him but were not happy about our dating. Stan's parents felt the same way. There were a lot of Greek girls who were suggested to him as far more suitable than I.



A Jewish teacher whom we both loved was married to a wonderful woman who was not Jewish. After watching me struggle against a deep love for Stan and the promise I had made as a child, they suggested I read 'The Prophet' by Kahlil Gibran and especially the poem about 'Children,' which I'd like to read.

“Your children are not your children.
 They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
 They come through you yet they belong not to you.
 You may give them your love but not your thoughts.
 For they have their own thoughts.
 You may house their bodies but not their souls.
 For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
 which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
 You may strive to be like them,
 but seek not to make them like you.
 For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
 The Archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you
 with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.
 Let your bending in the Archer's hand be for gladness;
 For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable.

Cincinnati



Looking for the poem I found this clipping tucked away in the front of the book. It was part of a column in a Cincinnati newspaper written by a person who called himself 'Cincinnati'. A reader had called attention to great flocks of "creedless sparrows" around Eighth and Plum Streets.

He writes, "the reader suggests they may be sparrows with a universal creed....the way they seem equally at home on the cross of St. Peter in Chains Church, or the minarets of the synagogue across the street, or on the tower of the Presbyterian Church of the Covenant around the corner."

The reader wonders "how the sparrows might behave if, suddenly, they were endowed with that which is called human intelligence. They might no longer feel kin to one another. They would probably divide, some to roost on the cross, some to cluster around the minarets of the Jewish house of worship, others to cling to the Presbyterian house.

"...they wheel and swoop
 in the sky."



"Instead....they wheel and swoop in the sky in perfect co-operation." The reader "is aware of the essential unity of religious faith as he stands at the corner of Eighth and Plum - the Catholic church and Jewish temple facing each other, the church of the Presbyterians around the corner."

Both the poem and the clipping seemed to me to be mystical directional signals arriving in my life at that crucial time.

Stan and I broke up more times than I could count, trying desperately to please and honor our parents but we were always, often in unbelievable coincidences, brought together. We tried to be "best friends" but that didn't work. I quit a good job and went back home, intending to enlist in the WAAC's (WWII had started) or find work in Cleveland where I had relatives, in order to break up with Stan.

Wedding Day



I thank God, Stan didn't give up and we were finally, after a 5½ year courtship, married in 1944. How to get married presented a problem. In those times, no Rabbi would consider performing an intermarriage. Being married by a Greek Priest was not an option for me and Stan's Priest had informed him that, if he was not married in the Greek Church, he would be living in sin. Stan accepted that condition feeling it was a greater sin to not be able to marry the person you loved. I held out for a while, but our final compromise was that if I would agree to be married by a Justice of the Peace, Stan would agree that any children we might have could be educated in the Jewish Reform religious school.

Stan & I



We searched diligently for a religious affiliation that would fit our complicated situation but there were difficulties everywhere we looked. Reform Judaism was not open to us then as it would be today. So Stan attended some Jewish services with me and I attended some Greek services with him and, at times, we each went our own way. Whenever possible we celebrated Jewish Holidays with my family and Christian Holidays with his family. Incidentally, my parents grew to love Stan as a son and Stan's parents accepted me in the family completely and lovingly.

Four Generations



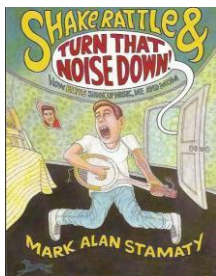
Stan, Mark, and Me



Three years later the great miracle of birth brought our son into our lives. He was named Mark Alan, for our beloved teacher Mike Abel who died just before I became pregnant. Mark's arrival was a joyous event, but when Stan

faced the probability of his being raised as a Jew, it was an issue. Speaking of mythical children before they were a reality was one thing....but a real live child, a son who would bear his name, and who turned out to be an only child was another. So, there were difficult times and, no doubt, Mark suffered as much as either of us from the conflict. But he was raised to know, respect and love both traditions and he will probably write his own version some day.

Graphic by Mark



**Cooper Union Classroom by Mark
Teacher's Eye View**



**Who Needs Donuts
by Mark Alan Stamaty**



It's my sincere feeling that Mark's life was enriched by being exposed to two different cultures. He attended Religious School at Temple Beth Miriam, was active in the Youth Group, and produced a newsletter and many posters, etc. for that group. He also went, on occasion, to Greek services with his father. He learned my bedtime prayer and a Greek prayer that Stan taught him. He is still in touch with many close friends who were the children he grew up with at Beth Miriam. We will never

know how differently he would have developed if he had two Greek Orthodox parents or two Jewish parents. If Stan had married a Greek woman and I had married a Jewish man, there would be no Mark...he would be two other people!! It is my fervent conviction that God needed and wanted Stan and me to create Mark...I think God wanted there to be a Mark Alan Stamaty.

Stan suffered from Alopecia Areata



Stan suffered from Alopecia Areata and searched for remedies all his life. One direction that he investigated was Christian Science and it helped him immeasurably. It also gave me the opportunity to understand and appreciate how important thoughts are.

Books & More Books



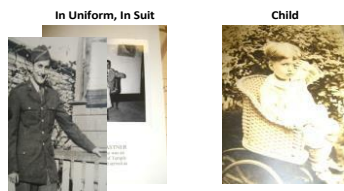
Books have been a very important part of my spiritual growth. I had been a book lover from the moment I learned to read and always appreciated the great treasure of Public Libraries. I read our Jewish Bible (more than once), the New Testament, Science and Health by Mary Baker Eddy, anything on the history and philosophy and techniques of Art, and anything on Jewish Mysticism and Mysticism in other religions. I read Unity publications and 'Science of Mind' and found in them so much that affirmed what I had learned and believed in Judaism. All of these things Stan shared with me. Our differences were mostly in the

religious rituals but not in the essence of our beliefs.

In 1968, my nephew received a diagnosis of Cancer. His father, my brother, said to me at that time, "Why did it happen to him? He's so young, his life is just beginning. Why couldn't it have been me instead? I'm older, I've had a good life." I don't know what I answered him, but, almost to the day 5 years later, when his son, after much surgery and treatment, was pronounced clear of Cancer, my brother was diagnosed with Cancer.

After 2 terrible years of surgery and painful treatment, my brother finally surrendered the fight and died. I went back home several times during his illness. The last time, I arrived the day before he died and, with my family, visited him at the hospital in Dayton (30 miles from my parents' home.) As they were leaving, I told them that I had brought work with me and was used to working at night and I wanted to stay with Erv at the hospital. It really was a 'white lie' but I couldn't bear to leave him alone in that room.

Erving E. Kastner



It was a crazy night, a weird combination of snow and lightning and thunder, something I have never seen before or since. My brother's room-mate appeared to be deranged. They were both on oxygen and this man wanted to smoke. He kept getting out of bed to try to get cigarettes. Since they didn't have personnel to take care of him they put him on restraints and the results of that made a bizarre display on the screen between the beds. I was so glad to be able to be there and hold my brother's hand and try to comfort him.

Erv had been a Scout leader as a boy and an Adult leader later. He was Worshipful Master of his Masonic Lodge and a devoted President of his Temple. He had given gallons of blood to Red Cross drives. He had served in the Army in WWII and made more sacrifices for good causes and done more good deeds than I could mention here. So as he lay there, in agony, I said to him, "Erv,

you've been such a good Jew and done so many good things, doesn't your strong faith give you some help now? And he looked at me with his big beautiful brown eyes and said, "I don't know, Clara." That really shook me and my belief.

I stayed with him all night holding his hand and trying to get him transferred away from his crazy room-mate. In the morning, a friend of my sister Edith, who lived in Dayton but had never before met me, invited me to their home to get some rest. I'd like to read a poem I later wrote about that experience.

JANUARY 1975

Holding my brother's hand
Through that dreadful night...
Wondering whether to pray
For his life or his death...
Feeling more love than I
Have ever known...
Another dimension of love
That I do not understand...
Yet helpless to help him
Live or die.

One cannot question (But one does)...
Somewhere the thread is held...
Some day I trust...I'll know...

I later touched his hand again...
When all I knew of him was gone
The hand was ice
And yet I had to tell him that I cared...
Maybe he heard
I kissed his cold forehead
And had to say, "Goodbye."

As I bathed my aching body
Trying to end my tears,
My hurting heart was healing
In the comfort of their caring,
A total stranger to them
I was welcomed...rested... refreshed...
No questions asked or answered
Compassion flowing from their eyes to mine.

My brother was dying (or maybe dead)
I did not understand the required surrender to God.
Do I even understand what I mean by "God"???
But, surely, their open door
Their firm hands and warm eyes
Were part of a plan for me to know that God is good....
That beautiful gestures by feeling souls...
Are...perhaps...what "God" is.

My Parents & I



SAM AND DINA KASTNER
My Mother and Dad in their favorite spot (the old swing on the front porch
of 1302 Nicklin Avenue) with me (CharaGee Kastner Samant Zimet)
down in the right-hand corner.

The next day Erv was moved to a better room. He looked much more comfortable and was probably sedated. When Mother and Dad came to visit he was able to talk to them and his way of saying 'Goodbye' was just "Dad, I am so tired." After we drove back to Piqua we received the call that he had given up the fight and he was gone. He was 53.

I stayed in Piqua and tried to help Mother and Dad pick up their lives and I was the Rock of Gibraltar while there. When I came back home, the loss hit me and I fell apart.



I spoke to Rabbi Goldman and the conversation was comforting. He told me to check out a book, 'On Death and Dying' by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. I read the book and found it helpful and also had the opportunity to hear her speak at Brookdale.

At about this time, I mentioned to a good friend what a hard time I was having accepting this loss. She told me about an interfaith group that met, read inspirational books together, meditated, and had a non-sectarian prayer session. It was another great thing that happened to me. I'm still with that group. We are much smaller now. Members have come and gone. Henriette, the founder, has

had a stroke and has lost much of her eyesight. Another member's eyesight is also failing, but I still try to be there on Wednesdays and read to them and to 2 other women and we discuss a book we choose to inspire us. I have learned so much spiritually from that experience.

Stan also participated in that group and we found so many areas of agreement about God and

belief. In our work, our minds worked together and we laughed a lot making up cartoons about even the difficult parts of life. Humor and laughter are so remarkable. They are very special among all the great gifts that God has given human beings.



And then on September 12, 1979, very suddenly Stan was gone. It took me a long time to learn to live with this loss. I would wake up before sunrise, if I slept at all, and go down to the ocean and watch the sun come up and I would sit on a big rock and write poetry. Here are three of those.

STAN AND ME

Grass knows how to grow
Birds know how to fly
Flowers know how to bloom
And even when to die

Trees know when to turn
Seeds know what they are.
Radishes know to be red
Onions know to be green.

A sperm found an egg
And knew to be me
A sperm found an egg
And knew to be Stan.

Do you think that's odd?
To me, it's an explanation....
Of God.

NO WHERE, NO WHEN, NO WHOM

I ask of the Poet, "What are you saying?"
And the Poet answers, "I have said it."

I ask the Musician, "What Song do you sing?"
The Musician answers, "Listen."

I ask the Artist, "What does it mean?"
The Artist answers, "The meaning is there."

I plead to the Rabbi, "Tell me of God."
The Rabbi answers, "Tell me what you think."

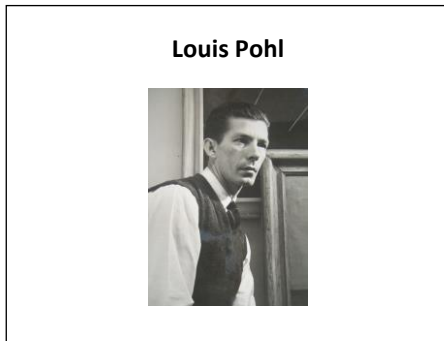
I knock on the Wall and they say, "Come in."
But there is no door.



SOMETIMES.....NOVEMBER 3, 1979

Sometimes it's hard to be happy
 To fight the gloom that tries
 To invade each corner
 Of a heavy heart.
 Sometimes, it's hard to push a smile
 Through a face that wants to cry.

I know you're there, God.
 The trees are glowing with glorious
 Autumn foliage.....
 But.....
 Sometimes.....
 I need to cry.



A large part of my healing was a visit with our dear friend, Louis Pohl in Hawaii. We had been friends since Art Academy days. He was Stan's best friend and Best Man at our wedding. He had gone to Hawaii and become a prominent artist and teacher, was actually declared a "State Treasure" by the Hawaiian Legislature. He introduced me to a wonderful group of very spiritual people and also introduced me to the writings of Joel Goldsmith. Lou himself was one of the most spiritual people that I ever knew. He was brought up by German Protestant parents and had looked into and seriously studied many religions, especially Christian Science, but

belonged to no church. He was a true Mystic and I owe a lot of my convictions to our many precious conversations. I had a terrible painting block after Stan died. In beautiful Hawaii, in Lou's lovely studio, I started to paint again.

While in Hawaii, I attended a 4-day seminar by Brugh Joy who wrote 'Joy's Way'. It was a very inspirational and healing experience. And during that month in Hawaii and those 4 days I found I was beginning to let go of Stan and come to terms with being alone.

At first when I was alone, if I were out somewhere, I'd be thinking, 'there's nobody to care whether I get home or not' and I'd feel very sorry for myself. But very, very gradually I found myself thinking in a different sense, 'Oh, nobody is going to be worried about where I am. I'm free to go wherever I want to go.' And then very slowly I came to realize there were some good things about being alone. I had much to be grateful for and in that sense I was really quite wealthy. And that's when I wrote this crazy poem.

Who Is Rich?



"UNTITLED"

I'm a wealthy widow
With a scar on my middle
And some scars
On my Id as well.

I used to be an Artist
I used to draw and paint
What I once was
Is what I now ain't.

I'm nobody's wife
But somebody's mother
I haven't got a husband
And I haven't got a brother.

Do I have any future
To follow my past?
Tall, dark and breathing
Is all I ask.

I'm driving around
In my little white Ford
Seeing lots of men
By whom I'm ignored.

I'm searching for myself
I'm looking for I
I hope when I find me
I'm with another guy.

Temple Beth Miriam, Elberon, NJ



In the process of running away from myself and my grief, and having no family nearby, I had been using Temple Beth Miriam as my extended family. I went to every service, took every class, and got involved in anything they offered. And, one of those classes was taught by a man named Milton Ziment. My memory is not entirely clear on this. I don't know if I asked him or he just offered but he took me to the Airport when I left for a trip to Ohio (for the funeral of my nephew who also subsequently died of Cancer). Milt also met me at the airport when I returned.

Milt
With my sister Edna (Eddie)



Milt and Daughters
Sari and Irene



And then, one day he asked me to be co-chair of the Social Action Committee. I accepted, not entirely sure what that committee did at a Temple. As I educated myself in this commitment, I

was surprised to learn that my total upbringing was what Social Action and Judaism were all about. They are inseparable. As a child, growing up in Piqua, Ohio, the values and ideals instilled

in me by my parents were an important part of their religion. In Religious School I learned the stories in the Bible. At home, I learned to care about people, that it was wrong to hate anyone, to share whatever I had with anyone who had less, to love and work for peace, to respect and learn from the elderly, to feed the hungry, to respect other races, religions and nationalities, to care about oppressed people in other countries.

Judaism, to me at that time, was Friday Night Services, Sunday School, Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, candles, matzo.....**BUT** not telling lies, loving my neighbor, sending packages to Russia, giving to those less fortunate.....that was just everyday living in our home. I didn't know that this was 'Social Action'. And I didn't know for a long time, how much of an integral part of Judaism this was! It had always been one of my major passions.



Milt taught the 7th grade in the Religious School at Temple Beth Miriam, and also trained the Bar and Bat Mitzvah candidates. He was invited to many Bat and Bar Mitzvot and often invited to bring a guest if he wished..... On one of those occasions he invited me. We went to the affair and we danced and there I was.....dancing again....and laughing again. So, now I'm co-chair of this committee and Milt and I are working together and writing a newsletter together.....and we're walking on the boardwalk together and I find that he cares about all those

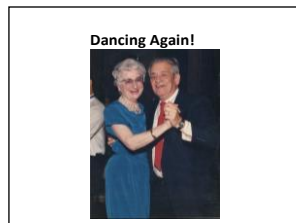
causes that I care so much about and, after a little while of Social Action and 'acting socially'.....we were married in 1984. This is a poem I wrote at that time:

SIXTY-FOUR GOING ON SEVENTEEN

Suddenly single at sixty....
 One in a world of twos....
 Vulnerable, alone and lonely
 In a partnership without a partner.



Surviving somehow, I came to NOW....
 Surprised to sense again
 Those faded former feelings
 Happier than I dared dream I would ever be.



Worried about my hair and what'll I wear?
 Will I see him? Will he call?
 I can barely believe
 I'm dancing again!!

**Rabbi Lawrence Kushner—
The Book of Letters: a Mystical Alef-bait**



Milt and I received reams of communications on Social Action issues. We attended conferences, seminars, teach-ins, lectures, hearings, board meetings, committee meetings, Regional and National Conventions and Biennials. Just before our 5th Anniversary, I saw an ad in a Jewish magazine for a gathering at Brown University to study with leading Jewish scholars for a week. One of the scholars was Rabbi Larry Kushner, the author and illustrator of a book I owned and cherished, “The Book of Letters, a Mystical Alef-bait”. For our Anniversary gift, we gave each other the trip to attend this Kallah.

It was a very inspiring experience. These Kallot moved to Brandeis University and we attended every year studying with the people who wrote the books about subjects we were interested in.....my interest was to learn everything I possibly could about Jewish Mystism and Jewish Meditation. Milt found courses that fed and stimulated his interests. We attended every year until 1999 when we had to cancel because Milt had to have heart surgery.

AT THE JAINA CONVENTION
MANY WORLD RELIGIONS



Somewhere in recent years, Milt was asked to be a Jewish member of the Board of Monmouth Center of World Religions and Ethical Thought.....and somewhere in those years, I sat in on many meetings and became a part of the organization which had become such an important part of me. Not too long ago, we also became a part of Monmouth Dialogue at Monmouth University.

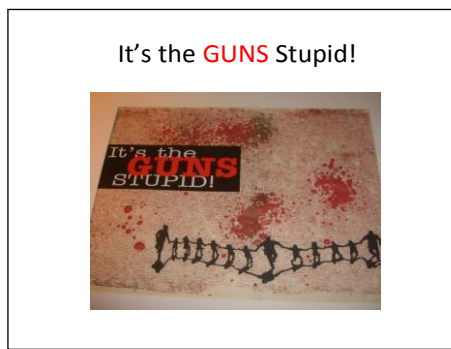
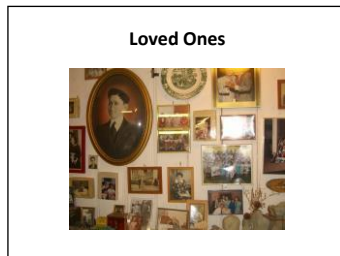
Lost Keys



Throughout my life, I know there has been a Guiding Presence that I cannot explain logically or rationally. If I try to explain it I become inarticulate. This Guidance has manifested itself in many ways....an item in a newspaper or magazine leading me to answers I need....the right book falling into my hands, seemingly by chance, that miraculously contained the thought that I needed at that time....ideas for cartoons, flooding in when I needed them....ideas for art projects when I was teaching....so-called coincidences beyond explanation....the right wonderful people coming into my life at exactly the right moment, many of whom

are here tonight. I ask for answers at bedtime and they are there the next day. I believe that imagination and intuition are my connections to God when I open my mind and let it sing.

Whenever there have been challenges good things have balanced the scales. When I was not wanted at one school, a much better experience was in store for me, if my friend had not been a devout Methodist she would have been Stan's date instead of me, but I was led to Stan, a loving companion and partner for 35 years, who, among other things, helped me develop as an artist and made me the mother of a wonderful son. Without Stan in my life I would never have enjoyed the fun and challenges of being a cartoonist. When Erv, my brother died, I discovered the inspiring support group. When Stan died I was guided to Hawaii and many healing experiences and finally to, so far, 27 years with Milt who shares so many of my passions. And though I could wish there had been no pogroms, my parents did come to America and meet or I would not be standing here tonight. They were so grateful and happy to be Americans.....my Father put up the American Flag every morning and took it down every sunset.



I believe that we have been given glorious gifts of Imagination, Intuition and the capacity for laughter. I believe that these gifts are God in action. I believe that we are all

connected in God by whatever Name is used. That we each have a little piece of God in us, that it is up to us to be God's hands and feet...to be there for whoever needs us. As Larry Kushner has written, "We are each a little piece of the puzzle of life and, even when we don't know it, we are an important part of someone else's puzzle." One of our prayer books says it like this: *'You are My Witnesses,' says the Lord, 'and I am God. That is: when you are My Witnesses, I am God; and when you are not My Witnesses, I am, one might almost say, not God.'*

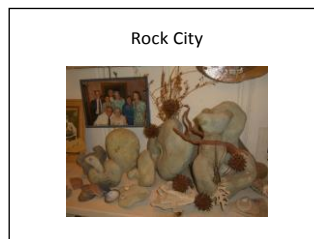
I am a Reform Jew but my religion doesn't fit within the confines of Reform Judaism. I think Jewish Mysticism comes closest to what I am in my heart. I have found corresponding philosophies in so many of the religions that I've studied. I believe that most of our differences are in ritual but not in Basics. We are all a combination of all the experiences good and bad that have shaped us. That's where I come from and what I've said here is who I am, so far. In conclusion, I have six short poems that sort of summarize my religion and express my feelings about life and death.

UNTITLED
 We dance together
 On this planet
 Each to his or her own song
 Sometimes.....
 The song is the same
 My tune touches your tune
 And we are one



Perhaps one day
 There will be
 A moment
 When every soul hears and
 Shares the melody of our Planet
 And we will dance together
 And KNOW that we are ONE.

VISIBILITY OF THE UNSEEN



So many clues...
 So many trails...A flood of facts...
 Leading and luring...
 Guiding me gratefully to God.

The petals on my plants,
 Colorful miracles,
 Affirming Divinity daily...
 Knowing and trusting....
 Waiting for water.

The trees in winter,
 Stripped of autumn's glorious garb,
 Perfect pictures of patience,
 Exposing their naked skeletons...
 Knowing that spring will come.

The ocean...God in motion...
 Changing...and unchanging...
 Reflecting the sky...but...
 Murmuring...roaring...muttering...
 So many moods of its own creative be-ing.

My Family



Family and friends.....
Individual as snowflakes.....
Blessing my life,
Being there...when they are close
Or far away...or even gone from the earth.



The man who is my son,
Grown from the infant I once held...
The miracle that made me a mother...
The gift of beholding a baby becoming,
Maturing into manhood.

Smiles.....laughter.....music...
Paintings.....poetry.....people...
An extended hand.....a tender touch.....a hug...
The wondrous world of words...
Multi-lingual language of life and love.

Shalom, Peace!



So many clues...so many trails...
A flood of facts...leading.....luring
Guiding me gratefully to God

The next one is the poem I wrote that for my painting called 'Hour Glass':

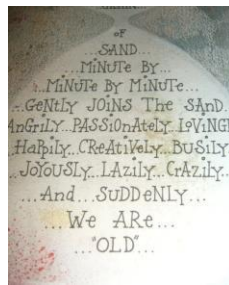
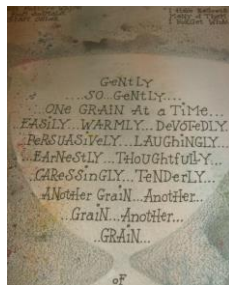
GeNtLY...



Gently

.....So....Gently....
...One Grain At a Time...
..Easily...Warmly...Devotedly..
....Persuasively...Laughingly...
...Earnestly...Thoughtfully....
...Caressingly...Tenderly...
..Another Grain..Another..
...Grain...Another...
...Grain...
Of
...Sand...
...Minute By...
...Minute By Minute...
...Gently Joins the Sand...
...Angrily...Passionately...Lovingly...
...Happily...Creatively...Busily...
...Joyously...Lazily...Crazily...
...And...Suddenly...
...We Are...
“OLD”

MiNuTe By MiNuTe...And... SUDeNLY...We Are “OLD”



MINUTES OF OUR MEETING

ONE MOMENT CANNOT LAST
25th Anniversary



We tend to cling to moments
We long to hold them fast.....
But life is many moving moments
One moment cannot last

....

Clara Gee—Then and Now

Reflective



Looking Forward



Had I held my first such moment
Refusing to let it go.....
I would have barred so many more
That could not come to pass.

Clara Gee and Milton



If I could have clung to the moment
The first time I was kissed.....
Think how many kisses
I would have had to miss.

So I treasure each precious moment
And try to live it with love
I savor its pleasure and then
I release it.....and as we part....
I bless the gift of memory
That stores it deep in my heart

And this last one.....

WILL THE NEW YORK TIMES MISS ME WHEN I'M GONE

Of the poems left unwritten
Will they know, when I am dead?
Will they say, "How clean her dishes!"
Or, "How well she made a bed!"

1963 or 1964 (?)



Of the paintings left unpainted
Will they know, when I am dead?
Will they say, "How neat her closets!"
Or, "How well she baked the bread!"

Waiting for Creation

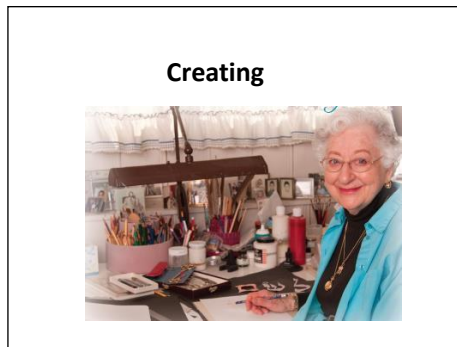


Of the 'Thank You' notes unwritten
Will they know, when I am dead?
Will they say, "How waxed her kitchen!"
Or, "How clever with her thread!"

In My Head



If they cannot see the genius
In its trap inside my head....
If they cannot note the brilliance
Of my witty words unsaid....



Though they search through every step
Of the life that I have led....
Will they only find my garden....
With its weeds unpulled....
Instead?

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P15 Temple Beth Miriam,

<http://njewishnews.com/article/2471/beth-miriam-education-wing-takes-off-in-a-flash-of-color>

P22 “ClaraGee Stamity Ziment” by Paul Newman

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Appreciation is expressed to Jennifer Lieberman, Paul Newman and Dr. Saliba Sarsar for their contributions to this project.