

The Pepperoni Brothers

Purim of my youth was comprised of three major events: There was shaking my *gragger* as loud as possible when my father said the name of Haman during his exquisite rendition of the *Megillah*. There was decorating the hundreds of boxes containing mouthwatering *mishloach manos* that my mother painstakingly baked and packaged, and helping my father deliver them attired in my multi-colored gypsy costume that I wore every year until it was time to pass it down to my sister. And finally, there was the Purim *seudah* that took place in the shul and the Purim *shpiel* that accompanied it.

Children and adults alike looked forward to the appearance of the Pepperoni Brothers, vaudeville duo Don and Gary, who dressed in flamboyant suits, straw hats and the necessary canes and performed original acts each year.

They simulated magic tricks to the delight of the children who caught on to the sense of ridiculous in the duo's attempts at sleight of hand. The duo would do a juggling act with just one ball, but the theatrics that accompanied the simple play were uproariously funny.

They would "balance" bottles on their heads and make it seem like a great feat, even though they were actually holding the bottles while mincing across the room. It was all great fun in tune with the Purim spirit.

The Pepperoni Brothers sang and danced, swinging their canes to and fro to amusing tunes with nonsense words, all in accordance with *simchas Purim*. They would include humorous anecdotes about the community and the expressions on their faces produced hilarity among the inebriated and chuckles from the abstainers.

The song and dance begun by the Pepperoni Brothers was contagious, and as their performance came to a close the audience rose and joined them in joyous celebration. A chain of dancers was formed and wound round and round the room, each man and child hanging on to the person in front of him. The women chased the youngsters around, wiping grimy faces and hands while smiling at the familiar faces passing by.

Ad d'lo yada was being happily tipsy. I don't recall

anyone getting drunk to the point of incapacitation or violence. There was no vomiting and no one fell asleep due to imbibing too much alcohol. The participants were drunk on *simchah* and camaraderie; there was a feeling of belonging to something larger and infinitely holier than what was apparent to the naked eye.

Just as the Pepperoni Brothers created an illusion for the entertainment of the Purim *seudah*, there was an illusion that Purim was merely about fun, food and drink. However, the spirit in the shul belied the fact that although the miracle of Purim was *nistar* (hidden), as the name of the reigning Queen Esther implies, the joy, *achdus* and gratitude of these Jews was *nigleh*, out in the open, and even a child was able to perceive it.

The merging of the old-timers, the Holocaust survivors, and the new *baalei teshuvah* who joined the community was interesting to observe on Purim. Although they had front-row seats to the Purim *shpiel*, my grandmother's friends — Tzilly of the best salt-and-pepper lokshen kugel, Sura of the hot gefilte fish balls, and Goldie of the old-fashioned strudel — shrugged their shoulders, as they didn't quite get the jokes portrayed in the performance.

However, they took pride and *shepped nachas* from the growing group of *kinderlach* who giggled and clapped in response to the *shpiel*. The joy of Purim was resurrected from the *shtetl* and brought to their corner of the *goldene medinah*.

The most memorable of Purim songs from the days of yore was the version of *L'shanah Habaah BiYerushalayim*: "Howard will take us to Ernie Von Schledorn [a well-known car salesman and a neighbor of Howard's], he will buy us a Pontiac, the Pontiac will take us to Yerushalayim, *shoin, shoin, shoin, to Yerushalayim Habenuyah!*" Sung over and over each year as hands and voices joined in a prayer for Moshiach, it still reverberates in my ears and heart.

L'shanah habaah biYerushalayim! ■

Liluy nishmas Dovid ben Chaim (Don).

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