

Our Granddaughter's Naming: October 16, 2021

Peter Grumbacher

“A picture is worth a thousand words,” and I’m sorry I don’t have pictures to show you of our granddaughter’s “Naming” ceremony that took place on Saturday. Now these ceremonies are the female equivalent of circumcision. The good thing about it is that while circumcision takes place on the 8th day after birth, a baby girl’s ceremony can occur anytime, and as I told the assembled guests, I officiated at the naming of a ten-year old AND her 37-year old mother.

This occasion is when the child receives his/her Hebrew name which is used when s/he is called up on her/his Bat/Bar Mitzvah at age 13, and is written on the marriage certificate, called a *ketubah*. Those whose heritage is Western European, most American Jews, name after deceased relatives. Those descended from Spain/Portugal or northern African countries name after living relatives. It can cause tension if mom and dad are from the two distinct populations. Only once did I have such a problem. You see, we believe that only one soul can exist so if two living people have the same name, well, one has to go...not the name, the person. But the others believe you must honor a grandparent, for example, while they are alive.

Since we usually use first initials we take that into account in giving them secular names but that doesn’t always have to be the case. Sometimes a name is given just because the parents like the name. Then artificially the Hebrew name is twisted to fit the secular...or not.. Her “secular” name is Ari Eden. Elana and Howie explained that Ari means “lion” in Hebrew and she was born early and fought like a lion though premature. Her first Hebrew name is Hannah. She was named after Howie’s grandmother, Ann (oh, that’s where the “A” comes in), a feisty little lady.

Her middle name Eden is after my parents, Ernst and Else, both beginning with “E,” making things far easier. And by itself Eden is a Hebrew name from the garden of the same name. Elana explained that both her grandparents were fighters, my dad in his Holocaust experience, my mother in her assistance in getting him out of the concentration camp.

Back to the ceremony itself....

I had explained what was to take place to my lady barber, a Roman Catholic by birth, a whateverIwanttobe now. She asked me a profound question after I described it. “Is there any point where the ‘baby’ has to stand still?” I knew just what she meant and, sure enough, this almost TWO YEAR OLD sweetheart

wouldn't/couldn't stand still. Though she focused her attention on climbing on top of a pew seat that one had to push down in order to sit, there was difficulty on my part to keep my hand on her head as I offered a blessing. Her giggling though made her wiggles worthwhile; her adorable face and realization that all eyes were on her, were far more "spiritual" than any blessing in Hebrew or any other language for that matter.

While the number of guests was limited because of the ongoing Covid nonsense, our daughter's and son-in-law's friends showed up as did whatever family we have left...Suzy's brother and sister-in-law and my cousin and wife. Except for the friends everyone came back to our home for yet more food. After about three hours or so everyone went their merry ways. Only our Virginia son, daughter-in-law and grandson stayed overnight.

Of course we started talking about family, how our parents would have loved to have been there. I showed Jonathan my grandson that photo I showed our memoir group a few years ago. I told him, "Jonathan, here's your great-grandmother, Lee, your great-great-grandmother, Rose, and your great-great-great grandmother whose name we almost didn't know." Jonathan was confused by that last point. "Well," I said, "only your Uncle Alex was smart enough to find out her name." And of course Jonathan asked how that was possible. "Easy," I replied, "he took the photo out of the frame, turned it around and saw everybody's names!" You need one smart one in the family.

After a year-plus of few get-togethers, it was so wonderful to have this opportunity for our families. Howie's dad and step-mother flew up from Florida; his sister and her family came down from Buck's County; my cousin and Suzy's brother came up from Baltimore, and of course how great it was to have our children together once again.