

"Pete, we'll never do it. Norm, we'll do it!"

- Getting Credit Where Credit Was Due -

Peter Grumbacher - January 2022

Ours was the last class in which the students had a choice as to whether to study at the Jerusalem campus. From then on the first year of seminary studies was to take place in Israel, no exceptions. Suzy and I decided we would take the plunge. It was just a week after our wedding that we flew there so aside from a few days of a "normal" honeymoon preceding our flight, our "special" honeymoon was spent in what truly is a phenomenal city...Jerusalem.

But there was a problem. Before that newly established policy of "First Year in Jerusalem," a year of studies for which students received credit, those who chose to spend a year there did not receive credit. OK, some – very few – did; the rest of us did not. No one really knew why. In any case I was determined to complete my studies in five years, the usual time frame, but if I didn't receive credits I'd have to stay an additional year on the Cincinnati campus. It's not that I didn't enjoy the experience; I just wanted to be ordained with the people with whom I began the road to the rabbinate. And so I focused on how to achieve my goal. I convinced my classmate and friend Norman to join me in what I considered a crusade, if you'll pardon the mixed metaphor.

Now the registrar at the seminary was a very powerful individual. Her name was Mrs. Weiss if she didn't like you, Miriam if she did. She liked Norman and me and so we felt calm when we walked into her office. Of course we first made an appointment deciding early that everything we did had to reflect respect, sincerity and, of course, humility.

I was the spokesperson.

"Miriam, Norm and I would like credit for the year we spent in Israel," I said.

"Of course you would," Miriam replied. *"Everyone wants credit."*

"Well, how can we get credit?"

I remember vividly how she raised her eyes as if to say, "C'mon Peter, it's not going to happen." And then she said, *"C'mon Peter, it's not going to happen."*

"OK," I said, *"I understand. But Norm and I really want the credit. We studied hard and did well. So what might we do?"*

Again she raised her head, this time rolling her eyes. *"I'd kick you out if I didn't like you guys,"* she said. *"Look, if you can get past me, you'll have to get permission from the Dean."*

"And if we do....?"

“Well,” she responded, “you won’t. But if you do then you’d have to write to the faculty members who taught your classes and get their approval.”

Hmmmm, were we making progress?

“OK, thanks Miriam.”

“Let’s go, Norm.”

“Where are we going?”

“You heard Miriam. We’re going to Dean Roseman’s office.”

The dean had an open door policy. No appointment was necessary. If his door was open, just walk in. He was a nice enough guy, just a few years older than the two of us. But he was tough...no nonsense. A rule was a rule, PERIOD!

So I presented our wish; he laughed. *“Well, gentlemen, first you need to speak to Miriam Weiss.”* I was so excited. I purposefully chose not to tell him we already had.

“We did, Dean Roseman.”

“Really? What did she say?”

I stretched her points just a tiny bit.

“She said we’d just have to get your permission.” (Now note please, the key to this was the word “just.” It made it appear we had HER permission, and it would be easy-peasy to get his.) What the dean was going to do next could have been a major stumbling block, indeed the dramatic and sudden end of our plan. And a lot had to do with his language. We knew he’d call Miriam but what he asked her was very, very important.

“Hi Miriam, it’s Ken. I’ve got Grumbacher and Lipson in my office. They said you gave them your permission to pursue their getting credit for their year in Israel and that all they needed was mine.”

He did NOT ask, “Is that true?” T h a n k G o d ! Three words could have foiled the plot. You see for all intents and purposes it was true. It’s just that each one of us – Miriam, the dean, Norm and I – put a twist to our words, enough to make everything very nuanced (Well, Norm left the talking to me, but at every stage he said, *“Pete, we’ll never do it,”* and I would respond, *“Norm, we’ll do it.”*)

So thinking Miriam gave her full, heartfelt OK for us to pursue our dream, he said, *“Go back to Miriam and ask her what you have to do.”*

Now we had a dilemma: do we dare go back to Miriam who was very savvy to the wiles of her students and would smell a, shall we say, manipulation of words, a mile away? Or should we just write to the faculty members as she said would be the next step “if the dean gives his permission.” He never really gave his permission, at least not in writing, but, hey, at this point we couldn’t be picky. In

fact, asking for his permission in writing could have been dumb, dumb and dumber.

I told Norman that we'd have to plot this next step very carefully so as to separate Miriam and the dean's roles in our conspiracy from that of the Jerusalem professors. Macy's could NOT speak with Gimbel's under any circumstances!!!

For the next couple of days he and I thought out loud: how could we do this? Every idea we had was rejected by the other, and for good reason. We knew that the right way would "be revealed," but we couldn't be quick on the trigger (And by the way, that "be revealed" is something in which we liberal Jews don't believe, but that's another story).

OK, so this was our thought pattern....the dean of the Jerusalem campus was a wonderful man but he was a *luftmensch*, his head in the clouds, in his scholarship, in his books. The nitty-gritty, nuts-and-bolts of being a dean meant little to him. Well, it probably meant a lot. He just didn't know what it truly entailed since it wasn't in his DNA; his DNA would be squished by his PhD.

AND THAT'S WHAT WE WERE HOPING FOR. Our letter to him would be all important. We thought, "Maybe if we ask HIM to get the professors to agree to giving us credit he'll do it in a way of least resistance, least effort." That was a gamble for sure, but we thought it would be better than writing to each instructor who probably didn't remember us anyway. And if they didn't remember us why would they agree to give credit to easy-to-forget students!!

While we didn't ask Miriam specifics as to how to appeal to those professors, we figured what she doesn't know won't hurt, and unless she called us into her office to cause us pain and suffering, we weren't going to communicate with her. She knew our number...and she had our number! We were counting on the one thing of which we were certain....Miriam Weiss liked us a lot. Remember, she even said so!

Moving forward a month or so (there was no email back in '70), we almost forgot about our mission...almost, but not completely. Norm said a number of times, "*Pete, we'll never do it.*" And I'd respond, "*Norm, we'll do it.*"

We did it!!! Miriam called us in. Incredulously she said, "*I don't know how you did it, but the Jerusalem dean wrote us and 'enthusiastically' agreed to give us credit.*" Of course he wrote "enthusiastically." We had written such unbelievable bullshit gambling on the belief he wouldn't know a Lipson from a Grumbacher, a Jerusalem artichoke from a Jerusalem stone. OK, so it was overstating a little, but we never lied in what we had written (actually, it was overstating A LOT!).

And as we walked down the aisle of the majestic synagogue on June 3, 1972, I heard from a few yards behind and to the right of me, "*Pete, we'll never do it.*" And he heard, "*Norm, we did it!*"