

# Ingrid's childhood Pesach memories

Contributed by [Miriam Shaviv](#)

**Source:** Ingrid Rockberger

The Seder night when the ceiling collapsed....

We were having seder night at Auntie Kit's (136 Hendon Way) circa 1974...and in the usual Cohen tradition, the men were at one end of the table, the women at the other. (No one will admit it but this was because the women liked to natter, rather than follow the seder service.)

Melissa, then about 3, was sitting next to me. As the seder service progressed and the usual discussions ensued as to when you lift the cup of wine, when you uncover the matzot etc according to the different haggadot, Melissa whispered to me, "Mum, the ceiling's falling down". She said this two or three times. "Yes dear," I probably said, seeing the Cohen/Schneider creativity moving to the next generation.

I think we were up to the egg and salt water when, as if the waters of the Red Sea had parted, the ceiling did indeed collapse - on to the seder table... bringing with it a deluge of water.

The cause - a burst pipe in the central heating system in the bedroom above!

Pesach at Powis Gardens

Every year my Booba made two seder nights for the whole family (22 people). She would not accept any help from anyone and she made two delicious meals with no modern appliances - no electric mixers, food processors, blenders etc etc. I can still visualize her hacking the chopped liver with an antique chopper.

Preparations for pesach began several weeks before when she started to make her famous raisin wine in a wooden barrel in the backyard (Don't ask about the hygiene - but we all lived to tell the tale, even the year it was attacked by worms!). The second barrel was for pickling cucumbers - nothing tasted better than dipping your hand in the slimy pickling liquid and coming out with a big fat cucumber...

Grandpa sat at the top of the table in a white kittel and supported by two enormous cushions, and conducted the seder service. Uncle Ron sat on one side of him and one of the sons-in-law on the other side. The men sat at the top of the table, with the grandchildren (9 until Barry came along to make it 10) scattered along and the women at the far end. Booba always sat on the piano stool with her magnifying glass reading her own book (I don't know if it was even a haggada - she was in her own world). She would jump up when someone would call out, "Mum, time for the meal!" There were the usual discussions on which order we should eat the maror, the charoset (of course she made it herself as well) and the matzot.

We grandchildren were all very close in age so when we were old enough to do the Ma Nishtana, we all took a turn to great applause, standing on our chair. Finally, it was left to Kenny (the youngest) and he was thrilled when Barry was born - and couldn't wait until Barry could take over from him.

There was usually family gossip around the table with the sisters usually criticizing

'sister-in-law' (Paul will translate). Dooks was always a little 'on the side' (mainly because the Fentons lived in Streatham) but my mum, Jean and Kit were a formidable and inseparable trio! I do remember – and I think it was the same night as the ceiling falling in – that Jean and Mum were muttering about Kit serving the chopped liver on what they thought were milchig plates...

Some years we did not attend both nights, as we went to the 'other side of the family' – which meant schlepping down to Stamford Hill – usually to the Grossmans.

Just a word about the songs....some were sung two or three times as the 'sons in law' had different tunes – or we did each verse in another tune. There were various traditions – Cousin Peter always did a strong rendering of Had Gadya and Cousin Barbara punctuated various songs with appropriate animal noises.

One other thing I remember (for now) when we came to the part of the service with all those 'As it was said"....She'ne'emar...my father would always say that in a loud voice, to emphasise – that was tradition!

After Booba died Ron, Jean, Kit and Mum took it in turns to make two the sedarim every year.

BARRY ADDS: My memory of the ceiling story is that Melissa was tired and had gone to lie down on the settee in the lounge. It was there she saw the bulge in the ceiling and when said she cd see drips of water, we thought she was imagining it through over tiredness. It then cascaded in the lounge after uncle Nat thought it would be sensible to prick the bulge!

PAUL ADDS: I cannot remember EVER going to Stamford Hill for Seder... inconceivable that we would not go to the "family" ( = the Cohens!) in Powis Gardens.

Powis gardens -- the seders (pronounced "Ciders") were indeed memorable. How can you miss out Uncle Laurie's animated (in every association of the word) renderings of the songs????? Or the year when Auntie Kit brought all the kids Easter Eggs as a Pesach present? Or Uncle Ron's annual explanation of why we eat eggs in salt water at the seder, which I won't repeat here in case any grandchildren ever read this (it had to do with crossing the Red Sea)? Never mind about Booba chopping the liver -- she also used to buy chickens whole and degut them and clean them herself. I remember the intestines all over the kitchen.

I have to say that even though those seders were certainly shorter (the only discussion being "How many pages to the meal?"), they seemed much, much longer.

I also remember - for some reason - a row one year (actually there were rows every year) when Cousin Peter found a misprint in some old Haggadah - it said 'The Almighty' instead of 'the Almighty' - and started yelling 'The Almig-thy took us out of Egypt - it was the Al-migthy! The Al-migthy" and wouldn't shut up until Uncle Ron swore at him. Then

Kate and Nate (as they were known) waded in to protect Peter's honour. "Leave him alone". Can't remember what happened next. We probably served the meal.....

*Sic transit gloria!*