

Afikoman

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The prize for finding the afikoman in my house was 5 dollars.

To put this in context, the starting pay for chores at the age of five was a nickel and this rate was raised five cents every birthday.

This means that finding the wrapped up piece of shmura matzo was equivalent to anywhere from 6 months to just under 2 years salary.

Needless to say, this was a coveted reward.

My brother won this purse every year for the first seven years of his life. Unimpeded by siblings, finding the afikoman was merely a formality to the end of the seder. This was until I turned 2, and could walk. Granted, there was a five year age difference

between us, but my parents allowed me a handicap. As a toddler, not only was I given a head start, but the adults gently 'guided me' in the direction of the 'hidden napkin' glaringly dangling out of the couch cushion right in front of my face. Some years my brother didn't even get to look. As I got older, and my motor skills more advanced, the competition became fierce. My father took great joy in the hiding. My mother who didn't want the house destroyed came up with two simple rules: 1) It could not be in the entertainment center, the dining room, the kitchen, any of the bedrooms, the bathrooms, the garage, or any cabinets and 2) We were not to make a mess, everything had to be cleaned up. What this amounted to was my brother and I gingerly walking around the living room, gently sorting through magazines and under tables. My brother, being the smarter of the two of us, took a detective-like approach to this endeavor. Before looking, he would rule out the places that it couldn't be based on where it had been hidden in years past. Then he would systematically go about the living room removing objects one by one. I however had a much more opportunistic strategy. I would pretend to look for the afikoman very close by him. Right when he found it, I would lunge and seize it, flailing it about in the air, exclaiming victory. With no referee (my parents were in the other room talking to their friends) it was his word against mine and as the younger of two I always got my way.

By the time my sister came into the picture the finding of the afikoman had been split into two age categories. Uninterested in winning Beanie Babies, I opted out of the 'ten and under' search. He may have won it now and a gain, I might have even let him have a few, but for the most part when it came to Passover I was ten dollars richer. The money was of course inevitably squandered on the two vices we were denied: junk food and video games.