

The Adventures of Eric by Harry Friedland

We were at our cousin's house for a big family gathering for shabbat supper. It was being held in their beautiful garden and the sun was already down as we drank in the cool evening air after a hot Cape Day.

Ariella, my littlest granddaughter, was aware of my penchant for collecting rocks and stones. So, she comes up to me holding out a stone - an ordinary brown common-or-garden piece of Table Mountain sandstone - saying, "Oupa, look what I found!"

I said, "That, Ariella, is - (thinking quickly) - "that is Eric". "Eric the Rock"

Solemnly she holds the stone to her chest and regards it carefully for a second or two. "Eric" she repeats. Then she proffers it to me again.

"Tell me about Eric" she says.

"Well, Eric lives on the mountain" I begin...

"Does he have a family?"

"Yes of course he has a family."

"A mummy and daddy?"

"Of course,"

"And two sisters?"

"Sure"

You can see what's going on here. Eric the Rock lives in a family which is starting to bear a resemblance to her own. And why not? All rocks do that, don't they?

And thus began the amazing tale of the escapades of Eric the Rock. But it wasn't my tale - it was hers. All I did was provide the briefest framework and she filled in the details with great enthusiasm. Her eyes shone and her expression was earnest. She gestured, rock in hand, to illustrate Eric going here and Eric going there; Eric in school; Eric in a deep dark forest; Eric fighting with his sister; now Eric has a cold; and now he's well again.

Eric the Rock, had a full life, without a single prop. All I had to do was ask a question, give a hint, point the narrative in a particular direction, and her imagination would go careening off on a new adventure.

I told her that there were musicians in England called *The Rolling Stones* and Eric sang a song.

I told her there was music called Rock'n'roll, and Eric, the Rock, rolled all over the patio.

I told her there was an actor in America called *The Rock*, and Eric suddenly developed huge muscles and caught bad guys.

And all she held in her hand was a very ordinary stone.

Ariella is a five-year-old from the high-tech land of Israel. If she had been any older, she would have been too worldly-wise and blasé to allow herself to be led like this, with a simple stone. But she trusts me, and she is prepared to suspend her disbelief for just long enough to go with this silly little tale: and in doing so, she gets to stretch her imagination just a little bit more than she might otherwise have done - and she entertains herself. And the story wasn't some pre-digested rubbish generated by the cocaine-stoked minds of the entertainment industry: it was hand-crafted, as it were: she made it herself.

Perhaps, one day, she'll write something...

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