

The Friday Night Coup by Leon Moss

I was edged out on Friday evening. The carefully planned operation was carried out by grandson number 2, the one with the red hair. "Move over, Pop. I'll do it," said the nine-year old firmly as he prodded me in the ribs with a sharp elbow.

It's like this. I say the Friday night Kiddush. I have been saying it since my barmitzvah. I say it every Friday night. Winter and summer. With or without the book. Sitting, standing or even pacing, if necessary. I can say it backwards, sideways and upside down. I can say it faultlessly with the lights on or off. I can say it quickly or I can shlep it out and turn it into quite a performance. When I say that I "say" it, I actually mean I "sing" it.

I began reciting the Kiddush on the first Friday night after my Barmitzvah, when my own grandfather, who had been saying it since *his* Barmitzvah, called me to his side.

"You say it from now on, my boy," he said in his Lithuanian/Irish/South African accent as he thankfully shoved the book into my hands. I could swear I heard him sigh with relief at his own words. Grandfather, short and secular, visited the synagogue three days a year. He would walk in solemnly, put on his talit, open his book and follow the service. He would read it faithfully to the end and heave a long sigh when it ended.

"Don't forget the tune." He added after I had taken hold of the book. The tune wasn't much. Over the years it has degenerated into a toneless drone, which lasts all of a minute and comes to an abrupt end when the guests yell "Amen" with enthusiasm, their eyes already on the chicken soup which in defiance of the Passover tradition, usually had matzo balls floating in it.

As for the book -it has long passed its sell-by-date although the prayers are the same as they were hundreds of years ago. There's not much left of the book, either. Front and back covers with a selection of dog-eared, tattered pages in between.

Last Friday evening was like any other. The family was assembled, all hungry and waiting to bite into the Shabbat special, anxious small grandchildren milling around, wondering what the delay was all about. Teenage grandchildren were silently urging the Friday night ritual to get a move on because their friends were waiting for them outside. Finally silence descends and I fill the battered old silver family kiddush-cup with grape juice and pick up the book. I don't need it but I always hold it, just in case. It flops open automatically on page 124, as it has done countless times before. I draw a breath but before I can utter a sound, I get the elbow.

I look down and there stands the redhead, beaming with confidence. He has learned to read at school and can't wait to demonstrate his newly acquired skills. And demonstrate he does. He reads through the Kiddush almost without drawing breath, hardly stumbling over the strange and difficult

words. I thought back to the days when I had started and remembered with embarrassment how I had stammered and stuttered my way through it the first few times.

Even more aggravating is the fact that grandson clearly understands a lot of what he was reading. For my first twenty years or so, I was convinced the prayer was written in Mesopotamian or ancient Egyptian, so foreign did it sound. Only after Hebrew became our adopted language did things clear. For grandson, born into the Hebrew language, most of the words have meaning.

My first reaction at this domestic coup was one of pride. No one in the family ever undertook such an important role until after his Barmitzvah, but that was in the old country.

I wonder what grandfather would think at this change in the family tradition of waiting until “after Barmitzvah”.

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Yoni and Kiddush

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