

HEALTH, FAMILY, & FERMENTATION: SEVEN ESSAYS

by

Michael Stein
A Thesis
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of
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in Partial Fulfillment of
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of
Master of Fine Arts
Creative Writing

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Health, Family, & Fermentation: Seven Essays

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at George Mason University

by

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DEDICATION

The following collection of essays is dedicated to my ancestors, grandparents Murdock, Roy, Stein, and Kveton. For the ancestors I love though we have never met, may your story be told again and may you come alive on the page. To Josef and Zofie, to Antonin and Zdenka. The dedication extends further to Antoine Roy, the first to leave and the first to call America home.

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ABSTRACT

HEALTH, FAMILY, & FERMENTATION: SEVEN ESSAYS

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George Mason University, 2013

Thesis Director: Dr. Stephen H. Goodwin

What do Czech heritage, beer, and diabetes have in common? They are all inside me. No, not all the time, but I'll be diabetic until there is a cure. As a result of a trip to Prague and with the help of a Czech historian, we have traced the Stein family back to the 18th century. And, beer is a subject that I simply *must* write about.

Last semester a professor of fiction asked me, "if your last name was Shot would you write about whiskey?" He said it offhandedly, though seriously because many of my fiction assignments, or "pastiche," were written around beer. They were scenes about brewers, people in European fields harvesting hops, and an immigrant looking over a body of water, the Potomac, that would inevitably be used in his brewing. It was hard for me to write about anything else, though I did end the semester by creating a piece of fiction about my great grandmother who had perished in the Nazi-run Czech concentration camp, Terezin.

In the following collection of seven essays I write about beer, health, genealogy

and its intersection with history and religion. My first essay *Bohemia*, is a chronicling of Czech lands and four generations of Steins, with religion and history providing the backdrop. Where *Bohemia* charts the course of religion back to the 9th century, the second essay *Crossing the Vltava*, is a peek into the lives of my grandfather, my father, and myself. The third piece, *Knock on the Cellar Door*, is a narrative of creative nonfiction; it also focuses on the lives of my father and grandmother who survived the Nazi occupation of Prague. *Zofie* is an essay about my great grandmother, the first and only known diabetic in the Stein family. *My Type 1* is another essay that deals with diabetes, particularly with my kind of diabetes, type 1 insulin-dependant diabetes. *Hops to Save The Day* traces the history of the first production brewery in the District of Columbia in the 21st century. Finally, *The Quest for Heurich's Lager* is my quest as a homebrewer and beer historian to recreate DC's indigenous drink, returning to the influence of Bohemia on DC's beer.

BOHEMIA

Last spring I had lunch at the Café Savoy with Peter Brod, a historian, journalist, and Chief of the Prague office for the BBC. I had come to Prague in search of the Stein family history. My hope was that a visit to the National Archives and many informal interviews would reveal all I did not know. What I *did* know was that my grandfather, Viktor, had survived Terezin, the Nazi controlled concentration camp in Czechoslovakia, and my great grandfather, Josef, was a Bohemian grain merchant.

As it turned out, Brod's parents, like my father's parents, had a mixed marriage. Brod had a Jewish father and a gentile mother. He possesses a wealth of knowledge about Czech history, political affairs, and Anti-Semitism in Europe. Like my father, he was born in Prague so I felt a connection to him through our similarities.

The Café Savoy, built in 1893 in La Belle Époque style, was and still is one of the finest cafés in Prague. Royalty could, and once probably did, hold court in this café. My ancestors weren't kings, but they were Bohemian subjects and citizens. My great grandparents were Bohemians under the Habsburg monarchy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Then, from 1918-1938, they were Bohemians in Czechoslovakia. Then, from 1939-1945, my father and grandparents were Bohemians in the Nazi "Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia."

Although I was an American in the Bohemian city of Prague, I felt that this café in this city was where the Steins belonged. Of course it was much easier for me to exist in the space as a Stein, even though not Bohemian by birth—than it was for my grandfather or great grandfather. Others—not Bohemians—had for generations used this café. Some—Communists, Nazis—were intent on obliterating the history I had come to seek.

We sat under an ornate ceiling, lined with gold crown molding, scalloped shells, and radiant chandeliers. Brod revealed to me that during forty years of Communist Party rule, the Savoy was the meeting place for high-ranking party members and their guests. At the Savoy, party leaders installed a system of listening devices to spy on each other and on the men in trench coats from Moscow, Leningrad, and other easterly parts of the Soviet block. This system of microphones was hidden in a dropped ceiling which covered the original one. A number of years after the “velvet revolution” of 1989, when the Communist Party lost power, workers uncovered the original grandeur of the gilded ceiling which I saw when I met Peter Brod last spring.

I was in Prague so I ordered pork frankfurters with house-made horseradish and mustard, and washed it down with a Pilsner. Brod ordered wiener schnitzel and a glass of Diet Coke. He pierced his lemon wedge with his fork and squeezed its pulp into a hexagonal glass.

Coincidentally, Brod is the name of the village where my Jewish great grandfather lived. Josef Stein lived on Jan Hus Square in the village of Český Brod. Brod told me that his was a very common name, not just for Czechs, but also for Slovaks.

He revealed that Český Brod is not to be confused with Deutschbrod; the former was the Czech village, while the latter was a village that Germans settled, in the 12th century, to mine silver.

Brod told me how fluid these regional boundaries were as generations of people, sometimes entire families of aunts, uncles and cousins traveled back and forth across the borders. The “Bohemian Revolt” of 1618-1621, really more of a war, exacerbated the uprooting of communities. It is now considered the beginning of the Thirty Years’ War, a war between Catholics and Protestants, which drove many Bohemians into Germany.

My eyes lit up when Brod spoke of a Czech political and religious history that was, in his words, “undocumented.” After Papal crusaders squashed the Bohemian revolt, many Protestants refused to convert to Roman Catholicism and moved north to more Protestant-friendly lands. However, some Protestants refused to move and refused to convert to Catholicism. So they chose Judaism and invented new, Jewish, surnames.

Brod said they took nouns and adjectives as needed. They created names like “Goldberg,” gold mountain, “Silberstein,” silver stone, or “Schonblum,” beautiful flower. This was a fascinating piece of history which I had never heard.

Depending on the century, religious groups, Protestants, Catholics, or Jews, were being driven from Czech lands into German lands or had fled due to the political climate. I was discovering that Czech and German history was intertwined. What once was black and white was now gray.

I knew that as a child my father saw German Nazis on the streets and in the tramcars of occupied Prague. The fact that some of these Nazis might have been Bohemians boggled my mind.

The conversations I had with Brod and other Czech historians felt like the uncovering of the original ceiling of the Café Savoy. My family's Bohemian background had not been covered up or forgotten, but the identity had been close to destruction several times throughout history.

B is for Bohemia, once a Kingdom, where my father, grandfather, and great grandfather, were born. This historical region holds Prague, called the golden city, twice the seat of the Holy Roman Empire under Charles IV and Rudolf II.

Today, Prague is the capitol of the Czech Republic, a parliamentary democracy incorporating two historical districts Bohemia and Moravia. The history of Czech Jewry is a lengthy one and the more I investigated it, the more I became aware of its overlap with the history of Catholicism and Christianity in the Czech lands.

By the time my great grandfather moved to Prague, in 1909, he was able to live outside Prague's Josefov slum. Before his time, Jews had been made to live in Jewish-only areas, ghettos. Anti-Semitism was widespread in Europe throughout the dark and Middle Ages. Governmental policies and the teachings of the church warned Christians of the Jews. From time to time raging Anti-Semitism would flare up and result in

pogroms—a Russian word which means wreaking havoc or demolishing violently.

Pogroms allowed the beating and murdering of Jews.

In Prague's Jewish ghetto of Josefov, Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel created the mythic Golem, a staple of Jewish folklore. The Golem is commonly depicted as a massive clay creature. The Golem's physical existence and his creator's birth year are disputed. However, historians acknowledge Rabbi Loew was a real Rabbi and his death date is recorded on a tombstone in Prague's old Jewish Cemetery as 1609.

You may be unfamiliar with the Golem but you likely know Adam. First mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, Adam is arguably the best-known Golem. The concept of the Golem is likened to an embryo, imperfect matter. God's would-be man was first a lump of human clay—or imperfect matter.

The *need* for Rabbi Loew's creation grew out of a long-standing European Anti-Semitism. One of the most disturbing charges against Jews was blood libel. Throughout Europe Jews were accused of stealing Christian children so their blood could be used in religious practices. Rabbi Loew created the Golem—so the story goes—to right the wrongs experienced by the Jewish community and to watch over Jewish children and adults to prevent their annihilation.

One version of the myth has the Golem going berserk and killing innocent Christians until Emperor Rudolf promised to end Jewish persecution. Another version has the Emperor himself as ruler over the Golem. The truth of the matter is that Rabbi Loew *was* in fact permitted an audience with Emperor Rudolf II—but what they discussed

remains a mystery. Unfortunately, anti-Semitism continued and reached its zenith in the Holocaust where more than 150,000 Czech Jews were murdered.

When I was a decade old, in 1994, I made my first trip to the golden city. My family and I arrived at Václav Havel Airport and were watched by Czech guards holding M16s. As a child, it didn't faze me. I knew my GI Joe's were much more heavily armed.

When we got to Prague I scoured the Charles Bridge and Wenceslas Square looking for toy soldiers. What I took to be Knights of the Roundtable were actually Hussite Infantry, 15th century Czech soldiers who fought against the Papal crusaders. They picked up arms for their leader, church reformer Jan Hus. This was a half-century before Martin Luther. Hus was convicted as a heretic at the Council of Constance and was martyred as he burnt on the stake in 1415.

As a child I did not know that 25 kilometers away stood the Stein residence in the town of Český Brod. No. 62 Jan Hus Square, was the birthplace of my grandfather, great aunts and uncle.

I spent all afternoon walking around Wenceslas Square dragging my parents from vendor to vendor. Throughout the day and into the early hours of the evening, one figure constantly stood out. He was bigger and beefier than the knights, closer to The Hulk in shape and size. It was the Golem, the mythic, massive creature. Tucked away in a desk drawer, I still have my copper Golem. The Hussite soldiers I once owned are long gone but over the years I have gained an understanding of their context in the history of Bohemia. I have also gained previously unknown chapters in the Stein family narrative.

The history of the Steins is full of brave men and women who just like the Hussites I will never meet.

O is for ostracize. To ostracize the Jews, the Nazi's drafted and implemented the Nuremberg laws in 1935. Christians who bought goods from or sold to Jews assimilated with them. This kind of trade became illicit. Other means of assimilation like marriage was now illegal. The union that my family created, the marriage of my Catholic grandmother to my Jewish grandfather was barely a year old before it was against the law throughout Germany.

According to the Nuremberg laws, any person with three or four Jewish grandparents was a Jew. A "mischling" was anyone with one or two Jewish grandparents. **Mischlinge** were half-breeds, non-Aryans, those of impure stock. Though they were really innocent children, boys like my father and Peter Brod.

Viktor, my grandfather, was forced to sweep the streets. Or build roads. Or maybe even forced by the Nazis to show them how to use his bent wood factory, which was confiscated. "Standard," Viktor's factory, produced skis, cribs, tennis rackets, and rocking chairs. The factory owner was now doing public works.

Was my grandfather's factory used to make stakes, rifle butts, and barricades for the Reich? Did the Nazis torture him? I may never have answers to these questions.

My research in the Czech National archives turned up no information on Viktor's forced labor. The years 1939-1945, the period of German occupation, were noticeably absent in my grandfather's file.

It is well documented that forced labor crews were made up of Jewish men and Christian men married to Jewish women. My father, though very young, remembers long periods of time where his father would go missing throughout the war. His mother would tell him, “your father’s away on a business trip,” but there was no business to be done. The Nuremberg laws had made doing business with Jews illegal.

Further ostracizing, Nazis forced Jews to do grueling work. The intensive physical labor was carried out both inside and out of the camps. These people, many middle class family men, were hard workers accustomed to the ups and downs of a business day in Prague. Yet the hardest day as a businessman was still easier than the work they were now forced to do. Building, breaking, and reconstructing, without rights or compensation, it was the work of a chain gang.

When I think of my grandfather being forced to wear the Star of David, I think of a unique time in world history, the Holocaust. Those who study history will tell you, the physical identification of Jews in public was nothing new in Europe.

Throughout Germanic Europe during medieval times the Judenhut, a long hat which came to a point, was required so Jews could be singled out. In 14th Century Rome Jews were ordered to wear Red robes. And under Edward I in 13th Century England Jews were required to wear yellow yokes or cloth.

The Fourth Council of the Lateran headed by Pope Innocent III ruled that Jews and Muslims had to identify themselves by dress. This was necessary throughout Christian Europe. In 1215 the council wrote, “it happens at times that through error Christians have relations with the women of Jews or Saracens, and Jews and Saracens

with Christian women. Therefore, that they may not, under pretext of error of this sort, excuse themselves in the future for the excesses of such prohibited intercourse, we decree that such Jews and Saracens of both sexes in every Christian province and at all times shall be marked off in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress.”

From this council Jewish dress was outlined. How else would the angry mob identify the appropriate recipients of the beating?

Of course a rule is just a rule until there is enforcement. Throughout these societies, enforcement was the best way to gauge a country’s xenophobia towards Jews. When my Grandfather married my Grandmother in 1934, the country of Czechoslovakia was 16-years-old. Though only a teenager, Czechoslovakia held great promise for the assimilation of Jews and Catholics. With the rise of Nazism this all changed.

Viktor stayed out of a concentration camp until 1945. His marriage to my Catholic grandmother made him less of a priority than the 6 million Jews who first faced ostracization, then deportation, and eventually murder, for being non-Aryans.

My grandfather survived his imprisonment in Terezin, but his mother, brother, sisters, brothers-in-law, and sister-in-law were killed in the Auschwitz and Maly Trostinec death camps.

My father and grandmother came to New York in 1948 and Viktor followed in 1951. I can only imagine the ostracization my grandfather felt. In his life he went from assimilation to interment.

Last year I uncovered some of his photographs, of Terezin, that looked to be from May, 1945, the time of the camp's liberation. One photo had a train full of inmates, presumably headed back home, on an overcrowded train car. The inscription on the back was what I can only describe as very dark humor. The caption was in German and the words read, "Back to Germany - Nazism beaten up - viva anti-Semitism."

H is for hops, little climbers that grow in most beer-brewing nations. The female flowers of the seed cones are what can give beer a biting bitterness or a pleasant perfume.

Czechs drink the most beer per person in the world. I'd like to say Bohemians drink the most beer in the world but that would leave out Moravia, the other half of today's Czech Republic. If today were the reign of Charles the IV, I would be correct. Under Charles IV Czech lands were known as the Kingdom of Bohemia, as well as Luxembourg, and Nuremberg, Germany, which was then known as New Bohemia.

The first document in German history that mentions the use of hops for beer can be traced to 822 AD. There are other sources that put German hop cultivation as far back as 736, predating the spread of Christianity to Czech Lands, which took hold in the 9th century.

Saaz are the most famous Czech hops though Saaz is actually a German word. Saaz, or Saazer, denotes in German where the Czech hops are grown. The Czech town is called Žatec, but like most Czech words that spill into American English, the German is better known.

It is Plzeň, the town in Bohemia, which lends its name to the most widely brewed beer style across the globe: Pilsner. Most Americans are probably more familiar with the spelling P-I-L-S-N-E-R. The “er” suffix is how Germans note where their beer is from. Pilsner is brewed in Plzeň.

Budweis, the German name for the town of České Budějovice, is where Budweiser was first brewed. Of course the Budweiser most readers are familiar with is very different than the beer that is brewed in Budweis, or České Budějovice, today.

These small Czech towns turn out massive amounts of pale lager. Pilsner was supposed to be an Appellation d'origine controlée or controlled designation of origin; the high quality of pilsner beer was designated by its specific location. The taste of the other pilsners, brewed around the world, would make Czechs angry if they were served these beers in the pubs of Plzeň.

Plzeň is 15 miles smaller than the District of Columbia but houses many more breweries than America's capital. If beer affected lives as profoundly as politics, Plzeň would replace Prague as the Czech capital. And if politics could bring people together, the way beer does, the world might never know another war.

Czechs will tell you it is the marriage of Moravian malt and Bohemian hops that make the best beer in the world—Pilsner Urquell. Urquell translates to source, both the source of pure water for the beer and the source of the world's first pilsner. When I've witnessed Czechs wax philosophic in the pub, they might have included water in their conversation, but they are sure to leave out yeast. And without water, hops, barley *and* yeast, there is no Pilsner.

There is a longstanding myth surrounding Josef Groll, a German, and the first brewer at Pilsner Urquell. As is stated in the *Oxford Companion to Beer* on page 409, “Groll smuggled a Bavarian lager yeast across the border.”

The story is interesting and perhaps heightens the seriousness of beer, a generally light-hearted subject, but it doesn't add up. A friend of mine, an American expat writer named Evan Rail, who lives in Prague, has attempted to set the story straight.

He writes, “I have heard it implied more than once that the burghers of Pilsen took advantage of the original brewmaster from Bavaria, Josef Groll, hiring him to set up the brewery and then sending him away once they had acquired his Bavarian beer-making mojo.”

He consulted the source's source, the chronicle of the Burgher Brewery in Pilsen 1842-1892. By doing so he proved the *Oxford Companion* wrong.

Rail writes that the founders of Pilsner Urquell had paid for yeast from a Bavarian brewery. There is no mention of smuggling anywhere in the document. The myth that the Bohemians smuggled Bavarian yeast was finally dispelled in 2011. The truth had been sitting in the Pilsner Urquell archive in Pilsen since 1892.

Pilsner has a cameo appearance in the life of Adolf Hitler. After the German Army occupied Bohemia, Hitler spent one night in Prague Castle. It is rumored that that evening in the castle, Hitler drank beer, not any beer, but Pilsner Urquell.

Robert Payne, author of *The Life and Death of Adolf Hitler* gets into the widely believed claims that Hitler never smoked, drank, ate meat, or fraternized with women.

Payne believes only the first to be true, citing Eva Braun, Hitler's companion, as the source.

In this biography Payne claims that Hitler drank diluted wine and beer, frequently. He writes of Hitler's fondness for Bavarian sausages. Ultimately, Payne believes that the myth of a man, who abstained from women, beer, and bratwurst, was a creation of Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister of Propaganda.

French author Laurent Binet develops this theme in his recent book, *Himmlers Hirn heisst Heydrich*, or *Himmler's brain is called Heydrich*. The novel is a work of historical fiction. On page 97 Binet writes, "Heydrich (while in Prague Castle with Hitler) can't help noticing that the Fuhrer eats a slice of ham and drinks Pilsner Urquell, the most famous Czech beer—Hitler, who is teetotaler and vegetarian. He keeps saying that Czechoslovakia has ceased to exist, and no doubt he wishes to mark the historic importance of this day—March 15, 1939—by departing from his usual eating habits."

E is for ephemeral. The history of Jews in Bohemia is ephemeral: for every gift granted by an emperor, a turn of events snatched it away. In 1341 King John of Bohemia permitted Jewish families to reside within the walls of Budweis, or České Budějovice. By 1380 a synagogue was erected. With the freedom of open religious practice one would think tolerance continued to flourish. However, by the 1389, a pogrom in Prague resulted in the murder of 3,000 Bohemian Jews. Many had sought refuge within the walls of the Altneu Synagogue, which was made of stone and could not be burned, but, tragically, it

did not save them. As one survivor, Rabbi Avigdor Kara, recalled, “It was... a sacrifice of innocents, of innocent lambs.”

Great grandfather achieved economic security though it was ephemeral during his children’s lifetimes.

Incredible developments transpired in Josef’s time; Jews grew from a small, persecuted group, to an accepted minority in many parts of Bohemia. For example, in 1724 three Jewish families lived in the Český Brod area. By 1890, 200 Jews comprised the religious congregation of Český Brod- Pr

Council shows he paid the second largest sum of membership dues. Only one other member contributed more crowns than Josef.

In 1909 Josef moved his business to Prague and in 1914 the entire Stein family moved there. Years later Josef was generous enough to gift four apartments in the golden city to his children. The 1930 census shows that the Stein family still owned house number 62 on the Jan Hus Square in Český Brod. But the Stein family lived in Prague until the German occupation.

After graduating from business school, Josef's son Viktor found work as a bank clerk. He later became a producer of sports equipment and eventually owned a factory.

Viktor started his own business in 1926, which was originally a shop with sports equipment, most of it imported from France. Later he opened a bent wood factory just outside Prague, primarily producing tennis rackets. During World War II, the Nazis confiscated the factory. Viktor entered the Terezin concentration camp in February 1945, which he survived. The camp was liberated in May 1945.

Following the war, the government appointed him "national trustee" of his own factory. He then became the head of an import-export company, Drusport. He was fined twice for selling goods too expensive, once in 1947 and once again in 1949. In 1949, following this harassment by the new Communist government, he was able to leave the country.

M is for Moravia, the other half of the Czech Republic. Bohemia is the western half and Moravia is the eastern half. Bohemia borders Germany, Moravia borders Poland

to the north and the country of Slovakia to the south. In theory one could walk south from Moravia to Hungary with a left foot in Slovakia and a right foot in Austria. This geography is testament to the interconnectedness of the people who have lived in Czech lands.

If Prague in Bohemia is the golden city, Brno in Moravia might be called the silver city—it is the second largest city in the Czech Republic. Whereas Prague is closer to Germany, Brno is closer to Slovakia. Geographically Moravia is closer to Poland and the historically Moravians consider themselves more Slavic than Germanic. Interestingly enough, the first Bohemians were actually Moravians.

Historical documents from the 9th century reveal the Moravian conversion to Christianity. This is a bit inaccurate for Christianity existed within Bohemia and Moravia prior, but it was the arrival of Saints Cyril and Methodius that solidified the conversion. They converted the gospels into what today is called Old Church Slavonic.

Byzantine Christian brothers, Cyril and Methodius, arrived in 863. It is important to note that the brothers were Greeks from Byzantium. They were not Roman. The noteworthy thing about the Greek brothers is that they were closer to the easterly Constantinople than Catholic Rome. This was an early sign that Great Moravia would not easily take to Roman Catholicism. At this time Rome was more closely aligned with the German Frankish Kings and Great Moravia was an ugly gosling that would not neatly get in the gaggle.

The irascible Moravians were difficult to rope into Roman Catholicism. This struggle continued throughout the centuries and many religious writers who took issue with Rome found wide audiences in Czech lands.

Charles University, founded in 1348, has a crest that reveals a kneeling Emperor Charles IV, King of the Romans, King of Bohemia. The academic year 1402-1403 saw Jan Hus, an ordained priest become rector of Charles University.

It didn't take long for him to introduce some heady doctrine to his students. He had already translated the controversial English reformer John Wycliffe. In 1406 he read from his pulpit a eulogy for Wycliffe. After Wycliffe, Hus is generally considered the first church reformer.

Like Wycliffe, Hus wanted the scriptures to be available to his people in their native language, what is today Czech. The Roman Catholic Church took issue with this. Most churchgoers were illiterate and the likelihood of the congregation understanding Latin was low. For his belief that Mass and religious texts should be written in Czech, Hus was pegged as a radical.

Hus was convicted as a heretic at the Council of Constance, and was burned at the stake in 1415. This led to his followers becoming adamant anti-Roman Catholics. From 1419 to 1434 five Papal Crusades of the Holy Roman Empire were ordered against Bohemia, each one directed at the Hussites.

In the end, Catholic Crusaders never defeated the Hussite armies. The decisive Hussite defeat came at the battle of Česky Brod at the hands of other Hussites in 1434.

Like the Jews, the Hussites experienced much religious persecution. The Jews favored the Hussites to the Catholics as the Hussites likened the Roman Catholic Church to the Antichrist. This was completely different than the depiction, popular throughout the medieval times, of Jews as Antichrist.

The Hussites respected the Jews for they were the children of the Book and once received divine revelation. While researching this oft-forgotten chapter of Czech history I was surprised to find that the Jewish surnames, Brod, Dub, Jelinek, Kafka, Kuranda, and Pacovsky had all once belonged to the followers of Jan Hus.

The religious persecution the Hussites faced must have been *really* bad to choose a conversion to Judaism over Catholicism or emigration. Perhaps these conversions to Judaism came simply because these people were the stubborn offspring of generations disloyal to Rome. I wonder if somewhere amongst the self-proclaimed “warriors of God” there was a Stein?

Because they wanted to align themselves closely to the Bible, the last Hussite stronghold in 1434 was called Zion. For centuries after the Hussite wars, the last of the Hussites, Moravians or Bohemian Brethren, had been hiding underground in northern Moravia.

It would be another 300 years before a small group of Moravians emigrated to America, to the colony of Pennsylvania. On Christmas Eve, 1741, a small group of Moravians settled on a riverbank and founded Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

I is for independence. Today, Prague is the Capital of the Czech Republic, which has a parliamentary democracy, a government run by the people through their elected representatives. And today the Czech Republic is a member of the European Union. Yet independence has always been a struggle for this small land-locked country often called “the heart of Europe.”

The Republic, established with the support of the United States in 1918, allied itself with France and Britain, the major democracies in Europe between the two world wars. But when the Nazis came to power in Germany, these “allies” did not protect Czechoslovakia. This lack of protection by the major Western powers was repeated in the 1945 Yalta agreement between the US, the Soviet Union, and Britain. It effectively made post-war Czechoslovakia a Communist state.

Today even though the independent Czech Republic is a member of the European Union, it remains vigilant trying to maintain its independence in the face of global business competition. Currently every Czech weekly and daily newspaper, save one, is foreign-owned. Ironically, the one that isn't foreign-owned is a descendent of Rudé Právo, the Communist Party's paper.

In February 1948 before my father left Prague, he remembers picking up Lidové Noviny, Prague's oldest daily, which was beginning to be censored by the Communists. On the front page there was text above the fold, but below and inside entire columns and photos went missing—censored. To silence a dissident's voice, Rudé Právo, forbade sales

of other papers before 10 AM. The Party forbade newsstands from selling other newspapers. Later, the Party stopped rival newspaper presses altogether.

Today, the Czechs cautiously guard their independence.

A is for America, the land of opportunity. In August 1938, the National Geographic published an article, “Czechoslovaks: the Yankees of Europe.” In an interview with Dr. Edvard Benes, the President, when asked about the future of Czechoslovakia, responded:

“Jews, free as in England or the United States, are no problem here. Every country in Europe has Gypsies. Poles are only one-half of one percent of our population. Little Russians joined us at their own request. The American problem is assimilation. Ours is not.”

But just one month later, in Munich, the governments of France, Great Britain, and Italy signed a pact agreeing that the Germans could occupy the Sudetenland, the German speaking area of Czechoslovakia. Not one person from the democratic Czech government was invited to the conference. Almost nothing of the forthcoming annexation and occupation are mentioned in the National Geographic article.

In May 2012, when I was in Prague doing research, I discovered a document of my grandfather's in the Czech National Archives. It was dated June 1945, just after the war ended. He was requesting a name change. ‘Why would he do this?’ I wondered. He wanted to change Stein to Stain, a one-letter difference. Perhaps he thought that would sound less Jewish and more American.

Unfortunately, Anti-Semitism continued in Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe, even after the war. He had witnessed the unthinkable: the arrest and killing of Jews in a civilized assimilated country. The name change request appears to be an attempt to change the last thing he had control over. He could not move his family before WWII, and even after WWII he could not move *with* them.

Waiting for an American visa, he traveled to France and finally got to the US three years after his wife and son. He never got his factory back and he never found job satisfaction in America.

However, in 1966 he began working for the American Fund for Czech Refugees. After years of feeling helpless, he was able to speak action to power and helped many Czechs escape the Communist regime and start lives in democratic nations. I know that as Michael Victor Stein, American that I am, I will forever be proud of the Bohemian Steins, and grateful grandfather never changed his name.

CROSSING THE VLTAVA

The sun is hazy bright. The heat radiates off the gray cobblestones in Prague. We're afforded a moment's cool when we're lucky enough to get some shade in the shadows of Jan Nepomuk, a national saint. The heat rising from the stone creates waves in the distance.

My Czech grandfather always appears cloudy in my memory. He emerges as a character perplexed that his foresight was not as crystal-clear as his hindsight. How frustrating it must have been for him to know that had he turned his dream into reality, he would have achieved prosperity by owning a small business in the United States.

My father and I are visiting Prague. We find a little store that sells sandwiches. "He wanted to open a sandwich shop," my father tells me. "The shop would have been somewhere in the business district, down by Wall Street," as if this was something that could have been easily done. In truth it would have been difficult, but perhaps it was more easily done *back then*. Today, between Cosi, Fraunces Tavern, and the guy on the corner selling street meat with relish and sauerkraut, his shop wouldn't stand a chance.

"Small open-faced sandwiches," my father says, "some with egg, some with ham, some with fish, nothing fancy, just a lunch spot for the businessmen down there." This shop never opened, but in a way, I'm glad it didn't. Had it opened, my father might still be working there, married to a nice Jewish girl, and I might be attending Hunter College

to get my degree in accounting. Maybe not. But it's easy to get caught up, second guessing yourself, when you play the "what if" game.

As in most families, the "what if" game transcends generations. In the Stein family it's: "what if he *had* opened that shop?" Playing that game relies on hindsight. Without it you might think all your decisions are right. Hindsight undermines us appreciating what we have in front of us.

It does not surprise me that my grandfather himself played the "what if" game. What does surprise me is that my father still speaks of his father's dreams. I mull it over.

I realize that if we settle for a dream deferred, derailed, or destroyed, we won't be disappointed if it never comes to fruition. I struggle with this state of mind. If I set the bar so high, at a height I know I can never clear, I am never disappointed falling short. If I set myself up for failure, I am never surprised or disappointed if I don't reach my goal.

"*Prosim, Prosim!*" the words get louder as the shopkeeper tries to alert my father to come back. He thinks she is asking for more money. In fact, she is letting him know that he has just taken the brown bundle of sandwiches belonging to the customers behind us. Unnoticed by my father, I had taken our package of open-faced sandwiches and two bottles of water to a spot outside. I signal to him and we find a shady spot to eat.

We sit at the foot of the Charles Bridge, the passageway to the Old Town. As we watch the faces passing us, I cannot help but think this spring scene is not all that different from the one found near Wall Street or Battery Park. True, there may be fewer suits walking around here, but there is the business man on his cell phone, yakking away, his finely tailored gray Italian suit looking too hot for how cool he seems to be on this

steamy May Day. Overall though, there are the tourists, just as there would be in Battery Park. Here they come from Hungary, from Germany, Russia, Romania, Korea and Australia. They are the new travelers – the ones that support Prague’s tourism economy. Long ago, the Charles Bridge was the most important route between the Old Town and Prague Castle. I was an indispensable trade route between Eastern and Western Europe. Now it is a crossroads for visitors from all across the globe, as a place for fun, for love, for parties and for sightseeing.

Our lunch spot is on the left bank, the Malá Strana, or “Lesser Town.” Legend tells us that Charles IV ordered its initial construction in the year 1357, on the 9th day of the 7th month at 5:31 AM. The sequence of numbers for the time the foundation stone was laid is of great significance. The numbers trace the odd numerical pattern, 1-3-5-7-9-7-5-3-1. This palindrome is an example of all things coming full circle.

This bridge is where my Catholic grandmother and Jewish grandfather came for Sunday strolls. These banks are where my grandparents swam in the summer. This river is where my father learned to ice skate. This bridge and its legend represent my heritage.

I ask my father about my grandfather and the Holocaust. “Your grandfather never liked to speak about that part of his past. Millions of lives and family histories were lost in the concentration camps. I don’t know how your grandfather endured Terezin. It must have been his iron will to live.”

“While death loomed all around him,” I blurt out.

After the war, my grandfather and his family came to America. While his spirit had not been broken as a prisoner, most of his relatives had been executed and those who were lucky enough to leave created the Diaspora I now share with my cousins.

It is easy to get swept away and drown in these weighty thoughts. Even though my grandfather never got his shop on Wall Street, he was brave enough to dream –and to act—so that his family would be free. Hindsight always presents us with the dreams that might have been. However, life lived in hindsight blinds us to the present. For my grandfather, he got to see his most important dream come true: the dream of freedom.

And to my grandfather, the survivor, I am forever in debt.

So here I am, an American, in the land of the free Czech Republic. I am in the capital city, in the heart of Prague. I am not in the Hapsburg monarchy, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, not the Nazi state, not the USSR. I am a free man in Prague.

KNOCK ON THE CELLAR DOOR

Antonin was not a particularly loud man and in his old age he had become hard of hearing. Everyone in Prague knew listening to a BBC broadcast was punishable by death and Zdenka, his daughter, reminded Antonin of this weekly. Partly because of his hearing, and partly because the Germans were scrambling the broadcast, Antonin cranked up the decibels. It was the volume of the broadcasts that made his family nervous.

On Saturday there would be no mistaking the sounds of gunfire outside his apartment. On Sunday would be the high-pitched screech of hurtling bombs. The explosions would be closer to his building than ever before.

Antonin's gray, well-trimmed mustache curled upward at the edges. His ears stuck out from his head and his neatly combed, gray hair never fell below his ears. He was a sharp looking Catholic always in a three-piece suit.

His wife was also born Catholic in the Bohemian countryside. On Sundays she prepared elaborate meals for her daughters, Zdenka and Olga. Olga, the younger daughter, had married earlier than her sister in 1934. Zdenka had married in 1936, also to a Jew. This was not uncommon in cosmopolitan Prague though in a few years it proved deadly.

Their husbands were always welcomed at Sunday dinner. But lately both Jewish fathers went missing. Unbeknownst to Antonin, only one son in law was left. The living son in law was interned in Theresienstadt while the other had perished in Auschwitz.

Antonin entertained his grandsons on Sunday visits by showing them a map of Europe. For the last year he had plotted the Allied advance. He showed Petr and Robert where the troops pushed the Germans back. He charted the Nazi's retreat out of France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. He showed them the Russians drive through Poland.

General Patton and the American GIs had arrived and liberated Pilsen. Yet on this particular Sunday, May 6, 1945, Antonin did not hear the chimes of Big Ben. He did not hear the German he was accustomed to on Radio Prague. Instead, he heard Czech, the language of his people. The only German he heard was a call for the Third Reich to lay down their weapons to prevent further bloodshed.

The British reports contradicted the newsreels of German victories Petr saw in the Prague movie houses and at school. At the front of his classroom was a flag with the Swastika. Petr and his classmates extended their nine-year-old fingers towards the red, white, and black.

Petr was what the Nazis deemed a *mischling*. The *mischlinge* were crossbreeds, mongrels, offspring of mixed parents. If a Jew and a non-Jew had a child, that child was a *mischling*. Petr's father had two Jewish grandparents and these two Jewish grandparents made Petr a *mischling* of the first degree. Second degree *mischlinge* had only one Jewish

grandparent. Petr's blonde hair and blue eyes allowed him to pass for Aryan in the streets of Prague but his father's yellow Star of David gave him away.

As the war went on Viktor, who had owned a wood-bending factory, *Standard*, was made to do forced labor. Petr would go without seeing Viktor as the forced labor trips sometimes took days.

Peter would ask Zdenka, *where's Dad? Have you heard from him?*

Petr, I told you that your father is on a business trip somewhere outside Prague. He'll be back home as soon as he can. Please don't worry.

When the Nazis released him, usually Sunday, he would return home to Branik.

On one particular Sunday Zdenka, Viktor, and Petr were out walking in Prague. Viktor was carrying with him an attaché case resting atop his chest. Viktor, clenching his briefcase, obscured his yellow Star of David.

As they crossed the street they spotted a Czech police officer on the adjacent corner.

Excuse me, the officer said stopping the three of them.

It looks as though you are trying to hide your star.

I was not. I was simply strolling with my son.

You could get in big trouble for trying to cover your star.

I wasn't hiding it we were simply walking.

More words were exchanged and eventually the policeman let them continue on their walk. This was the first time Petr understood that something terrible could befall he

and his family right there in Prague. Their walk ended when they returned to their apartment.

Branik was on the outskirts of the city. Five miles north stood Prague's Astronomical Clock. Five miles south was Modrany, the town where Antonin had worked in a large lumber mill before the war. The red tile roofs, ubiquitous around the neighborhood, had shifted in size, length, and hue throughout the centuries. Some even had modern metal roofs. The Schutzstaffel, or SS, the Nazi Party's Protection Squadron, were ever present in Prague and in her suburbs too.

Petr immediately switched his seat whenever he saw them in his tramcar on his rides to school. Petr was blonde and had been confirmed Catholic, but a quick look at his papers would identify him as the son of Viktor Stein, a Mischling. Zdenka had asked him not to tell any of his friends in school of his father's religion.

The suburban blue-collar neighborhood of Branik had been fairly quiet during the war. Despite the bombs being dropped in Strašnice, many stores in Branik remained open for business; the ceramics shop, the biergarten, the butcher. Petr liked the butcher. It would be hard to find a student at Petr's school who didn't like the man selling knackwurst, weisswurst, and frankfurters.

The people that visited the butcher were young, old, and middle-aged and all with their coupons. Nazi Party Officials didn't need coupons.

Petr was jealous of his cousins. Petr's fondness for frankfurters was obvious to Gerti. He always seemed to have a coupon for a frankfurter when she and Robert did not.

Perhaps it was his mother's savvy bartering in the countryside, but his hungry cousins did not overlook Petr's penchant for pork.

Robert and Gerti could always entertain one another even though they were 10 and 13. Petr by contrast was an only child. He needed his neighborhood friends, or at the very least his imagination, to play.

Zdenka heard a rumor that her sister, Olga, had had her villa in Vinohrady confiscated. Olga's apartment was given to the Germans, once Leo, her husband, had been taken away. Leo, along with a thousand other Czech Jews made up just one transport to the Theresienstadt ghetto. The ghetto was not just a ghetto; it was also a transit camp, the last stopping point before the death camps of Poland.

When Olga was evicted from the apartment she moved her children to Strašnice, a residential part of Prague, about 10 miles from where Zdenka and Petr lived in Branik. Gerti and Robert, Petr's cousins, did not like the move, as there were too many sirens in Strašnice. A siren went off signifying the start of an air attack and another siren for the end.

Just like Leo three years earlier, Viktor had to leave for the Theresienstadt camp on February 4, 1945. Petr did not know where his father went. He just knew that Leo, and now Viktor, were absent from Sunday dinner.

On the morning of Tuesday, May 8, 1945, Petr heard a hurried wrapping on his apartment door.

Mrs. Steinova. A familiar, deep voice cried.

Mrs. Steinova!

It was the baritone of Mr. Honsa, the superintendant of #109 Branik. Mr. Honsa lived in the three-floor, three-apartment building with his family on the first floor. The building was a few blocks from the tram, which ran north from Branik into Prague.

Coming! Zdenka shouted. She closed an eye to peer through the peephole.

Come inside Mr. Honsa, she said, loosening the lock.

Alright, but I haven't much time. He entered the apartment and quickly closed the door behind him.

Rumor has it they're setting explosives in front of our building. There's a cellar down the block where we can hide. I'll be there. Take Petr with you.

Explosives? Zdenka asked.

Yes, the Americans are in Pilsen already on their way to Prague. The Germans will try to stop them. There's no time, please hurry!

Petr followed Mr. Honsa out of his apartment to the top of the stairs.

Come back here! Zdenka shouted at him.

Petr stood for a second and watched the top of Mr. Honsa's head get smaller. He stared at the shiny bald vortex of smooth skin and hair as Honsa wound down the three flights.

Only three sets of stairs separated Petr and Zdenka from Mr. Honza and his family in their first floor apartment. Mr. Honza's children had their father. Petr's father had been missing for the last four months.

Petr went back into the apartment, into his room where he had been before Mr. Honsa came knocking. Out of his window, past the tram tracks, he could see the river where he'd learned to swim and where, in winter, he and his friends ice-skated. Zdenka stormed into his room.

Petr, we have to leave—put a sweater, pillow, cap, and a toy in your rucksack...and hurry.

How long will we be there?

I don't know. Did you take everything? His mother asked, turning away.

Petr thought for a moment. Which toy should he take, Chief Sitting Bull the Sioux? Sailor Jack? He chose Jack and stuffed him deep inside his knapsack. On top of Jack he placed a sweater, cap, and pillow.

Further instructions came, *take a jacket and put on your wool knickers.*

But Mom, it's May. It's too hot for them.

Don't protest. Just do what I ask. And hurry!

Petr and Zdenka went down the three flights. Zdenka kept her 41-year-old frame one step behind her 9-year-old son. She pushed open the wobbly metal gate of their building and stepped out on the sidewalk.

Down the street, in the distance, Petr saw barricades. Jury-rigged piles of brick and cobblestone were built up like great big sandcastles. When sandbags wouldn't stretch people used bed frames, books, and overturned wheelbarrows and carts to block off the road. Past the barricades he saw men in overcoats and jackets. Petr could tell they were not German soldiers.

The men appeared armed. Some had smaller guns than others. Some had very old hunting rifles. Pinned to their coats were swatches of red, white, and blue; the tri-colors of the Czech flag. From downtown Prague, Petr heard gunfire in the distance. The main road leading from Prague to Pilsen was quiet. Petr and Zdenka ran past the ceramics store. Past the biergarten, its long wooden tables and benches now empty. They curved off the main road.

It's impossible for me not to imagine how a different set of circumstances would have changed my family's history. What if the Czech army had been called up and actually battled the Germans?

The outcome of the Czech Army seeing action would have likely meant the death of my grandfather, a lieutenant in the Czech Army. Though no one can say for sure, there is no way the tiny nation of Czechoslovakia could have survived the onslaught of the Third Reich.

When I tease out this what if scenario, I come to a conclusion which is actually worse than the hand that life dealt the Stein clan. Though Viktor lost his mother and all of his siblings in the Holocaust—his brother and two sisters were killed in Poland and his mother died in Theresienstadt—he himself survived. He was liberated with the rest of the prisoners in Theresienstadt and my father had more time with my grandfather at the end of their lives. He got to see his son marry, a luxury none of his siblings were afforded.

When they got to the cellar door, the building Mr. Honsa told them about, Zdenka pulled and Petr peered down into the abyss. He could see the outline of a body at the foot of the ladder.

Be careful Mrs. Steinova, Mr. Honsa hollered up to them.

You go first, Zdenka told her son.

Petr made his way down the rickety ladder, which creaked as he descended the wooden rungs. Mr. Honsa steadied the frame.

Careful Petr, his mother cautioned.

He placed his boots on the cellar step. He turned his body and faced her. Rays from the setting sun lit up Petr's blonde hair.

It was May, but the weather still had a sting that nipped him when the sun went down. It was unusual for Petr to be out past dusk.

Petr placed his boot on the second rung and his feet felt cold. The dark basement was cooler than outside and a chill climbed up his legs. The cold air was inside his body turning his skin to gooseflesh. He tried not to shake the ladder as he shivered.

Petr reached the last step of the ladder and Mr. Honsa touched his shoulders. He could feel warmth come back to his body despite the chill in the cellar.

Come on down mom, Petr shouted.

Watch your voice, Mr. Honsa warned.

Throw your rucksack first.

She took the pack off her back and tossed it to the super. She went down the ladder, shaking the wood as she lowered herself into the basement.

Petr surveyed the room and could see some of his neighbors though most of the faces he did not recognize. The walls were made of rocks and the ground of dirt. Two light bulbs hung from the low ceiling over a few chairs, a long wooden bench, and a card table. It was cold and damp inside: the perfect climate for a root cellar.

When will we leave? One older woman asked Mr. Honsa.

When it is safe.

When will that be?

When it is over. The super replied.

Silence filled the room. After a short time Mr. Honsa spoke.

We'll turn the lights off soon. If you need the bathroom, go now, into the woods next to the house. Only one person can go up the ladder at a time and no one can go out at night. The Germans are patrolling.

Soon the lights went off but the adults kept talking. Zdenka opened her rucksack and produced from it a blanket. Petr could open his rucksack and take out Sailor Jack; but he decided to keep his old friend inside, where he'd be safe.

As his mother laid out their blanket on the dirt floor, Petr listened to the voices of the adults as they drowned out the gunfire.

I've heard that the SS are fleeing the city and jumping out of their cars in the suburbs. They're breaking into basements shooting women, children, and the elderly, to take their vengeance. Said Mr. Honsa.

General Patton is in Pilsen. Less than 100 kilometers away. His GIs will be here before breakfast time, said another man.

That's the sound of liberation, one of the adults said.

That is Czech gunfire, Mr. Honsa confirmed.

How do you know? It could be the Germans chasing our men across the square.

Those are our boys chasing the Germans out of our buildings and back into their barracks!

How can you be so sure? The man asked Mr. Honsa again.

I have it on good information, the super said.

And with that, Mr. Honsa reached into a wooden crate under the table and produced a bottle of beer. He popped the swingtop off the bulbous brown glass and drew a seat to the lip of the table. He took a long drink.

There was silence for a few moments before a woman spoke.

What will we do for food?

We will leave to get food when it's all over. Mr. Honsa assured her.

I will go, Zdenka spoke up.

I will make the trip to the grocer and bring us back some food.

You mustn't, Mr. Honsa urged her.

I have made the trip to Orlick many times before this one won't take so long.

From downtown Prague, the gunfire increased. It was enough to end the conversation and any notion of leaving. The adults with young children tried to shush their babes to sleep.

Petr struggled to sleep. The coat his mother had worn was spread across his legs and he drifted in and out of consciousness. When awake, he listened to the gunfire.

Cak cak cak. Cak cak cak. The firing grew louder. Following the steady sounds came a loud explosion.

Every face Petr could see showed worry. One woman started sobbing, an old man clutched at his chest with his hands.

Mr. Honsa, who had been silent throughout the night, became excited at the sound. His eyes lit up. Some of the pilsner from his brown bottle spilled onto the floor as he raised his hands.

That's the resistance chasing the Germans, he exclaimed.

How do you know? Those could be the Germans chasing our boys, another man said.

Mommy, will the Germans find us? Petr whispered, hoping his mother was still awake.

Shh. Shh. Don't worry Petr we will be all right. Everyone has an opinion, but the Germans will be gone soon.

Will they really blow up our house? Petr asked.

Shh. Don't worry. Close your eyes—get some sleep.

Eventually the gunfire and sounds of explosion stopped and Petr drifted back into sleep.

The silence of the morning was broken by a loud knock on the cellar door. Petr grabbed his mother's hand. She must have dozed off as well. Her arm now parallel to his. Petr worried the knock came from the Germans. Would holding his mother's hand be his last earthly memory?

Quiet, quiet, Mr. Honsa whispered to the group.

Again the loud knock came. Everyone in the cellar froze. Petr thought the knock came from a German soldier patrolling.

Ahoj. Ahoj. Jak se mas? The Czech words came from outside.

Mr. Honsa climbed the ladder. Reaching the top and opened the cellar door ever so slowly. Appearing in front of him was Antonin's gray mustache.

Antonin! You scared us. What are you doing here? It is too dangerous!

Are my daughter and grandson here?

Yes, yes they are.

In my father's memoir, Antonin appears "carrying two shopping bags full of food—bread, cheese, chocolates and water. My mother threw her arms around her father and I was the happiest kid in that basement."

When I tell my father's story to Gerti during an interview, she seems surprised. She asks me the questions I have asked my father which are ultimately impossible to answer, "how would grandfather have known where they were?"

Indeed, how would have grandfather Antonin known where Petr and Zdenka were? I feel guilty for the 18 years I lived on this planet without asking my grandmother, Zdenka, how he knew.

One of her questions, "could grandfather get food with rationing?" she can speculate to give us an answer. "Everybody knew somebody from the country, I

remember mother taking father's clothes to these people out in the village." These were Leo's clothes that Olga bartered.

No matter how guilty I feel for not uncovering more of my family's history—I was 18 when Zdenka died—I know it is nothing compared to the guilt my grandfather, Viktor, must have experienced. Though my father was never in a concentration camp, he feels it too. They call it survivor's guilt and I cannot help but feel it when I think of my father and my grandmother hiding in the cellar. Life hung so delicately in the balance and they had magically made it through six years of war. I shudder to think what surviving from 1939-1945 would have meant, only to die two days after the war was declared over. Many Czechs did die in those last few days and even more Czechs had their families torn apart by the Holocaust. In the end, the Steins were a lucky clan.

ZOFIE

Last Spring my father and I visited Terezin. Were it not for my family members who perished there, and over 30,000 others, I might say this was a beautiful place.

Nestled in the Czech countryside, a rural farms and fields surround the walled garrison town built in the 18th century. The garrison barracks once housed soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian Empire then the structures became a Jewish ghetto during World War II.

It is best known as a ghetto, but also a concentration camp, for kids. It was a place where the Jewish Elders stressed the importance of education and cultural enrichment for young Jewish boys and girls. The boys and girls were encouraged to write and draw, sing, play soccer, and generally carry on a normal life. Though for most of these children life was very far from normal. They were surrounded by barrack walls and had no privacy as they had to share a bathroom with a dozen bunkmates.

I went with my father who was visiting the camp and ghetto for the third time. It was my second time at Terezin, having gone once in 2008. The first time my father visited the ghetto was with his father in the early 1970s. Though I never knew my grandfather, I can only imagine how strange it must have been for him to be back in the camp—a free, US citizen—a few decades after his own imprisonment. He was fortunate to survive Terezin, but his mother, Zofie, had perished there..

Zofie was a diabetic and all medicines were confiscated from Jews both before they were deported to the camp or upon arrival, if they were lucky enough to somehow smuggle it on the transports from Prague. The need for medicine within the walled ghetto and the grounds of the camp was much greater than the medicine's supply. There was a hospital on the ghetto grounds but many Jews died from lack of food before they could step foot inside the infirmary. Disease ran rampant because of overcrowding. Despite all of the difficulties of life in the ghetto, the Jewish Elders were determined to see that the children had food, medicine, and a semblance of life as it was before the camp. The Elders who controlled things like the transport lists—which determined who would be shipped to Auschwitz—thought that these children were the future of Czech Jewry and it was in their best interests to protect the children as much as possible.

I am also a diabetic, a type 1 insulin-dependent diabetic, as Zofie was. I stand outside the Hannover Barracks in Terezin, the place where Zofie likely died. As a 28-year-old, I remembered how difficult my diagnosis was at age seven. Zofie's diagnosis, any diagnosis before the late 20th century, was more difficult. As an elderly diabetic in Terezin, there was no chance for her survival.

In October 1991, when I was seven, I had an unquenchable thirst during a two-hour car trip with my parents. We were driving back to Manhattan from Amagansett, Long Island, where we'd spent the weekend. No matter how much I drank, my mouth was dry.

In one hour, before we entered the Long Island Expressway, I consumed a liter of water. So, I started in on the seltzer we had with us. By the time we crossed the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge, I had finished two more liters. I crossed my legs as tight as I could. My mother and father were concerned about my slaking thirst and they realized that they needed to call my pediatrician.

Dr. Michael Traister's office had a great stash of toys and books in his waiting room including what I believed to be every single Dr. Seuss book ever published. The office was sandwiched between Broadway and West End Avenue, about 11 blocks from our apartment.

After drawing blood Dr. Traister walked into the room where my mother and I were seated. He told us my blood sugar reading was way over what it should be and he thought I had diabetes. In that moment I knew I would die. Not when or how—just knowing the inevitability was enough.

All Dr. Traister said was “I think you have diabetes.” Seeing my hysterics after his diagnoses probably convinced him not to mention heightened risk of organ failure and heart attack. Age seven is my earliest memory of my life called into question. In my mind, my death was now imminent.

It would be another 18 years before my current endocrinologist confirmed that blindness, heart attack, and cancer, could become problems. She replied to my question with the cool reassurance of statistics, “of course you're at heightened risk.”

I don't remember formulating the idea that my illness would live as long as me; this conceptualization came later. What I do remember is the phonetic “die” in the name

of the disease. I could grasp the sound. Of course cancer and AIDS were more fatal, but they didn't contain "die" in their names.

Dr. Traister told us they'd be expecting me at the Pediatric Endocrinology unit at Mt. Sinai Hospital. At home my mother made me pack clothes and pajamas, but I was more focused on collecting the dozen action figures—GI Joe, the Thundercats, and He-Man and She-Ra would all keep me company at Mt. Sinai.

Our cab cut through Central Park and down Fifth Avenue, Museum Mile, the stretch from 105th street to 82nd street. Fifth Ave was bustling with activity on that fall morning—the shoppers forming foot traffic and the daily deliverymen with their pickups and drop offs. The copper-colored leaves floated down and littered the sidewalks of New York that October morning. Their beauty was lost on me as I feared the first revisit to the hospital where I was born.

A few hours that felt like weeks, after blood testing, blood drawing, and three nurses later—Paula, a short, dark haired, energetic diabetes educator arrived. The butterfly needles coupled with the thought of something silver colored piercing my finger pads made me queasy, even my parents became suspicious. Paula carried an ominous black kit and an orange. From her kit she produced a vial she described as saline solution and a syringe. She removed the plastic cap from the syringe, pulled on the plunger, and drew air into the needle. She stuck the needle into the vial. Then she pushed on the plunger, squirting air into the solution. She pulled on the plunger again, this time drawing saline into the syringe.

"We use this to practice. This is how to draw your insulin," she explained.

She poked the orange and squirted the saline solution through the peel.

“This is how diabetics inject insulin,” she said.

That orange citrus looked nothing like my pasty white dermis. The demonstration was preposterous. I was not injecting any solution into my body.

Eventually I learned that insulin, the daily medication for Type 1 diabetics, is a hormone. Hormones come from glands and this system of glands is called the endocrine system. The endocrine system aids in metabolism and creates equilibrium inside the body. When the body has too much sugar the pancreas squirts out a bit of insulin. For example, to metabolize an ice cream sundae your pancreas squirts out more insulin than when your body metabolizes a salad. A salad, with very low to no level of glucose, likely does not need any insulin from the pancreas at all.

All Type 1 diabetics have lost their ability to produce insulin within their body. Therefore, they must inject a synthetic version of it. Type 2 diabetics have built up a resistance to insulin. Type 1 diabetics are told they have “lazy pancreases” that stopped making insulin. Type 2 diabetics are told they have a body “too lazy” to absorb insulin. Type 1 diabetics are typically young and generally thought to be in good overall health when they are diagnosed. Type 2 diabetics tend to be overweight and inactive, most are elderly, or in declining health. Oddly, yet increasingly, part of the diabetes epidemic has become diagnosing younger cases of Type II diabetes. These cases are becoming more regular, yet when I was diagnosed there were very few cases of young Type 2 Diabetics.

Whereas Type 2 diabetes was onset by poor health and diet, the historically accepted cause of Type 1 diabetes was genetics.

I can't remember when my father, Peter, told me my great grandmother, Zofie, was the reason I had diabetes. He might have tossed it off as casually as, "maybe she had something to do with it." As a young boy I was eager to draw conclusions. It was an immediate answer to my burning question "why me?"

Zofie is my link to the past and she became my easy answer. She was the only member of the Stein and Murdock families, my father's and mother's, with diabetes. Zofie became the reason I had this illness.

My father, Peter Stein, was born in 1936 in Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia. Peter's father, Viktor Stein, was born into a Jewish family. Peter's mother, Helen, came from a family of Catholics. Viktor's mother Zofie, the diabetic, was one in a long line of Bohemian Jews.

My father's memory of Zofie, his grandmother, was a woman dressed in black, perhaps still mourning the death of her husband, Josef Stein, in 1937. This is the same year that Thomas Masaryk, first President of Czechoslovakia died. While citizens of Czechoslovakia mourned the death of their President, my great grandmother mourned the death of her husband.

A friend of Woodrow Wilson, Masaryk became President in 1918 when Czechoslovakia became a nation. Masaryk and his democratically elected government stood for and allowed minority representation, convincing Czechoslovaks that persecution of innocent people would not be tolerated.

Eager to learn more about this time period, I began interviewing my relatives in 2006, when I was 22. While they are technically my second cousins, my “aunts” Vera and Gerti are both older than my 76-year-old father and have similar overall recollections of wartime Prague. Though they were both just girls, young brunettes, during the time of Nazi occupation, they had to be strong and brave to survive. Vera is the daughter of Zofie’s brother. Gerti is the daughter of a Jewish father who died in Auschwitz. Family lineage links us all together but details of stories differ. I am always trying to reconcile these differing “truths.” Sometime ago I began to feel personally responsible for getting their stories straight.

Somewhat startling to me, was the fact that Vera was unaware that Zofie had diabetes. This felt suspicious to me, considering Vera had visited Zofie before the war and before Joseph’s death, in 1937. However at the time of her visit, Vera was only seven so it is possible she knew and had forgotten.

After mulling it over with her, Vera, agreed that Peter would know more, especially considering Peter learned Zofie had diabetes from Viktor, his father.

Had I more relatives, my whole family structures and experiences would have been different. Zofie’s children, my grandfather’s siblings, and all cousins surely would have influenced my understanding of the Steins. If my great aunts and uncle had lived—Kamila, Karla, and Richard—would I know more instances of diabetes in my family? I know from my father none of them were diabetic, but Zofie’s death does make me wonder how many diabetic Czech Jews perished in the Holocaust? And how would I fare under the same conditions in which Zofie survived for 19 days? How long would I last

without my insulin or glucagon? With insulin I can lower my blood sugar levels before I am ever at risk of going into a diabetic coma. With glucagon, anyone who can read the instructions can administer a shot to keep me out of a diabetic coma, should my blood sugar go too low and I pass out. I was eager to find out if Zofie had these medicinal luxuries in the ghetto.

During World War II, the Czech Jews married to non-Jewish spouses were among the last to be arrested by the Nazis. This saved Viktor, my grandfather, from going into a concentration camp until 1945. His mother and siblings were all rounded up in 1942 and died shortly thereafter.

As recalled by my Aunt Vera, before the German occupation, there had been growing unease amongst the Czechs. Vera, who is Zofie's niece, spoke to me about her pre-war visits to Zofie and Josef's apartment in Prague. She said that the adults paid particular attention to the recent development of the Anschluss, the annexation, or occupation of Austria under German control. The Stein family tree had branches in Vienna, and with Austria's annexation in 1938 they wondered what the future would hold for 20-year-old Czechoslovakia.

Vienna, like Prague, was one of Europe's most progressive capitals housing a large Jewish population. Orthodox Jews resided in both cities, but most Jews, like my great grandparents, were largely assimilated. They considered themselves Czechoslovaks first and Jews second. Before 1918, Austrians were subjects of the Emperor of Austria and Czechoslovaks were subjects of the King of Bohemia. Before World War I the

Emperor and the King were the same person: Franz Joseph I. While Franz Joseph was a powerful man, more people know his younger brother, Franz Ferdinand. Gavrilo Princip assassinated Franz Ferdinand leading to the start of World War I. After his trial, Princip was taken to the prison, the small fortress, in the garrison town of Terezin.

Terezin was named for King Joseph II of Austria's mother, Maria Theresa. In 1777, she said, "I know of no greater plague than this race, which on account of its deceit, usury and avarice is driving my subjects into beggary. Therefore as far as possible, the Jews are to be kept away and avoided." She had no idea how prescient her words would be. And it is ironic that the people whom Maria Theresa and her subjects were to shun in the 18th Century would be the very ones overcrowding and dying in her garrison town in the 20th century.

The rural town of Terezin was a logical choice for the Nazis as barracks surround the village and small fortress. The ghetto was tiny in comparison to the massive death camps in the East. While the extermination camps were designed for efficiency, the Nazis propagandized Terezin as "paradise." Though very few men, women and children survived the Holocaust in Terezin; for most, about 96% of Jews, it was a holding pen before transport to the death camps in Eastern Europe.

The Nazis specialized in euphemisms and lying, take for example "The Jewish problem" –who wouldn't want to solve a problem? But of course their solution was to murder 9 million European Jews. "Transports East," was a similarly vague and deceptive term. To "go east" from Terezin sounded benign enough, but the true meaning was sending prisoners to extermination camps, like Maly Trostenets in Belarus, and

Auschwitz in Poland. All of Zofie's children, save Viktor, were made to "go east" and died in these death camps.

Early in WWII the Nazis lied to elderly German Jews, many of whom had served Germany with distinction in WWI. Though German Jews made up roughly 1% of the German population, roughly 3% of soldiers in the German Army were Jews. The Nazis started a campaign of stressing the positives of life and the "paradise" of Terezin. These elderly German Jews were told that Terezin would be a well-furnished retirement community with private homes, recreational facilities, and medical care. All they had to do was to sign documents turning over their homes and property in Germany to the Nazi government.

What they found in Terezin was the opposite—squalid, overcrowded, oppressive housing, small portions of food, and very limited medical facilities with medicines prohibited.

The Nazis also tried to sell this myth of "paradise" through a propaganda film sponsored by Josef Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda. The 1944 film, closer to a fairy tale, "The Führer Gives the Jews a City," depicts a cultured life for Jews in Terezin.

The movie was made in anticipation of the International Red Cross and Danish Red Cross visit in 1944. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Prisoners planted gardens, painted housing complexes, renovated barracks, and developed and practiced cultural programs for the entertainment of the visiting dignitaries to convince them that the 'Seniors' Settlement' was real. The SS authorities intensified deportations of Jews from the ghetto to alleviate overcrowding, and as part of the

preparations in the camp-ghetto, 7,503 people were deported to Auschwitz between May 16 and May 18, 1944.”

It's true that Terezin was a ghetto, really a way station to the transports that meant imminent death in Eastern Poland and Belarus. Terezin was “paradise” the way a “gift” in Auschwitz was Nazi code for suicide. In the end, only about 3-4% of the Jewish men, women, and children who came to Terezin survived. Most of the 96% were murdered in Auschwitz while some, like Zofie, died in Terezin.

I wonder how successful the Stein family would have been without assimilation. My guess is not very. My great grandfather Joseph was a grain merchant, and he likely sold grains to Jews, non-Jews, and everyone in between. The 1900 census states that he employed several Catholics. The majority of the farmers who Josef dealt with were Czechs, so he spoke to them in Czech, though he also spoke German. My aunt Vera recalls that whenever her father and Josef didn't want her to understand what they were talking about, they would converse in German.

Many Czechs spoke German, especially those who lived in the border towns along trade routes and in Prague. Certain families had been residents or traders, travelling the same trade route for centuries. These Jewish traders lived in rural towns like Český Brod, where Josef was born. This was where his Jewish family lived and where he started his business, out in the fertile fields of Central Bohemia, the place where grain was grown.

Both Zofie and Josef spelled their names the traditional Czech way. They did not use the anglicized, “Sophie” or “Joseph.” My grandfather’s name is “Victor” though he spelled it “Viktor.” Like his father, my father first spelled his name, in Czech, as “Petr.” Not the anglicized “Peter” that appears on his books, driver’s license, and bills.

In the dark hours of July 6, 1942, Zofie was forced to report to Prague’s Trade Fair Palace. The Nazi’s had forced the Jewish Religious Congregation to inform all Czech Jews where they were to report. They placed under Zofie’s apartment door a postcard with instructions, telling her to report to the Trade Fair grounds. Eventually all of her family was ordered to do so. Zofie and all others on her transport were instructed to arrive before dawn, so that the Prague populace would not question the beginning of “resettlement.”

When Zofie got there, she was assigned a “living space,” a wooden shack without anything inside it. Toilets were located a long distance away. Though the thought of running away may have crossed her mind, even at 78-years-old, Zofie was surrounded by Nazi guards inside the fenced-in Trade grounds and even further surrounded by German-appointed Czech police outside.

It took the Nazis three days to get the information they hoped to gain from their intensive interrogations. For three days, Zofie would have been called back and forth from her section of the shack, her “living space” with the bare ground floor, to the desks behind which Hitler’s paramilitary guards, called the SS, demanded answers. I can only imagine the exhaustive questioning my great grandmother would have had to endure.

Where are your documents? Papers. Passport. Proof of residency in the Protectorate. Gas bill.

Jews were interrogated endlessly. They were ordered to declare their personal assets.

How many crowns do you have in your pockets? And your pocketbook? What about other valuables? Your necklace? Earrings? Anything you don't have on? Anything in your luggage?

How many keys do you own? Where are the keys to your home? Why do you have only one key? We must have them now! And where is your fuel ration card? You must produce it! Are you lying? The card will tell us. And where is your food ration card? Surely you haven't left that!

When the first forced deportations started, the Nazis sent Jews on passenger trains. The next cycle of deportees were sent on freight trains fitted with benches so the elderly and ill could sit. Finally, Czech Jews left Prague on a bare boxcar, the same car used to move meat, the same way the butchers had shipped cows and live stock earlier from the country to the city.

The Nazis intended to deceive Jews and Christians about the true nature of the ghetto Terezin. After the early deportations, the Nazis became wise to the reactions of the people in the streets of Prague. It has been written that upon viewing the early transports in broad daylight, "the men took off their hats and many women wept." And why shouldn't they? These children were their children's classmates, these men were their

business associates, and fellow sports club members. These women, like Zofie, were their warm and welcoming neighbors.

While there could have been some peace, in a thin wooden shack, a “living space” with the ground as your floor and a toilet a long walk away, it is unlikely. Though the scene that played out inside the Palace, where Zofie was marched after filling out her forms for Nazi registration, was chaos. Typically used for mechanical and agricultural trade shows, the Palace became the last time my great-grandmother, great aunts, and great uncle stood in Prague. Heda Margolius Kovaly, a Czech Terezin survivor, describes the scene in *Under A Cruel Star A Life in Prague 1941-1968*:

“The inside of the Exposition Hall was like a medieval madhouse. All but the steadiest nerves were on the point of snapping. Several people who were seriously ill and had been brought there on stretchers died on the spot. A Mrs. Taussig went completely crazy, tore her false teeth out of her mouth, and threw them at our lord and master, Obersturmbannfuehrer Fiedler. There were babies and small children who cried incessantly and, just beside my parents, a small fat bald man sat on his suitcase playing his violin as if none of the surrounding bedlam were any concern of his. He played Beethoven’s Concerto in D Major, practicing the same passages over and over again.”

I can hardly imagine myself navigating this madhouse. How Zofie, a 78-year-old diabetic, managed not only to navigate this madness but to go on living for another 21 days after arriving in Terezin is beyond me. When did her children last see her? Were they allowed to escort their 78-year-old mother to the Trade Fair? Was her maid, the

woman who provided her and her family help, allowed to accompany her? Was she completely alone?

More importantly, did she have insulin? Or did she have glucagon? Insulin, for high blood sugar, and glucagon, for low blood sugar, are two medicines that can prevent patients from entering a diabetic coma.

The heat in July would have been oppressive, particularly because the Czech Jews were instructed to bring their winter coats with them. They were allowed some luggage and as the Nazi's began taking over Jewish properties, Zofie would have had to pack her entire life into her suitcase.

When Zofie boarded the train, transport AAn, she was amongst 1,000 other Czech Jews on her rail car. She had a string around her neck, holding a sign with her number, "890."

In its construction, Terezin is a hexagon though inside it appears rectangular. It appears rectangular because the square buildings and barracks with hard angled roofs fit so neatly between the Wallstrasse, the walled street, Egergasse, the alley closest to the Eger River, Seestrasse, lake street, and Bäckergasse, baker's alley.

Inside the ghetto there is only one road with two exits. The north exit leads to Praha, the golden city. The south exit leads to Litoměřice, a tiny village three kilometers from the fortress of Terezin. The fortress is named in honor of Empress Maria Theresa.

On July 6, 1942, Zofie's transport from Prague arrived on the tracks of the Bohušovice nad Ohří station. She and the thousand prisoners were forced to walk two miles to the entrance of the Egergasse, the alley closest to the Ohří River. There was no

potable water despite the rich Ohří and ever-richer Elbe nearby, and the young boys from the ghetto were permitted to leave the walled streets. They meet the passengers and were instructed to carry for the elderly their suitcases, rucksacks, and packed bundles. The children eased the difficulty of transport so that the soon-to-be imprisoned could use their canes, walking so they would be less burdened, shoulders hunched by their bundles. The ghetto also sent stronger young men, these ones with a cart, so they could wheel away the dying that would not survive the walk.

Led by armed German soldiers and Czech policemen, the transport passed through the narrow, arching, tunnel. Two black steel doors flanked the curved passageway and larger stones outlined the door's borders, separating the poured concrete slabs from the smaller red bricks. Once inside the Ebergasse, watches, wallets, spectacles, cigarettes, and medicines were confiscated. If somehow Zofie managed to smuggle insulin or glucagon on the transport with her, it surely would have been confiscated at this point.

Zofie, who lived in Prague and managed to stay alive for five years after her husband's death in 1937, died in 1942 in Terezin. I cannot imagine what the camp must have been like for a 78-year-old widowed, Zofie. Having just arrived, she would die without access to the medication she once had used so freely.

I know Zofie was not on a regimen like most of us Type 1 diabetics today. She likely injected only one insulin shot per day—or possibly only one shot per week. I don't know if she administered her own insulin or walked to her doctor's office for a shot. Both

were acceptable regimens for a woman of her social class in Prague. Both were standard insulin regimens for diabetics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In contrast, my regimen is quite different as I have insulin attached to me 24-hours-a-day. I have an insulin pump that allows me to carry insulin on my person at all times.

My father and I believe that Zofie died due to a lack of insulin, that her blood sugar went so high her body became toxic, attacked itself, and she went into a diabetic coma. Perhaps more likely, it could have been a lack of food that caused a fatal low blood sugar.

The hard laborers, or *Schwerarbeiter*, were allowed the most bread, the *normalarbeiter*, or normal workers, were allowed less bread, and the *kranke*, or non-workers, received the least bread of all. The elderly were classified as *kranke*, at first this was anyone over 60-years-old though it was later raised to 65-years-old and eventually 70 years-of-age or older. Even with the later age classifications, Zofie was already 78 in 1942 when she arrived in Terezin.

Schwerarbeiter were given 500 grams of bread. *Normalarbeiter* 375 grams and *kranke* received 333 grams of bread per week. That's less than 12 oz of bread a week. Or, fewer than six slices of bread per week. Even if Zofie could have eaten six opened-face sandwiches per week, it would still leave her one meal short of seven meals per week. As most diabetics, and certainly Zofie before the Holocaust, eat on average three meals a day, this would have put her 15 meals short of a regular food schedule.

So while it was likely food shortages that lead to Zofie's death, both extreme low and high blood sugars can induce diabetic comas. As Zofie was diabetic, this is typically where Zofie's story ends.

The medical name for our illness comes from the Greek, *diabetes mellitus*. In Greek, *diabanein* is to pass through while urinating. Literally, you pass an excessive amount of urine through your bladder. *Mellitus* was the suffix attached to it that signified excessive, sweet, urine. Your sweet pee signified the condition of *glycosuria* or *glucosuria*, the excretion of glucose into your urine stream.

It is said that it was a Hindu doctor, who discovered "madhumeha," or honey urine, in his patients. He noticed that when his patients relieved themselves, streams of ants would gather around their waste. The ants were drawn to the sickly sweet urine. In those days, and for centuries to come, if you had sweet urine it meant you had diabetes. How did doctors know you had sweet urine? By taste. Even in Zofie's time physicians and their assistants were sometimes called "water tasters."

Since those early days, doctors have conducted extensive research to prove many theories and establish best practices. For a long time doctors, researchers, and scientists were less concerned about the cause of diabetes than its treatment. Only recently has the reason diabetes occurs been hotly contested.

There seems to be a paradigm shift in the way diabetes is viewed. There are more studies on the reason people get diabetes now than 20 years ago, when I was diagnosed. Today as I consult recently published studies I see that this historically trusted cause of

illness is called into question. The title of one 2007 study professes a theory, *Environmental Triggers and Determinants of Type 1 Diabetes*.

According to the article, 85% of Type 1 diabetics have no family history of the disease. The study offered an alternative theory to the one I had believed for so long. It pointed to environmental causes or possibly a virus as a trigger for the onset of Type 1 diabetes. Would I see myself differently had I believed in a virus being responsible for my illness? Instead, I always believed my great grandmother was the reason I had my illness and I was comfortable with that reasoning.

And while science seems to be on the verge of a breakthrough, much more research is needed before doctors can say, “your diabetes is NOT genetic.”

As a newly diagnosed 7-year-old I latched onto the common belief that Type 1 diabetes *is* genetic. I took comfort and felt less alone knowing my great grandmother had the same illness. In fact, I believe I have Type 1 because someone in my family had it. And who wants to hear that their pancreas has failed them and their endocrine system is busted for no apparent reason?

Hearing that diabetes is not genetic is frustrating for those of us who can point to a family member who had it. Somewhere, high up in the family tree, maybe there may have been a relative who suffered through diabetes without even knowing she had it. What about Zofie’s lost children and her grandchildren?

Today, many diabetics, some in my support group, believe that their diabetes is linked to a triggering event, such as a virus or flu, rather than genetics. One group member blames her diabetes on the hospital that conducted her appendectomy. She believes that her fever, which ran high for a whole week post-surgery, led to the virus that gave her diabetes.

I talk to my parents as an adult about my diagnosis. My mother remembers me having a cold or a little virus not too long, perhaps even the week before I was diagnosed. This is a different story than the one I've had in my head for nearly three decades. While my mother *may* have told this to me before, I don't remember hearing it. I have no doubt that it was easier for me, as a child, to conceive of my chronic illness coming from my great grandmother.

I loved the fact that I knew where my disease came from. I hated the fact that my great grandmother, who died in a concentration camp, passed along her illness from beyond the grave to me, but the connections gave me an odd sense of solidarity, a familial solace. She didn't deserve to die in a ghetto and I didn't deserve to have diabetes. But no diabetic in the history of insulin should have to endure without her medicine as my great grandmother did.

I don't believe friends in my support group see themselves as diseased. If what some diabetes researchers believe is true—that diabetes is ultimately determined by a causal or environmental factor—then we all come to diabetes from the same, or a similar, triggering virus.

And what if there was more than one environmental factor? Even if there were additional triggers, isn't everyone who receives the diabetes diagnosis equally diseased? For all diabetics who wish to continue on with life as normally as possible, the greater question is: what now? This quandary outweighs the philosophical question, "why me?" The big question now is, when will they find a cure? This cure has been promised to American Type 1 diabetics and their parents since the 1960s.

I know full well the power of language; I would rather possess an "environmental trigger" than a "virus." And actually, until there is a proven virus, I will accept the possibility that an environmental trigger is what causes Type 1 diabetes. I've also come to understand, as a result of my support group, that many diabetics don't want to be called "a diabetic." They want to be referred to as "a person with diabetes." I don't rally around this syntactical outcry. Still, I understand how it can be empowering to be "a person with diabetes" rather than "a diabetic" but I've never referred to myself as "a person with diabetes."

Having my own belief of where my diabetes came from enabled me to spin an alternative yarn to the Job-like questions so many diabetics ask upon diagnosis. "Why God?" "Why Krishna?" "Why me?"

For me, that question was answered early on: "because of your great grandmother." Zofie was diabetic. I am diabetic. End of questions. End of story.

Knowing the cause of my diabetes did not make the disease easier, but it did alleviate the question that is so frustrating to diabetics *and* diabetes researchers alike: why do people get Type 1 diabetes? Why do the islets of Langerhans stop working and

cause the pancreas to shut down? At the time I didn't realize how fortunate I was to have this kind of disease genesis story: "because of the family tree" is better than "because we are diseased."

Many of my ancestors perished in the Holocaust, in this Zofie's story was not unique. Nor was her disease. Surely it was secondary to what the Nazis perceived as the disease of Europe: the Jews.

Whenever I hear stories of diabetics who had been diagnosed in the first half of the 20th century I am grateful I was diagnosed in 1991. In the end even if scientists prove that Type 1 diabetes is *not* genetic, there will always be my suspicion that it *is*, at least in part, genetic.

I will always be grateful for what my diabetes has taught me about Zofie. Just as I am grateful for what Zofie has taught me about my Czech family. I persevere because of who I am, to honor her.

MY TYPE I

I was diagnosed with type I diabetes, or juvenile onset diabetes, when I was seven. It was 1991 and I was in 2nd Grade at the Calhoun School in Manhattan. My family and I lived on New York's upper west side and by all means life was good. This is not to say life was bad after my diagnosis but a kind of stress was present. There was a palpable anxiety I could read in my parents' faces, or in the movements of my teacher, her handling of me becoming more delicate, more gentle, she now had to deal with her first diabetic student.

Eight months after my diagnosis, in the summer of 1992, my parents sent me to The Elliot P. Joslin Camp for boys with diabetes in Charlton, Massachusetts. Camp ran from June to August and every single camper had type I diabetes. Joslin created a safe and nurturing environment for boys with diabetes to feel normal, a wood-carved sign greeted all visitors "Diabetics are the best." The sign was likely from the 70s, if not from the 40s, the decade in which Dr. Joslin began saving children's lives with insulin.

Almost all counselors and administrators also had type I diabetes, some for as long as 40 or 50 years. The existence of these staff members was testament to the fact that a chronic illness didn't mean a shorter or compromised life. It was easy for a kid to grasp that these type Is looked normal. And as the old camp joke went, "*if it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck...*"

For us type 1s life with diabetes is a balance game. The struggle is to keep the level of glucose in our blood at a reasonable number. If you do not have diabetes this is one of the many things your body automatically does for you.

Perhaps you've heard of hypoglycemic and hyperglycemic? If you are hypoglycemic it means there is not enough glucose in your blood. You need food.

If you are hyperglycemic it means there is too much glucose in your blood. You need insulin.

Diabetes is essentially an equilateral triangle in which blood sugar, insulin, and food are points a, b, and c. But as the world spins, so does the triangle, and when you forget to balance one side of the triangle, say food, you end up hypoglycemic.

The body likes equilibrium so the dramatic shift in blood sugar, from high to low, can eventually lead to death if not swiftly treated. Both type I and type II diabetics are at risk of hypoglycemia, but it is more commonly type I diabetics who are affected. Because of the disorienting nature of low blood sugar it is possible that within a 25-minute time span a diabetic may black out and go into a diabetic coma. Unfortunately because of this condition, some diabetics die behind the wheel of an automobile because of the effects of low blood sugar.

To date, no preventive measures against type I exist. In most cases the patient, a child or young person, is physically fit and of healthy weight when diagnosed.

Do preventive measures exist for type II diabetics? Most diabetologists and endocrinologists argue yes. Most type IIs are overweight or have compromised physical health; typically patients are adults when diagnosed.

I've always felt that type II's give type I's a bad name.

Generally type I diabetics are more willing to treat themselves than type II diabetics. Because type I diabetics are diagnosed early on in life, some at birth, most grow up and learn how to treat their illness. The longer you live with the disease the longer you know you *could* run away from treatment, but you do so at your own peril. Going a whole day without testing your blood sugar and avoiding insulin is feasible, but if done for a few days you'd likely wake up in a hospital bed—if you woke up at all. Juvenile-onset or type I diabetics typically understand the importance of self-management from a young age.

Type II or adult-onset diabetics can live their entire lives without having to worry about checking their blood sugar level. Maybe I should lighten up on them. It certainly seems learning to manage diabetes at 7 is easier than learning to manage it at 70.

“Good Morning Camp Joslin,” the voice echoed over the PA system in Charlton, Massachusetts. We woke from our cabins, off to the “lav,” lavatory, the communal camp bathroom. My bunkmates and I had to walk to the lav because our cabin had no bathrooms. Off we went across Elliot P. Joslin field, the dew from the grass wetting our slippers. The morning chill sent shivers while we walked, still cold from the low temperatures of New England summer nights.

After toilet, teeth, and washing hands it was ‘bloods and insulins’ time. This act occurred four times daily. Nurse Pete brought his kit, a hefty converted toolbox, to our cabin. Pete, a jolly man from Indiana, was once a Joslin camper himself. He greeted us every morning prior to breakfast.

Inside his box were glucometers—small machines that read the glucose level, your body’s blood sugar. Also in his box was our insulin—the hormone all type 1 diabetic bodies lack. All bodies need insulin to process food. Also in his box were alcohol swabs, which wiped the dirt from our bodies. We then drew our insulin into syringes and injected ourselves. Camp Joslin was where I first learned how to administer insulin and give my own shots.

Breakfast and bedtime bloods and insulins were carried out in the mess hall. At 7:00 am and 10:00 pm it was too dark or too cold to be checking blood sugars and drawing up insulin outside our cabin.

The mess hall had high ceilings. Hanging from them were light fixtures attached to old wagon wheels, they reminded me of shows like “Bonanza.” The wood paneled building was the site of breakfast, lunch, and supper. Every meal had each camper’s meal plan laid out in front of his plate. The meal card read “Meal Plan 7: 2 breads, 2 meats, 1 milk, 1 fruit, and 1 vegetable” this was the amount of food a camper was allotted. Scales helped campers determine how much rice equaled “2 breads.” Writing covered the boards in the mess hall with conversion rates, “15 grams cho = 8 oz of rice,” and “8 oz of rice = 1 bread.”

This particular summer, in 1994, Matt Maday and I waited our turn for bedtime bloods and insulins. He was 11 and I was 10, without much hair on our bodies. We talked quietly, even though we were in the mess hall we knew that if we talked too excitedly we would incur the wrath of Steve, our mean junior counselor who talked in a thick Brockton accent.

If one of us wised off, Steve would pull us aside and make us sit in silence. Or if we were disorderly, he'd make us lie down on a bench, fold our hands across our chests and put his knee across our arms until we promised to be quiet.

I remember talking about Maday's favorite topic, wrestling. He wanted 6th grade to hurry up and get here, so he could try out for the Woodland Middle School wrestling team.

"I can't wait Stein," he said.

It was a topic that made Maday easily excitable and I remember thinking our conversation was heating up, which was a bad idea because it would end with Steve's attention. He would split us up and make us keep quiet, or worse, pin our arms to our chests with his knees.

"Why?" I asked anyway.

"It's gonna be great," Maday assured me.

In describing the forthcoming wrestling season Maday painted a very promising scene and I began to feel his future was as bright as he thought it would be. Young Matt Maday, budding local star, champion wrestler of New York's Westchester County.

When Maday started to discuss the possibility of winning a letterman jacket his eyes lit up like an old prospector talking about an undiscovered deposit. There was a burning passion in him that unites the chronically ill with those in perfect health. It was the passion of desire, the stuff of Olympic commitment. Maday's desire to be a member of the wrestling team was like a dedication to a gold medal. For a brief moment, it was warm in the wooden mess hall.

He trailed off and I looked down at my fingers. There was silence. Then I turned my gaze.

As I looked at Maday's face I saw his pupils vanish, rolling towards the back of his skull.

"Matt!" I shouted.

"Matt. MATT!" I yelled louder.

Maday didn't respond and the weight of his skull carried his head towards the mess hall floor. Surly Steve and nurse Pete had heard me. Steve and Pete were on their feet, but it was too late to catch Maday.

Though Maday and I were each about 100 lbs, Steve never had a problem pinning us to the ground when we became unruly. Surely Steve could get Matt up off the ground.

But Matt's arms flailed and broke Steve's grasp. With Steve recoiling from the flailing arms, nurse Pete tried to poke Maday's finger to get a blood glucose reading.

At this point Matt's legs also began to move, taking on a life of their own. Soon his limbs whipped faster than his torso could support. His body began to whip as he

writhed and he created a large circumference on the floor. I learned later that Matt was having a seizure, now seen by all in the mess hall.

Maday was thrashing around like a fish out of water. I thought his mind was in another world, perhaps trying to dodge something there. It took Pete, Steve and the camp director, Kevin, to restrain Maday enough to prick his finger and get a blood sugar reading from a glucometer. I remember feeling lucky that camp director Kevin happened to be in the mess hall. That feeling soon deflated as I realized he was not going to be able to hold Maday any better than Steve or Pete.

Kevin attempted to feed Matt cherry-flavored glucagon—a fast-acting sugar that is a processed version of what is normally made in the body. As Kevin began to force the red viscous stream into his mouth, Maday's right arm broke free and drew backwards in an instant. Suddenly Kevin was on the floor. In the melee Maday had clocked the camp director on his jaw.

Watching the scene unfold I wondered where Matt went. He lost consciousness but it looked as if he gained another. Fortunately for him and all those who love him, he came back.

Kevin was able to hold Maday still and inject him with a solution of glucagon. Glucagon that can be injected is a faster-acting substance than the stuff found in human bodies. The injection immediately counters hypoglycemia. It takes the body's blood sugar from low to high rapidly. A short time passes and a conscious diabetic reemerges.

I believe that on that day I witnessed a bit of death in life, right here on earth. Maday didn't give himself to the elders, but it looked like he stepped into their realm. Not all of my Camp Joslin friends have been as lucky as Maday.

Having spent 10 summers at Joslin I remember many firsts coming at camp. My first talk about sex was there. It was not around a campfire or from an older counselor; it was actually with one of my peers.

His name was Jonathan, and like me, he was a city kid in rural Massachusetts. He came from Miami, I came from Manhattan, and while Florida was far from New York we bonded over the ways we thought our cabin mates to be naive country bumpkins. Though we were both 11-years-old at the time, I remember our conversation vividly.

"I shouldn't ask you this," Jonathan said.

"Well you have to now," I said.

"No I don't. It's bad. I mean, I shouldn't even be asking you."

"Just ask me man. There's nothing in the world you couldn't ask me."

"You ever go low, like *really* low, when you're doing it?"

"Doing what?" I asked.

"You know. When you and your girlfriend are doing it."

"*Ohhh*," I said. His statement registered. Here I thought New Yorkers grew up fast.

"I dunno man. I don't think so."

“Well think about it. I think if you *do*, you can’t get it up. You go soft. Erection dysfunction or something.”

Though it would be years before I knew what Jonathan was talking about, his adolescent assessment was correct. When male diabetics are hypoglycemic, they are unable to achieve erection. Studies have been conducted that show problems with orgasm, libido, and arousal are common in both women and men with diabetes.

I had the luxury of coming into adolescence as a diabetic. As a seven-year-old I got to understand my chronic illness before I understood my sexuality. I do not envy those who came to their disease and their sexuality at the same time.

Last year I sent an email to Matt Maday to see if he had heard from any of our old friends. He emailed back very sad news about a former counselor. He was a rugby player at Indiana University. He had his last name “Shella,” spelled in Swedish, tattooed on his back. He taught us diabetic campers we could be anything we wanted. And he showed us by example.

Matt’s email read: “About 2 years ago, he overdosed on heroin, but survived that. What killed him was either a diabetic low or choking in his sleep. The autopsy showed his level was very low but he also had some kind of sedative tab in his lung (I guess people put them in their mouth to get high). He passed out and swallowed it and choked on it and died.”

This image of Andy Shella in the final stages of life did not jibe with the image I had in my mind. I still remembered the summer of 1997 and the image Shella, counselor

and Maday and Stein, campers.

Shella led Maday and I into the mess hall to set the table for supper. Setting up was both a pain and a privilege. You had to leave bloods and insulins early to go put out the plates, cups, napkins, utensils and scales for the cabin. But if you did set up, you controlled who sat where, a little slice of power for the lowly camper. Of course if you put all the counselors next to one another, you were likely to have Shella reject your seating order and sit wherever he damn well pleased.

Shella and Maday were discussing music. With Shella from central Indiana, and Maday and I from downstate New York, our tastes in music varied. The conversation had progressed into a kind of quiz, a back-and-forth where we each tried to one up the other with our musical knowledge.

“He was the first guy to bring reggae to America,” Shella hinted.

“That’s too broad,” I protested.

“Fine. He was the first foreigner to bring reggae to America.”

“How can you even know that?” I asked.

“OK well it’s *widely accepted*, that he’s the first non-American to bring reggae to America.”

“OK. But how do you *bring* reggae? It’s not like something you can pack in a suitcase.”

“God Stein. Fine, I’ll rephrase. He was the first non-American musician to popularize reggae in America.”

“Bob Marley,” Maday guessed.

“Nope.” Shella smiled.

“Are you sure?” I asked.

“Yep. Eric Clapton.”

“WHAT?” I threw up my hands in protest.

“What? He was the first. Bob Marley might be popular now, but nobody had ever heard of him back then. It was Eric Clapton with his rendition of ‘I Shot the Sheriff’ who climbed the charts and popularized the song,” Shella relayed with authority.

Maday’s face was plain. It didn’t look at all quizzical. I was certain Shella was wrong and it was written all over my face. Shella lead us out of the mess hall and we walked back to our cabin in silence. Could Maday feel Shella’s smugness radiating off of him? I knew he felt certain he had won the music game.

This was the Shella I remembered: the stubborn, smiling, blonde rugby player who could be tattooed but responsible. Who could be wrong according to my opinion, but still be right for bringing us into his quizzes and games of one-upmanship.

Not long after Maday relayed the news of Shella, I learned the fate of another Joslin alum we had been counselors with.

Austin True Commando was a young diabetic and yes, that was really his name. Like Maday and Stein, Commando was a New Yorker. Another downstater, he was from Long Island. I remember thinking the first summer I met him, “I bet he thinks he’s a smooth operator.” I distinctively remember being jealous of him, particularly during The Joslin Camp dances.

Twelve times during the summer, the boys of the Elliot P. Joslin Camp for boys

with diabetes and the girls from the Clara Barton Camp for girls with diabetes met for a dance. For Joslin boys, campers and counselors alike, this meant meeting and maybe even dancing with a Barton girl.

Because of camp rules, Second Year Counselors-in-Training or CITs, could stay at Joslin from June to August, the whole summer. First Year CITs could only work for four weeks and then had to leave. This meant that Second Year CITs could meet three entirely different groups of First Year CITs, Barton girls or Joslin boys.

In the summer of 2000 Austin was a lucky guy. He took full advantage of the overlapping schedules. The Second Year CITs from Barton had all met our cohort of Second Years. We were old hat. But Austin and his crop of First Year CITs were fresh blood. They were new news, hot off the press.

I had met a Barton girl, a Second Year from upstate New York a few times. Her name was Jamie and I had now begun to seek her out at the dances. I'd chat her up and was more than willing to cut into my Diet Dr. Pepper allotment, gifting her one of my soda tickets.

She was the daughter of a dairy farmer and I was the son of a college professor; I looked to West Side Story for guidance. I figured if Tony and Maria could work it out, a downstater and an upstater could do the same.

I asked Jamie if she wanted a soda and she said yes. So I left her company to go get one. When I returned from the soda line, Jamie was talking to Austin and I felt my pride well up inside me. I felt hot and flushed and hoped my face wasn't turning red.

As a Second Year CIT, I took issue with all of the traffic Austin was logging

during the slow dances. Nevertheless, we remained friends and beyond teenage envy I never thought anything bad of Austin.

I found out about Austin's passing on a blog written by Kim, a young woman I went to college with. I had no idea she knew Austin. I knew Kim because she was another New Yorker at Susquehanna University, a college with less than 2,000 students. It turns out she and Austin grew up attending rival high schools in Long Island. Both were active in the same Universal Unitarian church.

Ironically enough, Kim became a Unitarian Universalist minister and wound up officiating the marriage of my wife and I. Kim married us in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, a few miles from Susquehanna University where we all attended undergrad.

A year before Kim joined my wife and I in matrimony, she wrote and read the Eulogy for Austin True Commando. Before Kim and I had a chance to speak of Austin's passing, I came across her post about him:

“Saturday Austin had a stroke or heart attack (still unknown officially, but due to his diabetes) while driving. He accelerated and swerved into on coming traffic, hitting a car head on. Austin was dead at the scene. He was 24.”

For some reason, diabetes or otherwise, these young men joined the ancestors while Maday and I were lucky enough to stay.

As a type I diabetic I am twice as likely as most Americans to suffer from heart disease or stroke. As a type I diabetic I am a member of a minority, a much smaller

enclave of the 25.8 million Americans who have diabetes. About 90-95% of all Americans are type II diabetics.

You might be able to tell a type II by looking at one, if they were overweight. Type Is are even harder to spot and pick out of a crowd.

If you saw me, you would not be able to tell that my body has been affected by my type I, though a closer look would reveal my illness' influence. My left middle finger has hundreds, likely thousands, of tiny holes that no longer bleed.

The skin on my fingertips has healed but left a Milky Way of tiny black dots from all the finger sticks. Most youngsters and adults are familiar with a finger stick, usually conducted at their annual checkup. I poke my fingers the way the doctor pokes his patients', ten to twelve times a day. My minute lancing device holds a lancet, a tiny 33-gauge needle, that pierces my skin lightning fast.

My thighs show tissue and blue-black blotches from 21 years of injecting insulin. From 1991 up until 2010 every drop of insulin I received was via subcutaneous injection. I stuck needles in my belly, legs, arms and butt in order to do what most endocrine systems do several times daily; squirt out a bit of insulin. In best-case scenarios the injection didn't hurt at all. On many occasions the pain was immediate like a yellow jacket's sting. Sometimes the pain stuck around, the way your hand feels after you miss the nail head and hit your thumb with a hammer.

Type I diabetics have a grace period between diagnosis and beginning insulin injections—physicians call it a “honeymoon”—when their pancreas still works. This period typically lasts a few months. The brief transition separates life as you know it and

life unknown. While the “honeymoon” is a tangible, serious thing, I often wondered if the cruel doctor who invented this term was diabetic. Perhaps he found humor in that the marriage to his chronic illness would last his lifetime. You may wed a dozen times but there is no divorcing diabetes.

Given how fickle life is, particularly for diabetics, I can’t help but wonder why I’m still here. I try to test my blood sugar every time I get into my car but sometimes I forget. I’ve skipped using my glucometer when I was just in the car for a short drive. So how many times have I been lucky? Countless.

I’ve always been able to sense when I’m going low. I can feel when I’m slower, getting lethargic. My mind races while my body is sluggish. My face gets pale and sometimes I break out in a cold sweat. Fortunately, my wife Sarah is able to notice my lows.

“Are you OK?” she asks.

Or “what’s wrong with you?”

When I don’t respond, Sarah will shove a cupcake in my mouth. It works and I’ve been lucky not to ever need a shot of glucagon. I wouldn’t know how to repay her for stabbing me with the needle that would save my life. Or worse, and I shudder to think, if she even physically could.

Going low is an unforgettable feeling. It sets my consciousness adrift but fast as it moves out in front of my body. It feels like somebody else is behind the wheel with their foot on the gas and my mind races, the RPMs outpacing the engine’s cylinders.

Eventually, if I drop low enough, I have something similar to an out of body experience. It's not a birds-eye-view as I cannot look at my body from above, it's more of a seed of anger, growing, branching out, expanding rapidly. My mind, still working, is pissed that my body has failed it. In that moment I know I need sugar, *get up, get help, eat some cake*. My screams become muffled and my body begins to slide into the ether that will someday claim us all.

HOPS TO SAVE THE DAY

Be they men, women, or children, brewers make excellent subjects. Writers love profiling them. Beer historians love reimagining the ones that brewed in centuries past. Brewers can be endearing or polarizing figures depending on their time and place. For example, the years of 1916-1933, as long as prohibition lasted in Washington, D.C., was a difficult time to be a brewer.

I knew right away when I met Jeff Hancock and Brandon Skall in the fall of 2010, that the co-founders of the DC Brau Brewing Company would make excellent profile subjects. As Staff Writer for DCBeer.com, a site that promotes the growth of the DC area's craft beer culture, I knew that brew masters and beer folks made great interviewees. Most of the pieces I wrote for DCBeer were short, punchy, articles excluding many of the stakes that come along with being a brewmaster. My pieces were largely void of the things, typically said off the record, that keep brewery CEOs up at night.

Brewers are laid back people, but breweries can be dangerous places to work. If you're lucky, your brewery is as automated as the AB-InBev plants that make Budweiser in Newark, New Jersey, Williamsburg, Virginia, or Jacksonville, Florida. However, most of the over 2,000 American craft breweries don't. Some have fully automated brewhouses from German companies like BrauKon. These systems come with gadgets that let a brewer start his brewday by pressing a button on his cell phone.

But the most costly system can't stop a pump from breaking when its time to pump 1,000 gallons of beer into a stainless steel tank. No streamlined German engineering can prevent parasitic acid spraying in your face. Or worse, dying in a freak accident, while keg cleaning.

This happened just last year in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Last April, Ben Harris, a 26-years-old brewer at the Red Hook Ale Brewery was cleaning kegs, a standard daily task for the majority of breweries around the world. Harris got into work at 7 AM, like any other Tuesday morning, and began cleaning the vessels that allow you to drink draft beer. A freak accident occurred while Harris was flushing the keg with air and an exploding keg sent debris into Harris' head and chest. He later died in the hospital. Harris left behind his newly married wife and unborn child.

The DC Brau brewery has never had any life-threatening accidents. But like any newly opened brewery, they had concerns when it came the financial health of their company. By the time DC Brau opened in 2011, DC had not had a production brewery in over half a century.

Before prohibition, in the late 19th century, DC had 10 production breweries. Prohibition started early in DC, comparatively to the rest of the country, in 1916. According to Garret Peck, author of *How Dry We Weren't*, DC had four breweries in 1917 and was the second largest industry in the capital, after the Federal Government.

I was a bit skeptical to read that the brewing industry was the second largest industry in DC. However, even the number of breweries is difficult to trace. Peck mentions four but the brewmaster himself, Christian Heurich, mentions more, in his

biography, *Aus meinem Leben 1842-1934. Von Haina in Thueringen nach Washington in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika, (My Life 1842-1934. From Haina in Thuringia to Washington in the United States of America.)*

“Before prohibition there were five breweries which had produced roughly half a million barrels of beer.” The Christian Heurich Brewing Company at its peak capacity held 500,000 barrels. There are no documents that state that this capacity was ever actualized, but that gives an idea of how much beer could be created. According to Heurich’s autobiography, 500,000 barrels was actually the combined output of five breweries.

Heurich goes on to say that after prohibition, “there were only two, and the population had greatly increased. I asked myself, ‘Will we be able to supply the demand?’ We made every effort not to have a shortage of beer, but soon we discovered that the public had forgotten about drinking beer!”

Prohibition had made liquor America’s alcohol of choice. That combined with World War I and anti-German sentiment had made the public forget about drinking beer.

Only two DC breweries were able to open after prohibition. The Abner-Drury Brewery, who released their beer too young, or “green,” didn’t make it past 1935. The Christian Heurich Brewing Company remained open until 1965.

With the 1933 repeal of Prohibition, Heurich worried about neighboring brewers cutting into his market share. In DC there was only one, and because Abner-Drury rushed “green beer” to market, they gained a bad reputation. Still, there were breweries in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York who threatened Heurich’s business.

But Heurich didn't have to worry about other breweries who had already been in his market for half a century. In 1932 there was not one brewer that was legally allowed to sell beer in DC. This is where the story of DC Brau differs.

DC Brau opened in 2011 with out of market breweries all competing for DC's beer market since Heurich closed in 1956.

Brau opened in Ward 5, or the "warehouse district," about five miles from Union Station and about six miles from the White House. The brewery is surrounded by the figuratively new: New Beginnings Uni Sex Hair, New Century Carry Out, New Town Cleaners, and New Canaan Baptist Church. The brewery stands behind Bladensburg Road. If you drive south along Bladensburg, towards New York Avenue, you'll see Goodyear Auto Services Center, C & S Auto Repair, as well as Rufus Auto Parts and Restoration.

When I first visited in September 2011, the warehouse space was littered with boxes and little else.

"They're pamphlets," Brandon said. His voice bounced off the concrete floors and echoed around the tall ceilings of the warehouse.

"Something the Armed Forces sends to soldiers' families."

Brandon was uncertain about the origin of the pamphlets. I read the print on the side of the large brown boxes, "To: Families of the Armed Forces."

It was late January 2011, before I next stepped foot inside the DC Brau brewery. Things had changed in that all of the brown boxes belonging to the previous tenant were

gone. There was a massive carbon filter as tall as a person, and glycol lines for cooling water and beer ran overhead.

Their stainless steel fermentors had shipped from China, first being made there, then shipped via ocean freight to California, then finally trucked from California, in their massive shipping containers, to Bladensburg Road, Washington, D.C.

There were about a dozen people at the brewery, looking to lend Brau a hand as we helped unload their fermentors. Each weighed 1,000 pounds and since Brandon had pulled his back out heaving empty kegs the week before, he was out of commission for the most part.

We helped unload the fermentors from shipping containers, just as they had come off the boat. Without instructions or crowbars, we pried the giant stainless steel vessels from their iron arms inside the massive containers. We moved them with the help of a forklift. We hoisted chains from the ceiling and stood them upright. I don't know if Jeff or Brandon knew if their warehouse beams would support the weight.

But the beams stood up and the roof didn't cave in. Nobody died. Pizza and beer on the brewery followed. It was still too early for Brau to serve its own beer and it would be April before their beer was sold to the public.

I wrote about the setup for DCBeer and titled my article "DC Brau Gets Tank'd." Normally when I write a piece there are comments posted. Sometimes multiple readers chime in on the article. Not one comment was posted below my article. I took this to mean that beer drinkers in DC were ready for beer, not build out updates.

I went to visit Brau again, a week before DC Brau's launch party. I was hoping to talk to Jeff to get some updates for DCBeer. If time permitted I was happy to lend a hand in the brewery and had even thrown on a pair of waterproof boots. They wouldn't stop my foot bones from shattering under a thousand pound tank but they were better than flip-flops.

While riding the metro I hit a delay and texted Jeff and Brandon to let them know I would be later than expected. A single tracking train and a bus shuttle between metro stops had made my ride unbearably long. I called Brandon and he came to pick me up in his gray Mazda sedan.

Nothing had been promised via email but I figured the final iteration of their first product to market, The Public Pale Ale, would be offered. After all I helped DC Brau install their fermentors, the very tanks that would produce the first DC-brewed beer in over 50 years.

When Brandon and I arrived, Jeff and Rob, DC Brau's Web Developer, were sitting on the sole couch in the brewery. Jeff and Rob were drinking one of Rob's homebrews; a maple nut brown ale. The beer was brown and muddled with a hazy thickness. It looked chunky.

We drink with our mouths. Though producers in the beverage business often talk about how we also drink with our eyes. This beer was not an easy drink on the eyes. The beer was murky, the color of mud. There was no head on top of the beer and that little white cap imbibers love to see was nonexistent.

The smell was appropriate for brown ale, a moderate malt aroma with biscuity undertones, a tiny bit of roasted character and the recognizable whiff of maple syrup. Rob confirmed the use of maple syrup. He had baked the walnuts in his oven and then dried them. After baking, he briefly sautéed them on his stovetop with a drizzle of maple syrup before adding them. No roasted malt was used and I was surprised at the slightly toasted quality from the sautéed walnuts.

Perhaps unsurprising was the lack of head. There was none because the oils from the fatty walnuts had killed any chance of head retention.

Rob had just put his homebrew in a keg the week before and we poured his brew from a swing-top growler. Because Rob's beer was so fresh, having just hit the appropriate level of carbonation, there was some yeast in suspension, which floated throughout the brown liquid. While it was a bit disturbing to notice tiny white islands floating by as I quaffed, Rob assured me that the next time I tried it, it would be clearer.

After our first glass Brandon announced he was leaving. Shortly thereafter Rob said he had to get home. He asked if he should leave his swing-top growler, Jeff urged him to.

Then it was Jeff and I. To my surprise, Jeff poured us each another glass of Rob's maple nut brown ale. Most of my surprise came from the fact that a few feet away were nearly two thousand gallons of pale ale. Jeff had seen Rob's setup at home and trusted Rob's method enough to drink the growler until it was done. I figured *what the hell, if it's good enough for the brewmaster, it's good enough for me.*

What I hadn't realized was that The Public, DC Brau's flagship beer, was flat. Jeff had just finished transferring the beer from the fermentation tank to the bright tank. After fermentation occurs, beer is transferred to the bright tank, or conditioning tank, in order to make it just that, "bright." The fermented beer still has yeast in suspension and is still too "green" to drink, so the bright tank helps to clean up the finished product.

Jeff's brewday had ended before I got there, when he transferred his beer from the fermentation tank to the bright tank. He spent the last couple of hours waiting for his pale ale to carbonate. If it's true that a watched pot never boils, a watched beer never carbonates.

For each pint of beer we share, three each, Jeff excuses himself to check the pressure gauge on the bright tank. Each time he checks, the pressure rises. Still it rises too slowly to think that the beer will carbonate by the end of the evening.

When Jeff returns from the last check, he suggests we head to Meridian Pint for dinner. I ask him if I can have a taste of The Public Pale Ale that will hopefully put DC back on the production brewery map. Sure, Jeff says.

The beer is cloudy and while no yeast is visible it is clear that there is still yeast in suspension. Part of this is attributed to a chill haze, a cloudiness caused by precipitation of protein-tannin compounds when beer is at a low temperature. Chill haze does not affect taste, only its aesthetics.

The pale ale's aroma was noticeably malt forward. Instead of grapefruit or citrus-notes provided by pungent hops, it was more bread-forward with a distinct smell of graham crackers, Lorna Doones or Uneeda Biscuits.

The taste was fairly well balanced though the noticeable caramel backbone offset the hop bite. I attributed this chewiness to the specialty malt—caramel. It had a fairly thin mouthfeel and though that is not entirely inappropriate for the style. Pale ale should be pleasantly hearty, not light and airy the way a domestic lager tastes (a commercial example would be the difference between Sierra Nevada's Pale Ale and AB-InBev's Bud Light).

The finish was on the dry side, which is inline with how I like my pale ales. I do not like a wet, round, quick finish in my pale ale. I prefer a dry finish with lingering bitterness.

But after my first sip, the finish lingered a little too long. A kind of licorice-like taste stayed in my mouth and I went to the bathroom to fill my glass with water and gulped it down. While some childhood aversions have diminished, such as mushrooms and brussels sprouts, I still have a strong distaste for black licorice.

Jeff didn't ask for my evaluation, which was a good thing because I was unimpressed. For starters the beer was flat. As a homebrewer I have tasted my fair share of flat beer, it is common for homebrewers to check on a beer's taste before bottling. The finished, carbonated, product will be drastically different. Brewers will check the taste of their beers before carbonating to see if something should be done to further affect the flavor profile.

The strongest flavors in beer are typically infused while the beer is in the brew kettle. This is well before the beer is introduced to yeast, at which point the sugar in beer is converted into alcohol.

Even though all commercial beers are first boiled, any number of different ingredients can be added once the boil is over to contribute a more interesting flavor. The same is true for homebrew. As a homebrewer I have added a pound of honey to a porter, just as it finished boiling. Although honey tastes sweet, it ferments dry and can dry out an undesirable round-tasting porter. Because honey actually dries out beer, with a simple addition of a pound of honey I have successfully taken a bland porter with a wet, round finish, and moved its finish closer to the flavor profile of dry champagne or white wine.

Many homebrewed stouts have been “saved” with the addition of coffee, long after alcohol was converted to sugar. Sometimes the yeast doesn’t convert all the sugar, especially when you brew a big, bold, stout. So what to do with a sugary sweet stout that lacks complexity? Add coffee!

A couple ounces of bitter black coffee can really alter the aroma and taste of stout. Two ounces of crushed coffee beans provide an assertive bitterness that counteracts the chewy, rich, saccharine-like flavor of an otherwise undrinkable stout. This is why homebrewers taste their beer flat. Carbonated stout tastes different than flat stout, if you had bottled it and waited for it to carbonate, at that point it would be too late to add coffee. So, we taste our beer flat to know what needs to be done before it is *really* done.

Before leaving the brewery for dinner, Jeff rinses a liter swing-top bottle. He does this so he can take The Public Pale Ale to the men behind the bar at Meridian Pint.

The bar is packed and we are carded when we arrive. We order beers at the bar. With hawk eyes we wait for seats. Finally two men get up and we quickly take their seats.

After placing our order for food, Jeff asks the Sam Fitz, Beer Director, if he'd like to try some of The Public.

“Fuck yes.”

Sam takes the bottle behind the counter and pours a taste into a small glass.

“It's good,” he tells Jeff.

“Let me get John,” and he shuttles down the length of the bar exuding frenetic energy.

Jeff introduces us. John is the owner. He also takes a glass and pours himself a sample.

“Not bad.” John says.

“We're gonna be packed here on Friday man,” he tells Jeff.

“Even more people than this. And everybody is going to have on DC Brau shirts. We made special ones for the launch party.”

John's excitement over the launch party clearly trumps his excitement for the under-carbonated ale.

Jeff and I pay our tab and he tells me he's going to go back to the brewery before he heads to the Wonderland Ballroom. Next to Meridian Pint, Wonderland Ballroom has the largest keg order for The Public. I wonder if Jeff is doing a disservice by sampling a beer that will taste differently than the finished product. But then again, how much can a beer really change in one week?

I declined the invitation to head to another bar farther from home, Arlington, Virginia. Before going back to the brewery Jeff dropped me off at the metro.

Next week saw the release of The Public at Meridian Pint. They opened at 5:00 PM. Before anyone imbibers stepped inside, the single-file line stretched down and around the block. Local news crews paced the sidewalk. I wondered, would this many people stand in line for under carbonated, licorice-tasting beer?

Dog walkers stopped and questioned the people waiting in line.

“Just to get into the Pint?” Those familiar with Meridian Pint, the Columbia Heights better beer bar, asked.

“DC Brau release!” Responded those in line.

The queue started around 4, an hour before opening. Inside, John, Owner, and Sam, Beer Director, and a whole host of barbacks prepped for the madness.

Earlier on in the day, Tax Day, April 15, Sam was running cleaning solution through keg lines. They had every staff member wear a DC Brau shirt. Black shirts with white lettering, were printed specifically for the event. Below DC Brau’s logo (an outline of the Capital building surrounded by barley spikelets, three stars as they appear on the DC flag, and two hop vines) was www.meridianpint.com. The shirt reads, “The release of DC’s first production brewery in over fifty years April 15th, 2011.”

The DC Brau rendering of the Capital was offset in white and the lettering on the back read “Fermentation Without Representation”—a play on DC’s license plate: “Taxation Without Representation.”

Brandon and Jeff, President and Brewmaster, were wearing bright red translucent visors with white-trim elastic bands. They're the card dealer visors you'd expect your aunt to bring back from her visit to Atlantic City.

A pressed button down covered Brandon's tattoos that circle his chest. The collared shirt covered his "sleeves." A black tie matched his closed four-button black vest. Orange Nike Air Max running shoes gave off a glow beneath dark jeans.

Jeff also wore a button down with a black tie and black vest. A silver elastic band constricted his left bicep. It was the kind of reflective band cyclists wear when they want to keep their pant leg out of their bike's chain. Were it not for the black Vans skate shoes matching his dark dungarees, Jeff could have stood in for a teller in a 19th century bank.

Oddly, the aesthetic worked. Though the fashion placed Jeff and Brandon somewhere between steam punks and black jack dealers in a struggling Vegas casino.

Eyes on the sidewalk were glued to Jeff and Brandon. It soon became clear that the two men casing the line were brothers in the brewing business.

"Would you like a house made French fry?" Brandon asked, arm outstretched.

"I'll be right back, folks!" Jeff shouted before darting inside to refill his red and white paper carton of beer battered onion rings.

In a few minutes time Jeff bombed down the sidewalk. This time with two cartons of onion rings. He offered me a ring. After trying to take the carton I realized they were for everyone in line. I gave Jeff a hug and felt his smile become contagious.

When I finally got to the front entrance I saw my colleagues Tammy Tuck, beer writer for the Washington City Paper, and Greg Kitsock, beer writer for the Washington Post, but from inside they could not see me.

I saw John at the door and tried to make eye contact. He didn't reciprocate. He didn't remember me. Or both. Or he was simply too busy making sure the line met fire-code.

After my ID was checked I was ushered downstairs. I tried not to take this as an affront or some off-handed gesture that the City Paper or the Washington Post produced better writing than DCBeer. The upstairs bar has a capacity of 104. *They have 104 up there*, it's as simple as that, I reassured myself.

Downstairs I saw more friends from the local beer scene. I spotted Favio Garcia, brewmaster for Lost Rhino Brewing Company in Virginia. Tom Cizauskas, former brewer at Maryland's British Brewing Company, beer writer and representative for Select Wines, a northern Virginia wine and beer wholesaler.

By the time I got my hands around a pint of The Public I was incredibly parched. Just looking at the beer, it was obvious it had evolved since last week. A week at a colder temperature had greatly improved clarity.

Jeff chose to dry hop the beer after I had tried the week before. He loaded up a huge mesh bag with hops, tied it, and threw it in the bright tank.

The aroma had changed significantly. Scent is what drives flavor and this smelled like a hop field had fornicated with a citrus grove inside the bright tank. Not only had the beer changed, it smelled like an entirely different product. The smell packed a powerful

bouquet and somehow the nasally bitterness crept into the flavor profile. Hops impart bitterness but different varieties of hops provide different, distinct smells.

Jeff used the Centennial hop variety, a flower originally grown in the Yakima Valley in Washington State—an area known as America’s hop belt. It is the largest hop acreage of any state.

The greatest question on people’s minds was, is this beer too bitter? It is a great question to be asking of your beer. The question implicates two possibilities: the beer has gone bad and skunked and is therefore bitter *or* the beer uses a copious amount of hops and that hop bite is present, making the beer bitter. As Jeff’s beer was never skunked the case was clear. The Public was bitter from the hops used in the cooking—in the kettle—and it was perfumed with a citrus tinge because of the dry hopping—hops added to the bright tank after fermentation had occurred.

Before hops (and depending on the country) beer was bittered with heather, bog myrtle, and/or rosehips. Botanicals stood in for the female flowers, hops, that brewers love so much. It was the spread of pilsner beer that made Europe love bitter beer.

Of course Europe’s “bitter” pilsner is mild comparatively to America’s bitter pale ale. From the repeal of prohibition until recently, hopping levels, or how bitter a beer is, have decreased. However, with the spread of microbreweries and smaller-scale commercial breweries in America, bitter beer is back with a vengeance. I am reminded of the quote from H. L. Mencken’s essay, *How to Drink Like a Gentleman: The Things to Do and the Things Not To, as Learned in 30 Years’ Extensive Research*:

Not long ago I invited a prohibitionist to supper, and induced him to drink a horn of Pilsner, assuring him that it wouldn't hurt him and hoping that it would cure him of his mania. He confessed afterward that its effects were surprisingly pleasant and harmless. He retained the use of his so-called faculties, and was aware of no impulse to kick over the table or brain the waiter. But he felt that he had to object to something, and so he objected to the taste. "It is," he said, "too bitter. I'd like it better if it were sweet." Fancy that, Hedda! Pilsner too bitter! That fellow, when he gets to heaven, will object to the fact that angels have wings.

The Public was a smash hit. Meridian Pint's original order for DC Brau's The Public pale ale was for 15 kegs. The 15 kegs were supposed to last to Monday. In less than seven hours every keg was kicked (before midnight). This staggering amount of consumption calculated to 5 pints per person, per minute. At the end of the evening sales of The Public had spoken for themselves. The DC public had not forgot beer, the way they had in 1933.

THE QUEST FOR HEURICH'S LAGER

One of my best friends Josh Hubner, attorney by day, is a dedicated homebrewer. Josh is President of the DC Homebrewers Club and he shares my passion for recreating historical ale and lager. Josh is a great partner in brewing and he helps me put beers into proper historical context. Especially when I get carried away with recipe formulation.

When I begin speculating and come to an incomprehensible conclusion as to why we should use 10 ounces of hops instead of 5, Josh grounds me. Beer recipes are formulated to style and my philosophy regarding style tends to be, 'Screw style, let's make a tasty monster!' Josh's style tends to be, 'Let's brew it to style, we can always re-brew and *then* create a monster.'

Josh responds to my heady, esoteric quips with, "I'm speculating here, but I also think that the hopping rates would be much lower - I can't imagine early 20th Century pub-goers and laborers waxing poetic about the 'floral' and 'spice' notes of the hops. I've never met any early 20th Century pub-goers or laborers, but I can't believe they knew or cared as long as the beer tasted like beer and it was cooler than ambient temperature and bubbly."

As a brewer Josh is primarily concerned with the specifics of how we are going to make a hundred-year-old recipe. As a full-time graduate student and history enthusiast, I am primarily concerned with replicating old recipes as closely as possible. When I come across ingredients that do not exist anymore, I ask why they no longer exist. I ferret out

what these were replaced with or why these ingredients fell out of favor and look for the ways in which greater changes in society influence smaller changes in breweries. Of course the changes are not always obvious.

As Josh constantly reminds me, sometimes in history, how the beer was made, what ingredients were in it, or what processes were used to brew it, are really secondary to the simple fact that the beer was there. Still I have always wondered what beer was here, in Washington, D.C., a hundred years ago?

In 1913 Washington D.C.'s biggest brewer was Christian Heurich, owner of the Christian Heurich Brewing Company. He had an advertising budget, something no breweries in DC have today. Heurich ran catchy and clever ads, before, during, and after prohibition.

One 1897 ad reads, "HEURICH'S BOCK BEER—like Christmas—comes but once a year—and its advent is looked forward to with much eagerness and appreciation by practically every one—because it puts new life and energy into the body—makes the weak strong, and gives health to all mankind."

This sounded like a beer I needed to try, but what did it taste like? Perhaps it was light colored, the way a German pale bock's straw color is accentuated with golden hues. Maybe the golden Bock had a surprisingly sweet taste up front; notes of graham cracker and a Lorna Dunes-like start that faded to a modest hop character in the middle palate and the earthy, zesty, spiciness of German hops rounded out the flavor profile for a pronounced, long finish. While there is no one around today to tell me what Heurich's

Bock tasted like, it was undoubtedly different than the beer being brewed in Washington today. So what kinds of ingredients were used to brew Heurich's Bock?

The ingredients were the same as the ones used today by the DC Brau Brewing Company, Washington's first production brewery since the Christian Heurich Brewing Company closed in 1956. Though the ingredients are the same, their beer is far bitterer than Heurich's. Their bestselling "Public Pale Ale" is much closer to copper in color than pale. It's called pale but with its copper and orange color it is actually closer to amber.

DC Brau uses Pacific Northwest hops, particularly hops from Washington State, just as Heurich did. Today these hops have pedigrees and names like: Willamette, Cascade, Mt. Hood, Columbus, Tomahawk, Zeus, Nugget, and Galena. Some of these hops have pedigrees from German hops, i.e. their father was a German hop and their mother was an American wild hop.

Was it simply a different combination or percentage of ingredients that the Chr. Heurich Brew. Co. used yearlong to brew its other beers? Were new ingredients shipped and freighted into D.C. just so the capitol's biggest brewery could replicate the beers of Heurich's native Germany?

Completely replicating Heurich's recipe would be a Herculean, if not impossible task. And if one were wiser, he'd take the wisdom of "I can build a better beer today," apply it, and not get stuck over how the lager of the late 19th and early 20th century tasted. I, however, have difficulty applying that wisdom.

In search of more information on the man behind Heurich's lager, I asked my friend Josh to join me on a tour of the Heurich House Museum. Josh and I often brew together in his one-bedroom apartment in Northwest D.C., just above Logan Circle. Our quest to recreate Heurich's lager and various pre-prohibition beers have led us to an understanding that the ingredients available today are superior to the ingredients used in the 19th and 20th centuries. Beyond historical context, Josh and I were hoping to gather more information about the pre-prohibition beers produced by The Christian Heurich Brewing Company.

Construction of the mansion began in 1892 and most visitors who see the five-story home have a hard time thinking of a humble brewer. Heurich and his family inhabited the Brewmaster's Castle for 51 years, from 1894-1945. Josh and I were the only two homebrewers in the castle. Everyone else on the tour came to see Washington's most intact Victorian house. We were alone in our quest for one of the brewmaster's recipes. Perhaps it was naïve of us to think that we could discover one of his recipes just by visiting the Heurich House.

Anything from a percentage of alcohol by volume to a physical description of Heurich's beer would have provided more insight than we had. Josh and I wondered if Heurich's recipes varied. Did Heurich's lager change from the opening of his brewery in 1872 to the closing in 1956? Whether or not the recipe changed, names certainly did, from "Home Brew" in 1912, to "Senate Beer," in 1940 and "Old Georgetown" in 1947.

The tour began in the library. The guide gave biographical information about the house, the German craftsmen who worked on it, and how the wood was imported from

Germany, Italy, and elsewhere in Europe. My eyes scanned the library for anything that remotely resembled a brewer's log or a big thick book that could have come from the brewery. The books were an assorted lot, though none had come from the time Christian Heurich lived in the house. The books were about architecture, sailing, and navigation; they did not look like original books that would have been in the library.

“Please keep together. I'd hate to lose a visitor on the tour,” our tour guide urged as she ushered us out of the library. While her directive was addressed to all, I knew I was the cause.

To the tourists the term “America's oldest brewer” was second to “Washington's largest private landowner.” They came to see the grandiosity of Washington's first fireproof home. They came to be wowed by the Heurich's hand-painted Steinway—one of only ten such pianos ever made. This information seemed to contradict my understanding; that, fundamentally, Christian Heurich was a modest brewer.

While the tour guide did mention Heurich's humble birth in Haina, Germany, she failed to mention the hovels Heurich first lived in upon his arrival in Baltimore in 1866. No discussion of the 18-hour days—before he was lucky to have a business partner who helped him buy the Schnell Brewery in Washington, D.C. in 1872. It was hard times for Christian Heurich, up until he bought the brewery, and even after.

As we made our way downstairs we observed the staff's kitchen and pantry. Just down the hall from the kitchen and pantry was Heurich's bierstube. A bierstube is a mini beer hall. Heurich's bierstube only had room for one short, rectangular table. Four rotund German men would have been cramped in this space—smaller than a living room.

In the basement, along the corridor between the bierstube and the kitchen, is a nondescript door. This entrance is far less grand than the foyer off of New Hampshire Avenue. Steps below street level, the unpretentious door is a gateway from the Heurich House Mansion to Sunderland Place. This door allowed visitors to come and go from Heurich's bierstube without fanfare. For business, pleasure, or whatever Heurich's need, the entrance closest to the bierstube provided secrecy for Victorian Washingtonians.

Adjacent to the bierstube was a tiny room, closer to a closet in size. The "keg closet," as it was, had glass draft lines running beer through the wall to the bierstube.

"It's a Victorian mancave," Josh said.

"Much to his wife Amelia's chagrin, this was Christian's favorite room," our guide said.

Ornate tiles line the room's floor. Beautifully engraved pastoral scenes, some agrarian, some depicting the hunt, are etched onto dark mahogany panels along the room's walls. One wall is reserved for quotes. These maxims warranted permanent paint: "Barley juice gives courage and strength." "He who has never been drunk is not a good man." "There is room in the smallest chamber for the largest hangover."

The Heurich House Museum tour guide asked our group if there were any questions. A gentleman with *The Ohio State* windbreaker spoke up.

"When did the Christian Heurich Brewing Company stop making beer?"

"I'm not positive but I do know Mr. Heurich died in 1945," the tour guide said.

"It was 1956. It was the board's decision to shut down the Christian Heurich Brewing Company before they started losing money," I answered.

“Well that’s something. It’s a shame. Too bad there’s no hometown brewery anymore,” the man lamented.

“Actually there is,” I retorted.

“They’re the DC Brau Brewing Company and they are the first production brewery to operate in the District of Columbia since 1956. Saturdays they have tours, sell cans to go and will fill growlers, definitely worth a stop.”

I figured if this man had come all the way from Columbus at least he deserved some accurate information. However, I had my doubts that he, his wife, and son would make it to 3178 Bladensburg Road, NE—the Ward 5 address of the DC Brau brewery.

It is 90 degrees outside the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History. The sun is oppressive because it is DC in June, and the humidity from the swamp makes it feel 100. The line of one hundred tourists behind me begins sweating. It is 9:45 A.M. and the museum won’t open for another 15 minutes. I’m sure I am the only one here for the archives.

It takes about 15 minutes for the line to progress into the lower level of the Museum and I am greeted by a welcomed blast of air conditioning as I step inside. I open my backpack for the guard and pass through the metal detector. Once through security, I head for the nearest bathroom because I don’t want to show up for my research appointment looking like I just spent the last 8 hours at a brewery working the overnight shift.

The reference intern buzzes me in through large glass doors. I sign my name in their logbook. She informs me I must watch an introductory presentation first and that there are no bags allowed inside the archives. Stepping back out through the set of glass doors, I place my backpack in a cubby and go into a side room to watch the “orientation slideshow.” The slideshow informs me there are vast resources in the archives, paper mostly, and no pens allowed. Pencils, OK. No food or drink is allowed but gloves are optional.

When I am done I am buzzed back into the larger room that features long wooden tables for researchers. I look at the sign in sheet again and know I am the only researcher in the room, I wonder what treasures lurk deep in these archives? I put on my own pair of white gloves out of respect for DC’s biggest, oldest, brewer.

Eventually a cart appears, weighed down by what appears to be logs. The Smithsonian site said that the 2 cubic feet of records would be seven boxes, however, on the cart are only three, though massive, receipt books. The dust-scented books are wrapped by brown trifolds and white strings tie the whole collection together. “Christian Heurich Brewing Company Records, 1893-1913” is the title of the collection as it is catalogued on the Smithsonian’s archival website. I find a receipt for malt dated March 24, 1884, and several others with dates earlier than 1893. While the collection is supposed to span to 1913, the latest receipt I find is from 1912.

The pages of receipts are brittle. Someone had the foresight to glue the receipts to newer, sturdier pages, but from the looks of it that was still some time ago. One of the first pages I photograph is a receipt from the “Charles Sohngen & Co., Maltsters.”

Maltsters are men who deal in cereal grains like barley, which is a member of the grass family. Malt is germinated barley. Barley is typically used in baking, cooking, and for livestock feed. These maltsters from Hamilton, Ohio, germinated their barley, turning barley for cooking into barley for brewing. This particular receipt for malt, one of beer's main ingredients comes from March 24, 1884.

Heurich had ordered 869 bushels of "fall malt," barley that had been harvested in the fall. In neat, calligraphic cursive, his writing on the receipt is very brief but reveals something of the brewer:

869 Bush. fall malt	677.82
Less for	29
	<hr/>
	\$648.82

Heurich received less than the 869 bushels he ordered. It is the meticulous weighing of supplies and the scrutinizing of orders that earned him a reputation as a shrewd businessman. Another receipt from June 1884 shows an order for 329 malt sacks. From the supplier Christian only received 300 sacks so he withheld \$9.68 for what he was shorted. In 1894, construction began on Heurich's new brewery in the Foggy Bottom neighborhood, on the grounds of what we know today as the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Construction for the brewery commenced in 1895. He also would have needed funds for the construction of the Brewmaster's Castle, Washington's first fireproof home. That construction began in 1892.

There is no shortage of reasons Heurich pinched pennies. Surely it was practiced in Vienna, in the breweries where Heurich apprenticed before coming to America. There

is difficulty in being both a business owner and a brewer. A brewer's love for superior ingredients contradicts his business sense. There comes a time as a craftsman, when you must say "cost be damned, only the real thing will do."

I know I will never find the exact reason as to why Heurich was a savvy businessman but in the basement of the National Museum of American History, I witness his handwriting and I begin to feel a connection with D.C.'s biggest brewer. How could he pass along the costs to his consumer? How could he buy the best ingredients? How could he keep costs of his lager low? The answers to these quandaries lay before me, in Heurich's own handwriting.

An 1899 receipt shows Heurich purchasing 20 bales of hops. The order consisted of a bale of "Extra Choice Bohemians 1889," a bale of "Choice Bohemians 1889," eight bales of "New York State 1889" hops and ten bales from "Washington Territory 1888." Even though the Washington Territory hops were from the 1888 harvest, they went for the same price as New York State's 1889 harvest: 12 cents per pound.

The choice Bohemians went for 23 cents per pound whereas the extra choice Bohemians went for 26 cents a pound. The Bohemian hops were double the cost of American hops. Were the Bohemian hops more costly, because they were considered to be of a better quality? Or was their cost higher to defray the expense of hops coming to America on an ocean liner? Whatever the reason for their inflated cost, Heurich decided he had to have them.

Almost all of the surnames of the maltsters and hop merchants in Heurich's receipt books in the archives are German. It is not surprising as the years between 1850

and 1930 gave rise to the largest influx of Germans in American history. Roughly 5 million Germans immigrated to the United States during that time and while brewers differentiated between Bavarian and Bohemian hops, up until 1918, both of these hops came from the same place: the Austro-Hungarian empire.

One receipt shows that on April 1, 1890, “Mr. Heurich” “Bought of Stein & Koester.”

I’d like to imagine that this Stein is related to me. Was he a Czech Jew or a German Catholic?

My great grandfather, Josef Stein, was a grain merchant. A middleman who brokered grain deals between farmers and third parties (bakers, breweries, or livestock ranchers). The receipt is for five bales of “Saazer hops,” hops from the Saazer region, the German word for the Czech region of Žatec. Did it matter that my family understood my great grandfather to be a grain merchant, not a hop merchant? Last spring, I went digging for my great grandfather’s business records in the Czech National Archives in Prague, but found nothing.

Under the “Stein & Koester” letterhead are the cities, “Mainz & Nürnberg,” two German cities. My great grandfather was from neither of these places. He was from Český Brod, in Bohemia, over 200 miles from Nürnberg.

While I may never know if my great grandfather had a hand in supplying Washington D.C.’s biggest brewer, there is an odd comfort knowing that somewhere in the supply line there is a Stein. Though Stein is an incredibly common name, the hops that Christian Heurich used to brew his lager were the same hops my great grandfather

would have known. They might not have literally come from the same vines, the same farm, or town, but the hops that were used in brewing a hundred years ago in German and Czech lands found their way to breweries in the new world, in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C.

My visit to the archives revealed Heurich used American malt—all of the receipts that I found for malt came from Ohio, Wisconsin, or Texas. Some of the maltsters Heurich used are still in business today. As far as recreating a lost recipe goes, I couldn't get closer than an ingredient, malted barley, from the very same company the brewer used. This was easy. The hop choice was easy too, though my research told me every single hop merchant Christian Heurich held a receipt from, is no longer in business.

Still, Josh and I were determined to recreate Heurich's lager, but which one? In 1899 Heurich advertized three beers: Senate, Maerzen, and Lager. All of these beers were lagers, but we wanted something that would live up to an 1897 ad that claimed, "it puts new life and energy into the body—makes the weak strong, and gives health to all mankind." Did all of his lagers do this or just one of them?

We decided on the Maerzen lager, a beer style that is brewed today as it was over a century ago. Josh and I decided to use American malt, and Bohemian hops just as Heurich's receipt records in the archives indicated. In fact, a May 1897 Washington newspaper advertisement noted that Heurich's Maerzen Lager was, "INDORSED [sic] BY POSTAL CONGRESS."

The ad goes on to say “Members of the World’s Postal Congress, in session in this city, representing all the civilized nations of the globe, after having tried and noted the beneficial results of Heurich’s ‘Maerzen’ Beer, have voted it superior to the imported. As a result of the investigation and decision, the first shipment of Heurich’s Beer was made to foreign shores the past week.” This beer gained Heurich a medal at the 1900 Paris Exhibition. If this lager was good enough for the Postal Congress and the judges at the Paris Exhibition, it would be good enough for Josh and me.

Competitions are a great way for a homebrewer to get feedback on his beer. They are also an agony to the brewer who perceives no flaws in his finished product. If you are consistently happy with your beer, you need no validation. There’s really no reason to enter your beer in a competition. Unless of course if there’s a prize, like having your homebrew brewed at a professional brewery.

The American Homebrewers Association (AHA) and the Beer Judges Certificate Program (BJCP) jointly administers every official homebrew competition. After tasting our lager, Josh and I felt pretty happy with the nearly finished product. We poured a sample out of the fermentor, the 5-gallon glass jug that looks like the 5-gallon water bottle that sits above most office coolers. We had still yet to bottle it, so the beer was not carbonated. While the flat beer lacked the spritzzy effervescence that is a staple of European lagers, the aroma and taste were great.

The smell was of a bakery, a scent similar to bread cooling after being pulled from the oven, this came from the malt but there was more. Another, deeper whiff

revealed a smell of fresh-cut grass, contributed by the Czech hops. The taste was slightly sweet but subdued by bitterness. Up front was a hint of graham cracker, balanced by the earthy, terra firma taste of hops that had been grown in Bohemia since the 10th century. “Balanced” was the word that kept creeping into Josh and my conversation.

We decided to enter it into the Square Kegs Winterbrew Contest. Square Kegs is a club for Chicago’s north side home brewers. The grand prize was a homebrewer’s dream come true: to make your recipe at Broad Shoulders Brewing, a well-respected Chicago brewery in the South Loop.

When I read this announcement, I packaged up my three bottles to enter the competition and headed to FedEx. I filled out the address label to the competition’s steward and answering FedEx’s inquiry as to the contents of my package, I simply wrote “yeast samples.”

About a month later Josh and I received our feedback from the competition it was a jagged pill to swallow. Our lager had an average score of 27.3, a reasonable score, though anything from 21-29 is considered “good.” The most consternating thing was the written feedback.

Judge 1, in his overall impression wrote, “Aroma is a bit overpowering. Some malt/hop imbalance.”

Judge 2, in his overall impression wrote, “Malt flavor is spot on, but balance needs to be a bit more bitter to improve drinkability.”

Judge 3, in his overall impression wrote, “This is getting towards an excellent beer but has definite technical and recipe (sic) flaws. The fermentation was problematic.

It ran a bit hot and didn't attenuate fully. Use really really healthy yeast in a properly sized starter. It needs more malt complexity. Too bitter."

Overly bitter or a bitter beauty; it's in the eye of the beer-holder. How else to explain what the judges were saying: "too bitter" and yet needed to be "more bitter." Our Maerzen was just too bitter for the style...but it also needed to be "more bitter" for the style. Perhaps, just as I thought I could deduce Christian Heurich's recipe from his ingredient receipts, these judges thought they could tell me how my beer was brewed in D.C. by tasting it in Chicago.

A few weeks later I was invited to dinner by Jeff Hancock, DC Brau Brewing Company's brewmaster. He and his wife Mari, are good friends with my wife, Sarah, and me. As Jeff finished stir-frying his seitan peppers and onions, a smell of garlic-rich brown sauce wafted into the living room. Mari brought out from the kitchen, the bowl of cold sesame noodles I had prepared. We all sat down at the table.

"Kimchiiiiii!" Mari said scolding her portly eldest kitty who had climbed on the table.

Jeff brought in his dish and we began to pass the food around. Against my better judgment I produced a bottle of the Maerzen Josh and I had brewed. Many homebrewers feel conflicted about giving their homebrew to professional brewers. Because Jeff makes beer for a living, we think, "Why would a head brewer want to try our humble little concoction?"

The week before, Jeff brewed a beer called “On the Wings of Armageddon.” This is a double, or 9% alcohol by volume, India Pale Ale. This ale was hopped with a new American hop varietal called “Falconer’s Flight.” This hop is more bitter than the old-world Czech Saaz I had used. Whereas my Maerzen was hopped to a rate of 30 International Bitterness Units (IBUs), DC Brau’s “On the Wings of Armageddon” was hopped to a rate of 115 IBUs. As far as hops were concerned, Jeff’s ale could not have been further from the balanced lager I had brewed.

Still, I felt I had to pour; it was the only homebrew I had brought to dinner. I lacked the nerve to ask how they liked it but knew that this beer had to be poured first as all of the other beers I had brought were more robust and less balanced, either overly sweet or overly bitter. Plus they were commercial beers that I had no hand in brewing.

I handed Mari the unlabeled brown bottle and she pried off the cap with an opener. She tilted her glass and poured the lager down the side. When the glass was half-full, she put it on the table nearly emptying the bottle.

“Don’t pour the dregs,” I warned.

“Not that they’re bad, they’ll just make the beer murky. Actually it’s OK. It’s just more Vitamin B,” I conceded.

As bubbles rushed up, a white cap began to form atop the burnt sienna. The beer settled and the color came closer to copper. Mari held it aloft to the candles on the table and the lager’s light ruby hues shone brilliantly. It was remarkably clear and though it had settled, tiny bubble escaped the copper body perforating the white head atop.

“Ooh, I like the look,” Mari cooed.

Her nostrils flared and she took a big whiff.

“Smells like fresh-baked dough and graham crackers,” she said. She took a sip and passed her glass to Jeff. He smelled the glass then filled his cheeks, swishing the brew around in his mouth. The white head lingered and clung to the hairs in Jeff’s moustache.

“You know, there’s really nothing quite like a balanced Maerzen,” Jeff lauded.

It was much too early in the evening for my face to have been red from beer. I tried to hide my excitement but Sarah spotted me beaming from ear to ear.

Our beer was well balanced and tasty enough to please both 20th and 21st century brewmasters. While I may never obtain Heurich’s original recipe, I know he would have enjoyed my maerzen by the stein.

EPILOGUE

Before I begin my epilogue, my sincerest thanks go to Steve Goodwin, Kyoko Mori, and Courtney Brkic for their help as readers and editors.

In my thesis I have explored three main themes—the history of my Czech family diabetes, and the culture of beer. Crafting my thesis was a struggle but I did not fight my writing, I let it push me in the direction it wanted to go. I used an organic model, keeping in mind a question I learned from Kyoko Mori and Joan Didion. I interpret the question as, “how do you know what you mean until you write it?”

Throughout my three years in the program I have come to know myself as a writer. “I am,” as Courtney Brkic has said of herself, “a slow writer.” Slow is nothing to be ashamed of and this was my choice as an essayist, to turn my focus onto topics that can be timeless and that require serious research. I drew Venn diagrams for the themes of each essay. It is my hope that, as I have discovered overlapping circles, my readers will see overlapping themes.

I have enjoyed writing more topical pieces like interviews and profiles and I have published them online. In those cases, I made sure I had my journalist hat on. I am grateful to have been able to explore much broader themes in my thesis. I can envision one or even several books emanating from this work.

I am particularly grateful to Steve Goodwin who organized this year's Visiting Writers course, which allowed several MFA Candidates to have their nonfiction read by Margaret Talbot. After reading my essay, *BOHEMIA*, she suggested and encouraged me to focus more on my family's religious experiences in the next draft, primarily Catholicism and Judaism. As far as future work goes this seems like a good place to start after graduation.

It is with pride, honor, and excitement that I leave George Mason University as a stronger writer.

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