

## Example Story One

### Gerald “Jack” Isaacs, 93

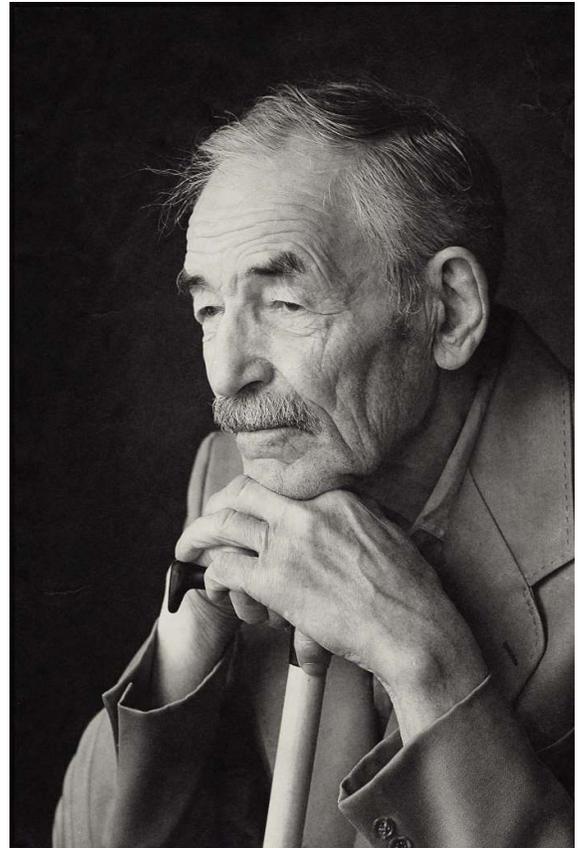
#### Clapham Synagogue

My father had a fruit shop at Clapham market before the war, which is why in 1938, when I was 12 years old, we moved from East Ham where I was born, to Kenwyn Road, SW4. Me and my mates were the big swells at the children’s service at East Ham United Synagogue – or at least we thought we were! I’d been a regular little mini-*chazan* on a *Shobbes* morning, quite operatic to my ears! We were a good crowd – my cousin Teddy Abrahams; Frank Emmanuel whose dad was a boxing promoter so we got all the programmes second-hand; and Alec Phillipson, who later was best man at my wedding.

When we moved to Clapham though, I left all my mates behind. I didn’t know anyone at my new school or at shul. The local kids all ignored me and there was no youth service for me to do my *chazonus*! Besides, the tunes were different. Rabbi Slowman was a stickler for what was proper, and wouldn’t have liked the showing-off I was used to indulging in. I was pretty unhappy. At the same time, because business was bad, my dad had to work on *Shobbes* mornings, and didn’t want to show his face in shul at all. I still went every week, but I was miserable.

But Rabbi Slowman noticed my miserable little face sitting at the back of shul and he must have spoken to some people at East Ham. One *Shobbes* morning at the end of *davening*, he whispered in the *baal koreh*’s ear and banged on the *bimah*. A load of the other kids trooped in. Rabbi Slowman then announced how lucky everyone was, and that there would be a special guest doing *anim zmiros*, and then with great fanfare he called me up by my Hebrew name, Yakov ben Moshe. The ark was opened, someone gave me a *tallis*, and everyone went quiet. I looked at the *rov* and whispered “what tune?” and he just said “Imagine you’re back at East Ham”. I gave it my best, and to my amazement, everyone clapped. I never forgot my old mates, or where I came from, but from that moment on, I was Clapham shul through-and-through, and later I was assistant *gabbay* for forty years. G-d bless SW4!

Please note that this story is for illustration purposes only.



## Example Story Two

**Davina (& Phil)  
Fleishman**

**Debden District  
Synagogue**

My family were in soft furnishings and our offices and warehouses are in Debden, where I grew up and still live. By 35 I was managing the company and doing alright. But to be blunt, I thought I'd pretty much run out of potential local dating options in our part of Essex, so I spent a lot of nights in the mid-90s going to 'Jew-dos' elsewhere in London, and was spending a lot of my hard-earned on *kiruv* safaris and trips away.



Meanwhile my shul appointed me *'eishet chayil'* one year, because I spent a bit of time organising a lunch club for old folk. I was really flattered, and didn't think I'd done anything much, but I thought 'why not?' and sponsored a slap-up kiddush lunch. One of the old blokes, Lew Sanders z"l, he was always at the lunch club, and me and him had always had a laugh together about how he was going to set me up with his nephew Phil. He bet me a tenner he'd bring him to the kiddush and I said if he did, he'd get a tenner but he'd have to spend it on food because I'd bar him from the lunch club! Anyway, come Simchas Torah and there was Phil! He was a lot better looking than I expected and Lew had only forgotten to arrange lunch for him afterwards. Or maybe it was part of the plan! Anyway, Phil came to me and my parents, and the afternoon turned into a whole day, and it sort of went from there.

We got married in Debden shul a year later, and Lew did one of the *sheva brochos*. And yes, he got his tenner!

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## Example Story Three

**Liza Caplan, 15**

### **Aldenham United Synagogue**

It was almost as though my batzmitzvah wasn't anything to do with me: the speech, the caterer, the colour scheme, the invitations, even the band, were chosen without me really being involved. So I wasn't very interested, to be honest, and I didn't even read through the sedra for the week, which was Pinchas.

A few months before the ceremony though, the Youth Directors at shul asked if I wanted to learn anything in the run-up to my batmitzvah. I'd never been asked *what* I might want to learn before, and I didn't really know what to answer. So I asked to look at my sedra and I discovered for the first time about the daughters of Tzelophchad, who asked Moses why they shouldn't inherit from their father. Why hadn't I heard about these women in the Torah before?!

I sat down with my parents and changed everything about the batmitzvah, and they were fine with it, because the whole point, they agreed, was for me to 'own my Judaism'. They even reprinted the invitations! And at the meal, I ran my own learning session with my friends – with the adults as spectators! – discussing Jewish heroines of Tanach, and why we don't know more about them.

Oh, and the final thing is that my Hebrew name is Tirzah, after one of the daughters of Tzelophchad. I never asked who she was before, but now I couldn't be more proud!

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