

My grandmother & a song from the past

My grandmother came to this country, from Derecin, Poland, in 1904. At Ellis Island she gave her name, Lillian Gerson. She soon made her way to Boston, where she lived with her cousin in Lowell. Her cousin's last name was Berlin, so my grandmother became "Lily Berlin."

She met my grandfather, and they moved to Littleton, New Hampshire where they had a store. Like a lot of grandmothers, she was a remarkable person. She never learned to drive, but some things she just knew - how to cook, how to sew, how to judge quality. During

the 1920s the violinist Jascha Heifetz, already famous, came to her home for Sunday dinners. I'm told that Heifetz suffered from hayfever, and came to New Hampshire for cleaner air, not to play the violin. Maybe he was also looking for good food. Somehow he heard about Mrs. Firestone's skill in the kitchen and became a frequent visitor.

My grandmother had another skill. She had a sweet voice, gentle and melodic. She knew Yiddish songs, and English too. One in particular she sang to me as a child, but as an adult I could only remember a few words, something about a "rainy afternoon" and ending with the word, "Good-bye." It was too late to ask my grandmother the name of the song, but the melody lingered in my ears, just as

her applecake did in my nostrils. (I wonder whether she made that applecake for the great Heifetz.)

Long after my grandmother died, I met a pianist who later became my wife. My mother would tell her about living in Littleton, and I would tell her about growing up in Claremont. I told her that my grandmother could cook better than anybody, and sing too.

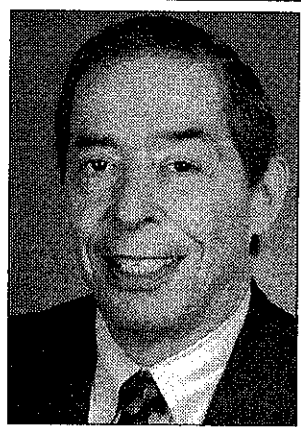
Virginia is a collector, I am not. She started to buy old sheet music and give it to me so that I would have a collection of something. One day she brought home a piece of music with a picture on the front of a man under an umbrella in pouring rain.

I looked inside and found, at long last, the song from my childhood, "Call Me Up Some Rainy Afternoon." It is a wonderful song, with the kind of lyrics you don't find in music anymore.

*Think of all the joy and bliss,
We can hug and we can talk about
the weather,
We can have a quiet little talk,
I will see that my mother takes
a walk ...*

I'm sure it's just a coincidence, but the cover page of the sheet music told me who wrote the words and music ... Irving Berlin.

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