

In His Words
by Sophie Katz

A history:

*My father came to Sheboygan in 1905.
Ma came in 1906.*

A story:

*Pa worked all the way across Europe—
He was a mason.
I asked him, “How did you get to America?”
He said he worked on steeples.
Apparently they have a lot of churches in France.*

A history:

*I had six siblings.
The oldest, my only brother, was named Sam.*

A story:

*My mother got the first choice of what name—
In the Jewish religion, the woman chooses first.
So Sam was named after her father, see.
But then they kept having girls.
My father, he said many times, “I’m gonna have a name after my father.”
So he must have tried awful hard,
Because finally he got me, named me Sol, and then quit.*

A history:

*My mother’s sister died of cancer.
Her second husband was a peddler.*

A story:

*I remember Bertha’s chest was burned—
From the x-ray, after the surgery.
I remember Pete the Peddler,
Walking down the street, yelling “Potatoes, potatoes!”
But he was a quiet man; Bertha was the communicator.
My nephew, your Zeidie, he gave apples to Pete’s horse.
He was a good boy.*

A history:

*You’re named after my youngest sister, Sophie.
Her husband’s name was Sam.*

A story:

They ran away to get married—

Wisconsin wouldn't permit it.
Indiana allowed it, because they didn't tell them
They were cousins.
Sophie was the rebel.
When I got to high school, all the teachers asked me,
"Are you related to Sophie Steingart?"
And my English teacher never gave me a good grade.

A history:
I met my wife when she was seventeen.
We got married at eighteen.

A story:
In those days we had house parties.
And a friend said "I'm having a bunch of people—
Girls—
Over at my house, why don't you come?"
I was like, alright.
The couples all sat down to play Bingo.
I didn't like it. Sylvia didn't like it.
She sat down on the couch. I sat next to her. Talked to her.
I asked her for a date, she said, "I don't take last-minute dates."
The next day after work, I called her up,
And the following Friday, I took her to an ice cream place.
I only had fifteen cents in my pocket,
So she ordered a drink and we ordered two straws, and that was our date.

A history:
The Second World War began in 1942.
I was drafted.

A story:
The day after we got married, we came out of a movie house
And the paper boys were yelling, "Pearl Harbor bombed!"
And the head of the draft board said to me,
"You're Jewish. You should be willing to go."
Everybody knew then, about the Holocaust.
But we'd just gotten married.
So we found a hotel in New York—
The Chesterfield Hotel—
And we stayed there for a month,
And that was our honeymoon.
And then we came back and I was drafted.

Wherever I was, Sylvia followed me.
If I was in a certain camp, she was in the town of that camp.

*She worked as a shoe saleslady in Texas—
 They fired her because she made more money than the men.
 I was sent to Junction City, and she looked for a job there.
 The men at J.C. Penny told her, “Lady, we don’t hire Jews.”
 And she said, “Just give me a job, don’t pay me.”
 She sold so many ties, the manager was shocked.
 And when my father got sick, and I had to go home,
 He asked Sylvia if she needed any money.
 Imagine that!
 From “we don’t hire Jews,” to “do you need any money”!*

*When I was deployed, she followed me on the map.
 I wrote her letters, we had a code—
 The first letter of the sentence was the start of the place I would be.
 But then I had to write St. Vith.
 That’s where the Germans hit during the Battle of the Bulge.
 I wasn’t hit. I got frostbite in my feet, but the Germans never came by.
 But when I saw that, that I wrote St. Vith and then it was hit,
 I never wrote in code again.*

*We were the first unit to come back to the States,
 Right after they signed the treaty in Berlin.
 Why did they send us back?
 Because we were supposed to storm Japan.
 But when you come home from Europe, you get thirty days of leave.
 And on day twenty-nine, they dropped the bomb on Japan,
 And the war was over.*

*All I know is, I was lucky the whole time.
 I missed the Germans—
 Wherever I was, they were not.
 I was all set to storm the shores of Japan,
 And before I even left the States, there was peace.
 They didn’t have me go into the concentration camps.
 Like I said, I was extremely lucky.*

*A history:
 We were married seventy-four years.
 This year would have been seventy-five.*

*A story:
 Sylvia got sick a week before Thanksgiving.
 I took her to the hospital, she was there one week.
 Then she came home, and we had nurses twenty-four hours.
 And finally she said, “I feel better, I don’t need twenty-four hours just this night.”
 She sat on the couch. She was smiling.*

*I turned around to get a blanket, and I turned back and...
Just like that, on the couch.
Just like that, she died.
I couldn't believe it.
I can't believe it.
Her heart just broke.*

*But we were lucky.
We retired young, we traveled.
We were close. We were in love.
We were extremely lucky.*