



I Married for Love, Sort Of

by Saralee Perel

One part I loathe about the holiday season is that it's usually a time of reflection. From age 5 until 8, I reflected on hating my parents because we were Jewish so I didn't get any Christmas presents.

From 9 to 15, I reflected on hating my parents because they wouldn't let me bring one lousy tree in the house. Hey! People have plant life indoors. So what if it has lights and tinsel on it? At age 16, my reflections changed. I reflected on how rotten my parents were because it was Christmas, for heaven's sake. How about forking over a huge wad of dough so I could buy my own presents?

And Chanukah? You think lighting candles on a menorah was what I dreamed of? No. I dreamed of jewelry and boys. Well, I'd get one present. What all teenagers die for. A new dictionary.

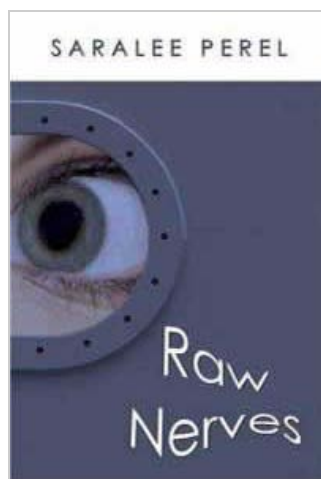
There's nothing like the Christmas lights in New England, where I now live. Makes me reflect on evening drives my mom and I took through the infidels' decorated neighborhoods in Maryland, where I grew up. It must have brought her joy while I'd scream, "They're just lights, Ma! It's not like they're satanic! Why can't we have them?"

She must have loved the constant fracas of changing radio stations from Sinatra to Christmas carols. She'd nearly drive off the road during our hand-slapping battles while I'd shout, "PA RUM PUM PUM PUM" over Sinatra's "My Way."

And New Year's? Oy vey. The Jewish New Year is as close to our national New Year as Big Macs are to hamburgers made from soy beans. On Rosh Hashanah (New Year), we don't do fireworks. We go to temple. I'd pretend to listen to the rabbi while I'd play mind games – imagining the Hebrew letters in the prayer book as people in weird positions – when I was 40.

At some point, I focused on getting married. Although love is important, I needed something else too. I wanted a man who not only adored me, but had a characteristic I'd cherish as much as love: a God-loving present-giving Christian.

Last month, my Christian husband, Bob, and I celebrated our anniversary with a whole bunch of presents (oh yeah, we said "I love you," a lot too.)



The finest present I've ever received was from a sad and silent man – my grandfather. I was his fundamental source of joy. And I adored him. Other than when he'd look at me, the only time I'd see rapture on his face was while he'd play his violin. When he'd visit from Manhattan, we'd hug like there was no tomorrow.

Born in 1885, he was 76 when I was 10. That Chanukah, he walked the aisles of Woolworth's, collecting 5 and 10 cent "pearls" and "sapphires" and hundreds of pieces of sparkling jewelry that he put in a fancy jewelry box. What man would do such a thing in that day and age?

As I write this, my eyes fill with tears. I see myself as that little girl opening the magical box. I remember feeling the strands of jewelry but only looking at Grandpa. I needed him to see my face filled with delight and adoration because I knew, even then, there was something more important than jewelry. I needed to see him smile. His smiles were so rare. I needed him to know how happy he made me. For that would bring him peace, if only for a few moments.

Late in his life, Grandpa was moved to my parents' house. I can still visualize him, having arrived at the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Station. He was sitting in a wheelchair outside the train, all alone, while passengers and luggage carriers rushed around. In his arms was his beloved violin, though he could no longer play it.

So nowadays, when Bob comes home, we hug like there's no tomorrow. Bob has my grandpa's soul. I must have "sensed" that when we met.

I have learned that presents don't matter (oh, who am I kidding?) What truly matters is the joy on Bob's lovely face, as he tenderly opens a present yet looks at me before seeing what it is. His expression is identical to the look of adoration I had for Grandpa.

I have a heart filled with treasures from my grandfather and my husband. And nothing – no matter what may lie ahead – will diminish the wealth these two loves of my life have permanently etched in my heart.



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Her novel, award-winning *Raw Nerves: A Cape Cod Comedic Thriller*, is now available as an e-book. To take a look go to: [Amazon](#).