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## *Diary of a Los Angeles Jew, 1947-1973: Autobiography as Autofiction*

By Marc Lee Raphael

From the Introduction: Four different interests came together to produce this book, a somewhat unusual combination of diary excerpts from the first 30 years of my life and my reflections on these entries during my seventh decade. These interests unfolded independently, but at a certain point in time it seemed convenient to link them into a single book. ...

The eighteenth century paintings of Giovanni Antonio Canal (=Canaletto), “notable for their accuracy,” as one curatorial marker put it, are as much the Venice of the artist’s imagination as they are “real.” Thomas Cole’s nineteenth century paintings of Kaaterskill Falls – and dozens of others – seemingly so “real,” are the result of his assimilation of imaginary landscapes into what one Cole exhibition curator, Alan Wallach, called “a mythic-historical framework.” And I have seen at least a dozen photography exhibitions at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. where the divide between documentary and fiction is never clear. Photographers repeatedly condense their fragments of reality according to their fantasies, ideas, and patterns of remembrance. ...

What has struck me more than anything else about autobiography is the truth of William Maxwell’s observation that “in talking about the past [they] lie with every breath [they] draw.” Marthe Richer’s first of four memoirs, *I Spied for France* (1935), is filled with direct discourse from twenty years earlier. At the very least, autobiography is the boundary between truth and lies. Or where does autobiography end and fiction begin? ...

Autobiography is really a special kind of fiction, a fiction in which memory and imagination conspire to reconstruct the truth of the past. This is only to say that most of us – think Frank McCourt’s *Angela’s Ashes* – tolerate a huge amount of fiction these days in works we accept nonetheless as somehow factual accounts of their authors’ lives; we don’t bat an eye. So, feeling that an autobiography would only be my memory’s report – years later – of what was once thought or felt, only remembered consciousness fraught with the considerable dangers of a living subject trying to become both author and character in his own narrative, I choose to begin what is technically a memoir, or a partial autobiography, with my diary entries, with a self that is not distinct from its story. ...

This is both a history of a Los Angeles Jew in the middle of the last century, and a history of my reading of that history. Psychologists such as Jerome Bruner explore the “narrative identity thesis,” the idea that the very conception of selfhood (what Rabbi Henry Berkowitz once called “an autobiography of your own [sic] soul”) depends on having a narrative of self. This is a narrative of self, for Oliver Sacks is *mostly* correct, I think, when he notes that “It might be said that each of us constructs and lives a ‘narrative,’ and that this narrative *is* us, our identities.” Mostly, I think, because surely people can develop and deepen in valuable ways without any sort of explicit narrative reflection. Living well, for many, is a completely non-narrative project. But not for me, who has wondered for years what is the self that it could be the subject of its own representation. How can one be narrator and subject, or, as Walt Whitman put it in *Song of Myself*, “both in and out of the game”? So this is the story of one self, and how this self related to Los Angeles, to family, to friends, and especially to Judaism.

# CONTENTS

**\$18.00**

## Introduction

1. December 24, 1947  
"a pony for Christmas" [sic]
2. September 9, 1943  
"Go Go."
3. September 19, 1948  
"I like Miss Margolin very much"
4. April 18, 1952  
"Topper pooped on our kickball field"
5. November 4, 1952  
"Where does God live?"
6. December 7, 1953  
"Immies – the best Hanukkah present ever!"
7. October 22, 1955  
"I make this solemn pledge to my people Israel..."
8. November 12, 1955  
"I will never allow you to play football"
9. January 7, 1956  
"The rabbi was very mean to me"
10. August 10, 1956  
"This is the first bird song that sounds like a Hebrew melody!"
11. January 4, 1957  
"My Uncle Harold took me to see *Teahouse*."
12. August 16, 1957  
"Rabbi Gottschalk, batting left, homered off my best windmill fastball in the staff vs camper softball game."
13. May 25, 1958  
"I stood next to Rabbi Lewis for the Confirmation picture."
14. October 20, 1958  
"I do not want to be a rabbi any more."
15. October 28, 1959  
"the best teacher I ever had."
16. November 23, 1959  
"I made \$28 this week from my pool."
17. September 19, 1960  
"walked home from the Beverly Hills police station."
18. November 1, 1960  
"the apathy in Watts is enormous."

19. March 5, 1961  
"Even against Valley State I did not play."
  20. April 10, 1962  
"I have never been so anxious about anything."
  21. October 8, 1962  
"mostly unprepared to lead services."
  22. February 6, 1963  
"Professor Hirschman said 'fuck' several times today in class."
  23. April 20, 1966  
"Solomon built the walls of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer." I Kings 9:15
  24. September 15, 1966  
"I couldn't believe that the Negroes would not cross the street."
  25. May 4, 1967  
"I cannot believe how much Jewish historical fiction remains for me to read."
  26. August 5, 1968  
"I think I devised a grading system for History 201 that my brother's classmates will think is fair."
  27. September 10, 1968  
"I am very anxious about beginning Polish classes."
  28. October 25, 1968  
"Draft Counseling – Rabbi Raphael – On the Quad"
  29. October 28, 1968  
"Mr [Joseph] Kahn asked me if I would serve as Interim Rabbi at Temple Emanuel without compensation."
  30. November 22, 1969  
"Rick's idea seemd to work well. Some day I will surely teach American Indian religion."
  31. April 28, 1970  
"Revolution begins in poetry."
  32. October 2, 1970  
"My *akedah* poem led to 45 minutes of discussion."
  33. September 30, 1971  
"*Bashanah Ha-Ba'ah* set up the entire High Holy Days."
  34. April 10, 1973  
"I cannot believe my good luck."
- Details

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