



THE MAGIC OF SHARING STORIES

By LINDA ELOVITZ MARSHALL



DURING THE DEPRESSION

my grandmother, an excellent seamstress, began taking in sewing. My grandfather, a proud and somewhat stubborn man, balked. His wife was *not* taking in sewing. Finally, they reached a compromise: Grandma could sew if (and only if) she used her sewing money for something fine, something *grand*, something they otherwise could not have afforded.

Grandma, setting her heart on Aynsley bone china dishes, sewed. And she saved. When the dishes were finally acquired, she and my mother (her adoring, youngest daughter) played “tea party.” As they set the table, Grandma proclaimed, “This dish I bought with money from making Rachel Stein’s wedding dress. And *this* cup from a bedspread for Mrs. Silverman...And this...” Even when she was failing, my grandmother and my mother enjoyed their special game.

I never joined them. Dishes, especially fancy ones, weren’t my, um, cup of tea.

Years later, when my own children were in school, I entered an Anthropology Ph.D. program. I listened to people and recorded their stories. Soon, I had stories from Zimbabwe, Guatemala, Prague...Some stories were even about dishes.

Nevertheless, I didn’t appreciate the story of my grandmother’s dishes as part of who *I* am, part of *my* heritage, part of what makes

me. It didn’t begin “once upon a time.” It didn’t have princes and princesses. It wasn’t from far away.

When I left graduate school, I opened (and closed) a bookstore, and, drawing on former experiences as an early childhood educator, tried writing for children. I attended a Jewish children’s book writers conference and had the opportunity of submitting a manuscript—one with *Jewish* content—to an editor.

I knew African stories. I knew Mayan stories. But, Jewish stories? *Oy!*

Then I remembered the dishes. I added plot to the story because there was none. I added humor because a bit of humor couldn’t hurt. I stirred in heaps of kindness because there’s never enough kindness.

I wrote, recalling the red corduroy bedspread and curtains Grandma Rose made for me, the doilies and doll-dresses she crocheted with hands trembling from Parkinson’s Disease. And, to polish the story with love, the way my mother and my grandmother polished those dishes, I added an ending that included Grandma’s whole community.

At first, my efforts at writing for children were rejected. But I listened to the editor’s suggestions and re-worked my stories. *Grandma Rose’s Magic* became one of my first books. I was 62 and a grandmother. It felt like magic. And, now, when I read *Grandma Rose’s Magic* to my own grandchildren, that magic sparkles.

We all have stories. They’re magic and they sparkle, all of them. Because sharing our stories and heritage is, indeed magic.

LINDA ELOVITZ MARSHALL, former early childhood educator, bookstore owner, anthropologist, sheep farmer, freelance writer, mother of four, and grandmother, was 62 when her first book was published. Many more have followed—and a novel is in process. Linda’s forthcoming picture book, *Rainbow Weaver* (Lee & Low, 2016) is about a Mayan girl in Guatemala. For more information, visit lindamarshall.com.