Despite our precarious financial situation and the wor­ries our parents endured, my siblings and I managed to have more joyful moments than sad ones. Mom always found a way to provide us with inexpensive toys and games. She taught us to play *bataille navale*, a battleship game. For this we used a paper on which we drew two large squares—one for our ships and the other to mark our calls. We played checkers with white and black beans on a checkered table­cloth, and she even made a large ball from our old worn-out socks, which we used when we played soccer in the street outside our house. During spring and summer she would not miss an opportunity to take us to the beach. She used to say, “We have the best entertainment of all here, close to home. The Mediterranean Sea has the most beautiful beaches in the world, and they cost us nothing.”

She always tried to make our homework interesting and fun. She would tell us a short story or an anecdote related to our homework to fix it in our minds. When I read about the parting of the Red Sea by Moses, she opened an atlas and showed me the Red Sea’s location. She then showed me the English Channel, which the French call La Manche. However, *manche* also means “sleeve” in French. One day, as she closed the atlas, I knew by the look on her face that she was ready to tell me a story. “When I was a little girl, I at­tended a French school, and in my class we had to recite passages from the Passover Haggadah about the Jewish exodus from Egypt.” One at a time, the students would go up to the front of the room and recite, in French, various passages for the teacher, who then asked questions about the recitation. The teacher asked one girl to name the famous sea involved. The student did not know the answer. Seeking help, she glanced at a friend seated in the front row, who wore a bright red dress with long sleeves. Her friend held up one of her red sleeves, thinking the reciting student would guess that the answer was the Red Sea. The student an­swered in a loud and confident voice, “La Manche” (“the English Channel”). She realized her mistake only when the class exploded with laughter.

I did not know if the story was true, but certainly my mother entertained me. And I never forgot that it was the Red Sea the Jews crossed. Her story also taught me that cheating does not pay.

She also wanted us to always stick together and remain supportive of one another. She once demonstrated the im­portance of solidarity with a few wooden sticks that she lined up on the table. “See,” she said, “how easy it is to break these four sticks one by one?” Then, taking four sticks to­gether, she continued, “And how difficult, if not impossible, it is to break them when they are unified?” Her influence inspired the four of us to remain united and close during all these years. We have had many fights among us, but we al­ways reconcile as if nothing has happened. Even today we spare no effort to help each other.

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We had a wonderful honeymoon at the only resort in Marsa Matruh. The breathtaking landscape on one side of the resort was desert, with its endless hills and valleys cov­ered with fine white sand; on the other side the Mediterranean Sea, with its clear blue water, sparkled. We could see fish, large and small, as well as aquatic plants and coral. It was a wonderland.

We spent most of our time at the beach. The desert sun burned during the day, and the beautiful seawater proved refreshing and invigorating. The day–night temperature swings were huge: from about 110 degrees Fahrenheit during the day to less than fifty degrees in the evening.

During the first few evenings, Etty and I walked on the desert sand but did not venture too far. At night we saw a bright fire quite far from the hotel. The firelight so in­trigued us that one evening we decided to investigate. After a long walk we came upon a few white tents and a group of Bedouins sitting in a circle around a fire. I greeted them in Arabic: *Al salam aleikom* (“May peace be with you”). They answered in unison, “May peace be upon you with God’s mercy and blessings.” They were surprised at our proper Arabic diction and invited us to join them.

Without waiting for an answer, they opened the circle to accommodate us around the fire. We sat as they did, cross-legged on the sand, which was still warm from the day’s heat. The fire in the middle of the circle served two purposes: it heated a teapot at its center and warmed the people around it. We shared a metal mug of sweetened hot tea that they passed around, each of us taking a sip. The men circulated a narghile, a water pipe filled with a fragrant tobacco lit by a burning coal. The smoke filled the air with jasmine and spicy scents. We had entered a different world less than a mile from one of the most modern resorts in Egypt.

The elderly leader of the group asked us where we were from. We explained that we lived in Cairo, were recently married, and enjoyed Marsa Matruh very much. They in turn told us how much they loved their peaceful, nomadic life in the desert. They invited us to stop by every evening, which we did most of the time. We enjoyed being with them. We spent long hours listening to their fascinating stories and philosophies. What a contrast to the environ­ment in Egyptian cities, where the government clogged the radio and newspapers with inflammatory messages. After we were better acquainted, we told the Bedouins that we were Jews.

Their leader said, “You know, this is how your ancestors used to live—as we do. After all, Moses was Egyptian; he was probably born east of here, not far away, closer to the Nile.” When we asked them how they managed to survive with deadly battles raging in their surrounding areas, they said that Allah protected them.

Before we left, we went to the tents to say good-bye. The old man offered me a typical Bedouin white woolen hat, and his wife offered a black shawl to Etty.

They embraced us and said, *Roohoo bel salama* (“Go with peace”). They stood on the sand waving good-bye until they could no longer see us.

As we sat on the train on our way back to Cairo, Etty asked, “What do you think will happen in this country? What will happen to us?” I could give her no answer. I cher­ished the hat offered to me by the Bedouin and kept it for many years. It brought back fond memories of the dark, rugged face of the old Bedouin who so graciously offered it to me.

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On Friday, July 26, 1957, two days after arriving in Brazil, I took a shower in the filthy facilities at the center, put on my most presentable outfit, and headed for the Rua Quinze de Novembro (Fifteenth of November Street). I had been told that all the banks had their headquarters on that long, nar­row street, named for the date of the founding of the Brazilian republic—November 15, 1889.

Rua Quinze de Novembro was about two miles from the immigration center. It was a winter day, during that month of July, but the weather was quite warm, which made me sweat profusely and added to my anxiety about finding a job. I took a deep breath and walked inside the first bank. When I asked to talk to the manager, the doorman told me to wait in the lobby and offered me a cafezinho, a small cup of strong sweetened coffee. The manager was busy, but a hu­man resources clerk would take care of me.

I explained my situation to the clerk in a mixture of French and broken Portuguese. I tried to say that my preg­nant wife and I had just arrived from Egypt and I desper­ately needed a job to sustain my family. I would accept any position and would work very hard. He listened to me pa­tiently. When I finished, he said that they had no openings, wished me luck, and accompanied me to the exit.

I methodically knocked on the doors of all the banks on both sides of Fifteenth of November Street. I got the same polite treatment everywhere. Shortly past four, I stopped to catch my breath. Soon the banks would close. My stomach was upset from anxiety and drinking so many sweet coffees. Beneath my jacket my shirt was soaked through with perspi­ration. I wiped my face and looked around. Only two banks remained, one to my right and another at the end of the street—the Banco do Estado, the São Paulo state bank. I knew a recent immigrant would never be hired there. I felt a deep emptiness and fear. How would I tell Etty that I had failed to find a job? How would we live and take care of the baby? Was my family going to be doomed to poverty? Would we have to endure the kind of deprivation I had suffered as a child? I glanced at the mark on my wrist. I thought of my mother’s words and of the mark’s supposedly magical power. When I was a kid, I believed it worked. *Well*, I thought, *it certainly isn’t working today*.

The bank on the right was Banco Brasul de São Paulo. It looked small in contrast to the state bank and even some of the other banks I had visited. I was so tired and discouraged that I wondered whether it was even worth trying this last bank. Nonetheless I decided to knock on its door.

After a couple of long minutes a short old man with white hair opened it to let me in. He offered me a chair in the lobby, just as all the other concierges had. Once more, in a mixture of French and the few Portuguese words I had learned, I explained why I was there. I supported my tenta­tive sentences with lots of hand gestures. But this fellow ac­tually seemed interested in talking to me. He pulled up a chair and sat down close to me. He asked me dozens of ques­tions about my background and about Egypt. He made a special effort to speak slowly in Portuguese, and he used some French words when I could not understand his Portuguese. We talked about the Suez Crisis and the Egyptian revolution. He seemed genuinely interested in my childhood, the kinds of jobs I had held, and my sports activities. Then we spent a long time talking about the immigration center and Etty. I explained that she was pregnant and that the baby was due in a few weeks. Despite the language difficul­ties, our conversation was more fluent and flowed more eas­ily than it had with the employees and concierges of the other banks.

I asked for his advice. I told him how badly I needed the job. “Do you think they will accept me? I don’t know the language, I’ve never worked in a bank, and I don’t have much to offer.”

He smiled at me and said, “Mr. Sardas, you are tired and tense. Please relax.” He handed me a glass of cold water, showed me to the men’s room, and gave me a towel to freshen up. When I came back, he said, “I checked with our vice president of human resources; she is in a meeting, but it will finish soon. I’ll take you up to the conference room.”

We took the elevator and stopped in front of a large wooden door. The man knocked on the door and opened it wide without waiting for an answer. Perhaps fifteen or more people were seated around a huge table. I guessed that the middle-aged woman at the head was the VP of human resources.

As soon as we entered the room, everyone stood. The woman came toward us and introduced herself; she was in­deed the human resources vice president. The old man put his hand on my shoulder and told the group, “This is Jacques Sardas; he arrived here in Brazil only two days ago. He has never spoken our language, but he managed to sustain a con­versation with me for more than an hour. He speaks French and several other languages. He is a good man, and as far as I am concerned, he is hired as of today.” He shook my hand and left. I could not believe what was happening; I was com­pletely dumbfounded. Who was that man?

The human resources vice president took me to her of­fice and told me that the man was one of the bank’s owners. “He is a very kind man,” she whispered. I said to myself, *He is more than just a kind man. He is my angel*.