

*im*, Song of Songs. This time I chose Billy Bob and Betty Sue, who'd been married 33 years. Imagine the burly planter Billy Bob—Orson Welles as Big Daddy—and his demure southern belle Betty Sue reading, “Let us go down to the vineyards to see if the vines have new buds. There will I give you my love. There you stand like a palm tree, your breasts clusters of dates.”

When Billy and Betty finished, they insisted on reading it again. They were having too much fun. It took all my diplomatic savvy to steer us on to *karpas*.

After the seder concluded, everyone kept talking over coffee and macaroons. Billy Bob, who rarely drank, but who by this time had consumed several more glasses of Mogen David than is *halachically* required, said in what he thought was a whisper, “Mike, I really enjoyed this! We don’t agree on everything, but that’s OK. It was fun! And those Bible verses you made me read to Betty Sue—that was better than Viagra!”

**W**eeks later, I received a thank you note from Tom. Unbeknownst to him or to Ann, when we gathered at Passover, three of their guests were in fact members of the Council of Conservative Citizens, the reincarnation of the White Citizens Councils, with its own motto: “White Pride World Wide.” Others were feeling pressure to join, and thought they would.

The three had now resigned from the CCC, they told Tom proudly. The others decided not to become members.

They had understood the Passover message of freedom and justice. They would no longer accept without challenge the homophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism of politicians and televangelists.

“We’ve come a long way since that seder in Yokosuka,” Tom concluded in his note, “but it’s been a journey I would not have missed for the world.”

Neither would I, Tom. Neither would I. □

## The Night Elijah Came to Temple

BY LEIGH LERNER

**D**espite the shoots and blossoms promised by the parsley on our seder plate, Pesach in St. Paul can feel more like the end of winter than the beginning of spring. Inside the social hall of Minnesota’s Mt. Zion Temple, 150 congregants found warmth at our community seder. Dinner had just been served when a staff member whispered, “There’s someone at the door.”

Excusing myself, I approached the expansive glass doors that architect Erich Mendelsohn had designed to provide a light-filled welcome to our synagogue. Outside in the cold moist air stood a man of late middle age, medium height and build, wearing a coat and tie covered by a tatty raincoat. His expression seemed both perplexed and sad.

I opened the door for him and smiled. He did not move.

“Is there a seder here tonight?” he asked.

“Yes, you’re just in time,” I replied, stretching the truth to make him feel wanted. “Please come in.”

He hesitated, seemed to rock from one foot to the other. Then he half-mumbled, “I, I don’t know...”

At that instant, I had an instinctual, visceral, deep-seated Jewish feeling—a sure knowledge—that this was no ordinary visitor. Though the opening of the door for Elijah was still a good half hour away, the actual moment had arrived. Surely this was Elijah standing before me, temporizing until he could determine if this were to be the heraldic hour. Would this be the beginning of our redemption?

“There’s a place for you at our table,” I said in a beckoning

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voice. Still, he vacillated, his eyes darting from side to side, considering.

So I gambled on force. Ever so slightly, I tugged at the lapel of Elijah’s battered raincoat, hoping the body inside the coat would follow. “Please,” I implored.

“No!” he exclaimed, brushing off my tug and rushing into the cold blackness.

Shaken, I returned to my seat. “Is everything all right?” someone asked. “You look pale.”

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