

TELL ME WHY NIGHTS ARE LONESOME

Muriel Gold

Some time after my father's death, my mother decided to sell her home and move to an apartment. I went over to help her organize the move. Dozens of items had accumulated, most forgotten for many years. What to discard? What to keep? In the furnished basement there was a built-in upholstered bench with a lid. Inside, a variety of items had been stored. My eyes fell on a scruffy, dusty, old shoe box, tearing at the edges. I blew off the dust and removed the lid. It was full of letters, letters addressed to **Miss Dora Ratner** in my father's handwriting, letters addressed to **Mr. S.B. Haltrecht** in my mother's handwriting.

I did not know then what I would do with these letters. But I did know that they were precious and had to be saved. So, with my mother's permission, I carried them home and eagerly read them, then carefully replaced them in the box and deposited them on the top shelf in my den cupboard for some unknown future use.

It would be a long time before I would tell my parents' story.



...when I look into the eyes of my children, I see my own immortality. They will continue my existence long after I shall have passed into the great and unknown beyond. It is in this phenomenon that we can unveil the true secret of the parents' intense feelings for their offspring. They are the flesh of our flesh, the blood of our blood, and the spirit of our spirit.

from S.B. Haltrecht's Bar Mitzvah speech to his son, Stanley, 1944

Muriel Gold, C.M., PhD, theatre educator, producer/director, grew up in Montreal, attended Strathcona Academy received her B.A. from Sir George Williams, her M.A. from McGill and her Ph.D from Concordia. She is former Artistic Director of the Saidye Bronfman Centre, for which, during her eight-year tenure, she won acclaim from theatre critics, academics, and the public at large. She has been on the faculties of McGill University, Concordia, and guest directed in the Professional Theatre Department of Dawson College. For books by Muriel Gold see <http://murielgold.ca>

For her lifetime achievement in theatre and drama, Dr. Gold was appointed to the Order of Canada in 2007.



Dr. Gold is the author of several other books.

The Fictional Family In Drama, Education and Groupwork published by C.C.Thomas, Springfield, Ill., in 1991.

Therapy through Drama: The Fictional Family published by C.C. Thomas, Springfield, Ill., appeared in print, in 2000.

A Gift to Their Mother: The History of the Saidye Bronfman Centre Theatre. MIRI Productions, 2007.

The Dramatic Legacy of Dorothy Davis and Violet Waters. The Montreal Children's Theatre. 1933 - 2009 is her current project.

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PART ONE

Two young people from different countries (Russia and Poland) serendipitously meet in Montreal, May, 1912, are attracted to one another, and correspond across the vastness of Canada over an eight-year period. Bernard Haltrecht is at first teaching in one-room schoolhouses in rural Saskatchewan, then from 1917-1920, he is an undergraduate at Queen's, while Dora, living with her large family on St. Louis Square, works as a stenographer for the Grand Trunk Railway.

It is an era where courtship is distinctly different from today. Their correspondence spans major socio-political world events - the Russian Revolution, the first World War, the rise of the Third Reich, the flu epidemic, the suffragette movement, and the beginnings of Zionism. Their letters, reflecting all these topics, as well as the theatrical and cultural events of their day, are a mine of Canadian History. The author shares their story, a story of two people, their courtship and their connection to Canada.

PART TWO

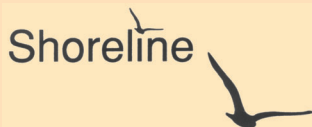
The love story unfolds through their middle and later years in Montreal. Bernard, upon graduation from Queen's in 1920, is engaged as founding executive director of JIAS where he not only faces the many hardships and heartbreaks of this position, but also experiences the joys of rescuing desperate Jewish refugees from eastern Europe.

After many barren years, Dora and Bernard become parents, and Bernard decides to enter McGill law school in spite of the quota system and the Dean's efforts to dissuade him. He perseveres throughout the many obstacles set out for him by the largely francophone Board of Notaries. Finally, determined to succeed, he sues the Board and wins his case.

PART THREE

Stanley and Muriel grow up in relative comfort first in NDG and then in Outremont against the backdrop of World War II and the persecution of the Jews in Europe. Muriel becomes infatuated with theatre, marries, has children, and combines her career with family life by developing a one-woman show and directing productions for the PSBGM. Meanwhile Bernard's flirtation with communism has repercussions for his son, Stanley, if anything, a Zionist. The end of Bernard's life comes prematurely and, while he is in a coma, his daughter at his bedside hears him pleading with God to "give us back the six million Jews."

A combination of biography, memoir and autobiography paints a powerful portrait of a Jewish family over three generations. Yet the story is more than a family story. It is a social history dating from the turn of the century to the present time. It is written in the creative non-fiction genre.



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