

WOMEN'S LEAGUE SHABBAT 2016



READING 3 Tillie Olsen

Introduction: This is excerpted from the short story "Dream Visions" by the Jewish writer, Tillie Olsen.

In the winter of 1955, in her last weeks of life, my mother -- so much of whose waking life had been a nightmare, that common everyday nightmare of hardship, limitation, longing; of baffling struggle to raise six children in a world hostile to human unfolding -- my mother dying of cancer, had beautiful dream-visions in color....

Perhaps, in her last consciousness, she did know that the year was drawing towards that solstice time of the shortest light, the longest dark, the cruelest cold, when--as she had explained to us as children--poorly sheltered ancient peoples in northern climes had summoned their resources to make out song, light, and food, expressions of human love--festivals of courage, hope, warmth and belief...

I had seen my mother but three times in my adult life, separated as we were by the continent between, by lack of means, by jobs I had to keep and by the needs of my four children. She could scarcely write English--her only education in this country a few months of night school. When at last I flew to her, it was in the last days she had language at all. Too late to talk with her of what was in our hearts; or of harms and crucifying and strengths as she had known and experienced them; or of whys and knowledge, of wisdom. She died a few weeks later.

She, who had no worldly goods to leave, yet left to me an inexhaustible legacy. Inherent in this, this heritage of summoning resources to make out of song, food, and warmth expressions of human

love--courage, hope, resistance, belief; this vision of universality, before the lessenings, harms, divisions of the world are visited upon it.

She sheltered and carried that belief, that wisdom--as she sheltered and carried us and others through a lifetime lived in a world whose season was, as yet it is, a time of winter.