

Hardly Any Left

By Carla Sarett (published in *The Woolfer*)

When I was sixteen or so, my older brother brought his first legitimate girlfriend home from college. By college, I mean during his college years, since either over the summer or during what should have been the spring semester, he'd hitchhiked to California (Berkeley or San Francisco, or maybe both) and met a girl and, naturally, fallen in love, and brought her back East with him. She was tall, blond and beautiful, but what mattered most to my mother was that the girl (woman, I suppose) was half-Cherokee, which meant, in my mother's mind (and this is the point of my story) that the girl was "actually" Jewish.

"You see, the Cherokees are the lost tribe of Israel, you know the tribe that no one ever found," she said to me.

"Mom, the Cherokees are on the continent of North America, and wherever the lost tribes were, it was a really different continent," I said, forgetting which continent.

"So, they took a boat," she sniffed.

"I think boats hadn't been invented, boats came later," I pointed out.

"Then a canoe," she said. "Or maybe the entire planet looked different then, and people just walked across on land. You have no idea what the world was like back then."

Well, that was true enough, but I had to argue further, that the Cherokee tribe did not, to my best of my knowledge, speak Hebrew, and there was no evidence of any Hebrew alphabet in any Cherokee dwelling. I felt pretty clever bringing that up.

"So, my father only spoke Yiddish, and I don't know a single word of Hebrew, and why should the Cherokees speak Hebrew in a whole new country?" But here, my mother paused, and moved on to her real argument:

"The Cherokee people suffered a lot. They were dragged across the whole country, they were taken to a strange place that they'd never seen, and everything they'd ever known was taken from them, and they could never return. Did you know that happened?"

I admitted that I did not know that, or at least not in the stark way that my mother told it then. Had we read about Andrew Jackson's policy in school, or was it, like some many cruelties, glossed over? It would be years before I read about The Trail of Tears.

"The point is there are hardly any Cherokees left," my mother said. "Hardly any."

And then I knew why the Cherokees were Jews after all; and I could not begrudge my mother a few extra in her tribe.