

WHEN I WAS A BOY IN BROOKLYN

ISRAEL KAPLAN • An Autobiography • FOLKWAYS RECORDS FG 3501



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Israel Kaplan remembers out loud the songs, rhymes, taunts, insults, charms and incantations of his childhood in Brooklyn around the First World War. This record preserves a great era in our history, and is a tribute to words and the wonderful way children in their innocent naivete use them.

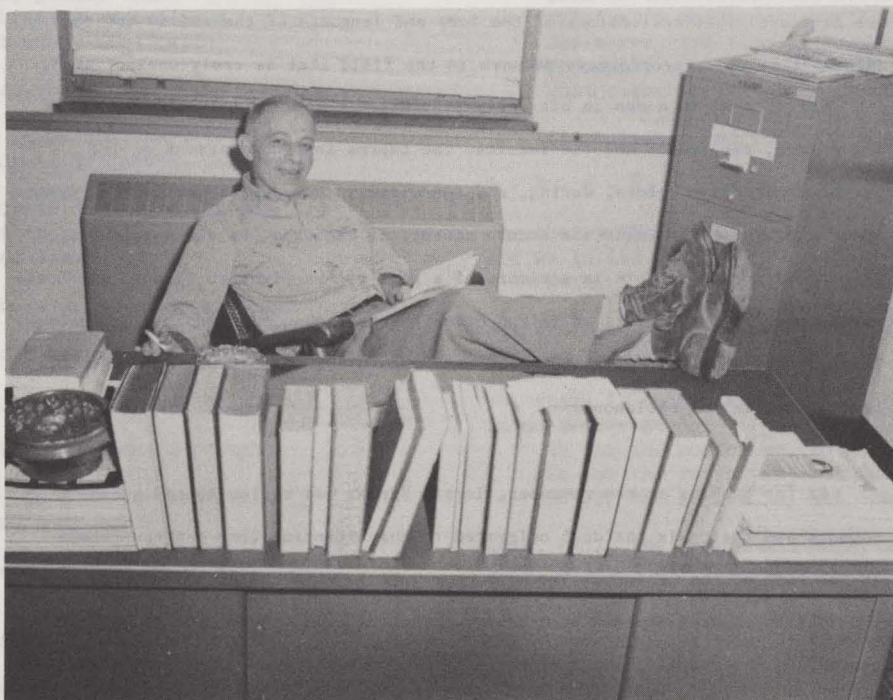
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WHEN I WAS A BOY IN BROOKLYN • ISRAEL KAPLAN

WHEN I WAS A BOY IN BROOKLYN

an autobiography -- Israel Kaplan



This record is an unabashed reconstruction of a piece of American life that disappeared between wars. Radio, T.V., and the various Little Leagues are fast obliterating The American Boy, and replacing him with call-it-what-you-will. The asphalt, and the cobblestoned pavements of Brooklyn spawned a resilient and self-contained comitatus that was able to perform that strangest of all human duties - entertaining itself. Although Stephen Crane saw the denizens of "Boyville" living by the law of the jungle, The Street had its forms (and norms) of law and order. Tradition and boyhood morality ruled out absolute anarchy, but improvisation was tolerated, and the group had adaptability. It did not depend on adult supervision, or Tin Pan Alley, or Madison Avenue; the group made its own rules, played the game, and wouldn't understand spectatoritis if its collective nose were rubbed in it.

The language of this record will bear comment: It is a sad fact that we grow up and away from words. Little children smell, taste, and feel words. They try them out, rolling them off the tongue. In their naivete, their innocence, their uninhibited simplicity, children learn and chant what they must not utter when they assume adulthood. Words, with which we ought to have a life-

long love affair, become a prison, instead of the liberating force they are in childhood. If they don't become a prison, they become a dark glass to obscure meaning. Walt Whitman (another Brooklyn boy, if you extend your geography) said he aimed at a "plate glass style."

The "informant" you will hear confesses that he made six preliminary tapes before he was able to conquer "flinching" as he approached certain words that he used as a child, and does not use now. And he feels that it is a distinct loss to literature that some national archives doesn't systematically collect and preserve - in some form or other - the poetry of childhood. There are some estimable collections of the love and language of the child, but the informant of this record knows no work in the field that is truly unexpurgated.

Here, then, is a man in his early fifties, remembering out loud the songs, the rhymes, the taunts and the insults, the charms and incantations of The Street in Brooklyn before, during, and immediately after World War I, the "great war," that interim between the secure century of Victoria and our bewildering, unanchored present. This is a record of a part of the Nineteen 'Teens, and these paragraphs are intended as an introduction and an explanation, not as an apology. There is not a single word quoted in this record that the informant didn't hear or use in his childhood.

As far back as he can remember, Israel Kaplan was called "Babe". His parents and their six children emigrated to the Argentine from eastern Europe at the turn of the century. Two more boys were born in the Argentine, and in 1906, the family arrived in Brooklyn. The following year, Babe became the ninth (and last) child, the only one eligible by birth to become President of the United States.

During his island-hopping tour with the First Division of the U.S. Marine Corps, Babe Kaplan dreamed of returning to graduate school and working on the language and lore of the children of New York City. But he finally settled on American literature, at Cornell, and is now a professor at State University College of Education at Potsdam, New York.

SONGS, RHYMES, EPITHETS, INCANTATIONS, ETC.,

AS THEY ARE QUOTED IN

"WHEN I WAS A BOY IN BROOKLYN"

-- Israel Kaplan

SIDE I, Band 1

What's dumber than a dumb Jew? . . . A smart Scandinavian!

What did St. Patrick ever do for Ireland? . . . He drove out the snakes! . . . Yeah, but he left the Irish!

May you grow like an onion, with your head in the ground!

Go to hell and bake bagels!

O, the Irish and the Dutch, they don't amount to much,
But the goddam Irish are better than the Dutch.

Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never harm me!

I made you look, I made you look, I made you buy a penny book!

Old Mother Witch thought she was rich, picked up a penny and thought she was rich.

Fire, fire, false alarm! Jimmy Farrell broke his arm.

If I'm a kid, then you're a goat; goats stink, and kids don't.

Brass buttons, blue coat, couldn't catch a nanny goat.

Johnny's It, had a fit, didn't know how to get out of it!

Chinke, chinkey Chinaman, chow-wow-wow!

Fat and Skinny had a race; Fat fell down and broke his face.

You're a better man than I am, Hunka Tin!

Put the tip of your finger up here (to your temple) and say the abbreviation of mountain. [M.T. - empty]

Analyze under John.

Old Man Ludwig is a good old soul, with a buckskin belly and a rubber asshole.

April Fool, go to school, tell your teacher you're a fool!

Silence in the courtroom, the monkey wants to speak!

Four more days and we are free from the school of misery.

No more pencils, no more books, no more teachers' sassy looks.

No more Latin, no more French, no more sitting on the hardwood bench.

Rain, rain, go away; come again some other day.

It's raining, it's pouring; the old man is snoring.

Rich man, poor man, beggarman, thief; doctor, lawyer, Indian chief.

Don't spit on the floor; remember the Johnstown flood.

If you think you're so strong, pick that [Spit] up!

The old man came home one night as drunk as drunk could be.

And on the rack he found a hat where his hat ought to be.

"O, my dear wife, my darling wife, my sweetheart wife," quoth he,

"Why is that hat where my hat ought to be?"

"O, you blind fool, you drunken fool, you silly old fool," said she,

"That is a cuspidor that was presented to me."

"O, I've traveled over land and sea for thirty years and more,

"But a hatband on a cuspidor I've never seen before!"

Swim, Jewboy, swim!

Tell it to the Marines!

It may be so for all I know; it sounds so very queer;

I hate to doubt your word, my friend, but bullshit don't go here!

I wouldn't live in New Jersey; I'll tell you the reason why -

A man got hit with a bag of shit, and that's the reason why.

Take the dice away from Baby; he's crapping all over!

Ass on the table.

In days of old when knights were bold, and toilets were not invented,

They left their load beside the road, and went away contented.

Yankee Doodle went to town, riding on a pony,
Stuck a feather up his ass and called it macaroni.

Fire in the church! . . . Let 'er fly!

Kaiser Bill shit on the hill; wiped his ass with a ten-dollar bill.

Lulu had a baby; she named him Sunny Jim;
She put him in a pisspot to see if he could swim.
He swam to the bottom; he swam to the top.
Lulu got excited and she grabbed him by the cock.

Band 2 - GAMES

Pom-pom-cuckety coo, pom-pom-cuckety coo,
Where shall this or that one go?
Shall he go east, shall he go west, shall he go under the cuckoo's nest?
Where shall this or that one go?

Sally o' the water, Sally o' the sea, Sally o' the blackbird can't catch me!

O, say, can you see any bedbugs on me?

My cunt is on a tree; please get it off for me.

Listen, my children, and you shall hear of the mid-night ride of a can of beer;

Through the alley and over the fence; I've got the can. Who's got the ten cents?

I stood on the bridge at midnight; I heard a voice exclaim,

"O, George, O, George, don't tear my drawers; you'll get there just the same."

The boy stood on the burning deck eating peanuts by the peck.

In the hallway of 483 was the first time she showed it to me,

A little red spot, and she called it her twat, but it looked like a subway to me!

O, the monkey wrapped his ass around the flagpole, around the flagpole!

A peanut stood on the railway track, his heart was all a-flutter,

Along came a choo-choo train, "Toot-toot!" - peanut butter!

Rich men ride in limousines, poor men ride in trains,
Hoboes walk the railroad tracks, but get there just the same!

Seek salvation! Seek salvation! Drop a nickel on the drum, drop a nickel on the drum, drop a nickel on the drum, and you'll be saved.

Child of Christ, Child of Christ, if you want to go to Heaven for \$1.37, drop a nickel on the drum, and you'll be saved!

You're in the army now; you're not behind a plow.

You'll never get rich, you son-of-a-bitch, you're in the army now.

O, the graveyard's an awful place, they bury you in a hole and throw dirt in your face.

Five o'clock in the morning the warden comes around With bread and cheese and butter that weighs a half a pound;

The coffee tastes like tobacco juice, the bread is hard and stale;

And that's the way they feed the boys in Raymond Street Jail.

Glorious! Glorious! One keg of beer for the four of us,
We were drunk last night, and were drunk the night before,

And we'll be drunk tonight as we never were
before.

I was sitting in jail with my face to the wall.
A red-headed woman was the cause of it all.

Band 3. SAYINGS

You don't have to drink Moxie.

"Not a cough in a carload." --- Who ever smoked a
carload?

"Good to the last drop." --- What's the matter with
the last drop?

You've got a face only a mother could love!

What are you posing for - animal crackers?

I'll piss on your grave!

Is your father a glazier?

Watchman, watchman, don't catch me; catch the feller
behind the tree.

He stole copper, I stole brass; watchman,
watchman, kiss my ass!

He's blind in one eye, and can't see out of the
other!

Don't worry, you'll be a man before your mother!

Run home and tell your mother she wants you!

I feel like a ball . . . I feel like a ball . . .
No wonder! Look what's between us!

What hand do you wipe your ass with? . . . I use
toilet paper!

You oughta get shoved up and made over again!

God! but she's beautiful! . . . Who? . . . Mary
Pickford!

You look like Clark Gable . . . under the arms!

Your ass is out! Your stockings are holey! Jerusalem,
you're losing 'em! Your Monday's longer than
your Tuesday.

Band 4. CALLING NAMES

Hurray for Charlie Ebbets! He can't lose!
Up the river, down the lake, the pitcher's got
a bellyache!
He swings like a rusty gate!
Give him a tennis racket!
Whatsa matter, your bat got a hole in it?
Kill the empire!

It's hard to be a Jew.

Baseball, football, swimming in de tenk
We got money, but we keep it in de benk
Boys' High, Boys' High, team, team, team!

A B [Abie], C D [see the] pents presser!

Holy Moses, king of the Jews, bought his wife a pair
of shoes.

When the shoes began to wear, holy Moses began
to swear.

O, where was Moses when the lights went out?
Down in the cellar eating sauerkraut!

Shoot him in de pents; de coat and vest is mine!

I cash clothes, I cash clothes!

Where did you get that hat? . . . I bought it in the
store.

How much did you pay for it? . . . A dollar
forty-four.

The rabbi came in with a big, big knife,
I thought he was going to have my life,
But all he took as a little bit off the top,
a little bit off the top.

Did you hear about the Scotchman who left his change
on the counter? . . .
Neither did I!

Do you know the Scotch national anthem? . . . "Let the
rest of the world go buy."

God made the niggers, he made them in the night,
He made them in a hurry, and forgot to make them
white.

Band 5. RIDDLES RHYMES

What goes in dry, comes out wet, tickles the stomach,
and makes you sweat? -- A washboard!

What goes in long, dry, and hard, and comes out short,
wet, and soft? -- A stick of gum!

Round like an apple, shaped like a pear, split in the
middle, and covered with hair.

Wanta hear a dirty story? . . . The boy fell in the
mud!

I wish I were a lavalier upon my lady's breast,
And every time she bent her back I'd see
the cuckoo's nest.

I wish I were a little fish a-frozen in the ice,
And when the girls went skating by, O, wouldn't
that be nice?

I wish I were a little fly between my lady's knees,
And every time she blew a fart I'd feel a
gentle breeze.

I wish I were a diamond ring upon my lady's hand,
And every time she scratched her cunt I'd see
the promised land.

Johnn, come tickle me, you know where,
Under the petticoat, right by the hair.
If you don't tickle me in the right place,
I'll pick up my petticoat and piss right in
your face!

Minnie, Minnie, Minnie, what a heart I got;
Take me down to the empty lot.
You lay on bottom; I'll lay on top;
Minnie, Minnie, Minnie, what a heart I got!

Peggy O'Neal was a girl you could feel any time,
any place.

Band 6.

The little Marine he grew and he grew, parlez-vous
The little Marine he grew and he grew, parlez-
vous
The little Marine he grew and he grew and now
he's screwing a woman, too,
Hinke, Dinke, parlez-vous.

The surgical corps went over the top, parlez-vous
The surgical corps went over the top, parlez-vous
The surgical corps went over the top to
circumcise the Kaiser's cock,
Hinkey, Dinkey, parlez-vous.

The Scotch Marines went over the top, parlez-vous
The Scotch Marines went over the top, parlez-vous
The Scotch Marines went over the top because
they heard a nickel drop,
Hinkey, Dinkey, parlez-vous.

What has become of Abraham, parlez-vous
What has become of Abraham, parlez-vous
What has become of Abraham, he's eating
ham for Uncle Sam,
Hinkey, Dinkey, parlez-vous.

The general got the Croix de Guerre, parlez-vous
The general got the Croix de Guerre, parlez-vous
The general got the Croix de Guerre but the
son-of-a-bitch wasn't even there,
Hinkey, Dinkey, parlez-vous.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching; Kaiser
Bill is at the door --
And there wouldn't be a Kaiser anymore.

I lost my leg in the army; I found it in the navy.

I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier; I brought
him up to be my pride and joy,
And if I had another, he'd march beside his
brother; America, here's my boy!

Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
Kill another German, and then kill some more.

What do you call those things that go over the
ground like this?
. . . Tanks! . . . You're welcome!

SIDE II, Band 1. AUTOGRAPH BOOKS

I wish you health, I wish you wealth, I wish you
gold in store,
I wish you heaven after death. What can I
with you more?

2 Y Y U R, 2 Y Y U B, I C U R, 2 Y Y 4 me.

DOWN	AND	YOU	AND
AND	YOU	LOVE	YOU
UP	WILL	I	LOVE
READ	SEE	THAT	ME

May you never be the color of this page!

When you are married, and your husband gets cross,
Pick up the broom, and say, "I'm the boss!"

I wish you luck, I wish you joy, I wish you first
a baby boy,
And when his hair begins to curl, I wish you
then a baby girl.

Remember the girl in the city, remember the girl in
the town,
Remember the girl who spoiled your book by
writing upside down.

'Way back here and out of sight, I print my name
just for spite.

Band 2. SAYINGS

The Heck of the Rest of Us. A Sale of Two Titties.
The Three Must-Get-Theirs.
The Yellow Stream by I.P. Fast. The Nubian
Princess by Erasmus B. Black.
The Passionate Russian by E. Nawder Titzoff.
The Ruptured Chinaman by One Hung Low.
Tarzan Of The Grapes.

"Open All Night"

Chicken in the car, and the car can't go, and that's
the way to spell Chicago.
Cork in the bottle, and bottle in the cork,
and that's the way to spell New York.
One-a-see, two-a-see, three-a-see . . .
Tennessee.
What's the longest word in the dictionary?
. . . Smiles. . . There's a mile between the
first letter and the last letter.

2 - 4 - 6 - 8, who do we appreciate?

Strawberry shortcake, huckleberry pie, V-I-C-T-O-R-Y,
Are we in it?
Well, I guess, 179, yes, yes, yes!

Strawberry shortcake, huckleberry pie, we are the
boys of the U.S.I.!

54, there is no better school than that; 54, there
is no better school
Ho for the ro for me, hot ions /irons?/
Ho for the ro for me, hot ions
Ho for the ro for me, hot ions, 54!

Hail, hail, the gang's all here, mustn't say the dirty
word, mustn't say the dirty word; hail, hail, the
gang's all here, mustn't say the dirty word.

What's the richest country in the world? . . . Ireland;
its capital is always Dublin.
Where does time go the fastest? . . . In Rome; every time
you turn around you see a Dago by.

She was only the stableman's daughter, but all the
horsemen knew her.

I'm not the milkman, or the milkman's son
But I can give you cream 'til the milkman comes.

Sneak home, your old lady's got buns!

Band 3.

There was an old lady of France who hopped on a car by
chance;
The motorman fucked 'er before the conductor,
And the brakeman shit in his pants.

There was an old lady of Wheeling who had a peculiar
feeling;
She laid on her back, and opened her crack,
And pissed all over the ceiling.

The night that Maggie died she called me to her side,
And willed to me her old red flannel drawers.
They were tattered, they were torn, and for many
a mile were worn
The old red flannel drawers that Maggie wore.
They were buttoned at the side so you couldn't
see her hide
The old red flannel drawers that Maggie wore.
They were buttoned at the back so you couldn't
see her crack
They were buttoned at the front.

I used to work in Chicago in a department store;
I used to work in Chicago, I did, but I don't
any more.
A lady came in for some garters; I asked her
what kind she wore.
"Rubber," she said, and rub her I did; I did
but I don't any more.

There's a place not far from here where they sell
tin cans of beer,
And my girlie, she lives like a queen.
She's a pippin, a dandy; she's bow-legged and
bandy;
She's cockeyed, she's pigeon-toed, and lame.
She's got the figure of a cork, she's the
terror of New York,
My cockeyed, consumptive Mary Jane!

Band 4. SUPERSTITIONS

"Whooping-cough they say it cures."

Idodine if you can see it; aspirin if you can't.

Away down South where the trains go slow
A butterfly stepped on an elephant's toe.
The elephant said, with tears in his eyes,
"Why don't you pick on a fellow your size?"

Away down South where the trains go fast
A nigger stuck his finger up a bamboo's
/Baboon's?/ass;
The bamboo said, "Goddam your soul,
But keep your dirty finger out of my asshole!"

Sailing, sailing over Niagara Falls,
Captain Dick, he lost his prick, and a fish
ran away with his balls!

_____ is the wagon,
_____ is the horse,
_____ is the driver,
But Hillquit is the boss!

We'll all stand up for Jesus, we'll all stand up for
Jesus, we'll all stand up for Jesus -- For Christ's
sake, sit down!

It was a dark and stormy night, and the moon was
shining bright,
And the captain said, "Tell me a story."

Band 5.

This is the way we wash our clothes, wash our clothes,
wash our clothes,
This is the way we wash our clothes, on a Monday
morning.

Mother, mother, I feel sick; send for the doctor quick,
quick, quick!
Doctor, doctor, shall I die? . . . Yes, my darling,
don't you cry!
How many coaches shall I have? . . . 1, 2, 3, 4, 5,
6. . . .

Go chase yourself! . . . Ye gods and little fishes!
. . . Sonny Lipchultz is no good; chop him up for
firewood!

Go in and out the window, go in and out the window,
go in and out the window, as you have done
before.

And now salute your lover, and now salute your
lover, and now salute your lover, as you
have done before.

Band 6.

Anything for Thanksgiving?

I went to the circus for fifty cents to see the
elephant jump the fence;
He jumped so high, he reached the sky, and
never came back 'til the 4th of July.

Get away from the swinging doors! Do you want to
get sawdust in your eyes?

Did you ever think, as the hearse rolls by, that
some fine day both you and I
Will be riding along in the same old hack,
and never think of coming back?
O, the worms crawl in, and the worms crawl
out; they crawl all over your nose and
mouth.

Band 7.

No tengo tabaco, no tengo papel, no tengo dinero,
goddamit to hell!
Si, no tenemos bananas, no tenemos bananas
hoj!

Hymie, say "Hello!" to Mrs. Levinsky in Algebra.

Mary had a little lamb, her father shot it dead;
Now Mary takes the lamb to school between
two hunks of bread.

My Bonnie lies over the ocean (dead drunk)
My Bonnie lies over the sea (dead drunk)
My Bonnie lies over the ocean (dead drunk)
O, bring back my Bonnie to me (dead drunk)

I'm the Sheik of Araby (without a shirt)
Your love belongs to me (without a shirt)
At night when you're asleep (without a shirt)
Into your tent I'll creep (without a shirt)
The stars that shine above (without their shirts)
Will light the way to love
You'll rule this land with me
The Sheik of Araby (without a shirt)

And the dance they do is enough to kill a Jew.

I'll give it beck to you, mit interest, too,
On Houston Street by a telegraph pole I'll
give it beck to you!

I should live so! . . . You should live so!

Nothing could be finer than to be in Carolina in the
morning, morning,
Nothing could be sweeter than my sweetie when I
meet her in the dawning, dawning.
If I had Alladin's lamp for only a day, I'd make
a wish, and here's what I'd say:
Nothing could be finer than to be in Carolina in
the morning, morning.