

Arnold

Arnold smelled like allspice. I realized it years after I saw him for the last time. A musty smell with a hint of cinnamon. Allspice is not a mixture of spices, as its shifting scent suggests, but the ground, dried fruit of the allspice tree.

Allspice brings to mind a gentleman with graying hair and a brownspotted face. He wears a white collared shirt with off-white stripes. Against this white backdrop, his arms are remarkably dark and hairy. He holds a violin in the left hand and a bow in the right. All blessedly consistent. Yet he shuffles around his apartment in the ugly rubber sliders I associate with rappers. Those sandals would have seemed uncharacteristic of my old violin teacher—if he hadn't worn them all the time.

He had an easy smile and an effortless laugh. "Ashley," the Russian would say, smiling, "when you shift down, your VYolin go up." If I made a comment, he would listen, smile, and reply, "Yeah, and..."

Arnold taught me to listen for the full, vibrating sound of an open string, then to give all my notes that same fullness. "Make like singer."

He played along with me at lessons, and I imitated his gentle, careful style. Only on scales did I play alone, staring into the eyes of a gypsy girl with a violin who stared back at me from the print above Arnold's tidy bed.

Arnold ended lessons with "You're welcome, my dear," helped my mother into her coat, and stood at the window waving till our car had pulled out.

Arnold probably smelled like his shaving cream. Still, I love that sniffing a bag of allspice reminds me of Arnold. And that, though Arnold is gone, his smell can last forever.

- Ashley Taylor, 2010 *Bagels with the Bards* Vol.5, p.55.