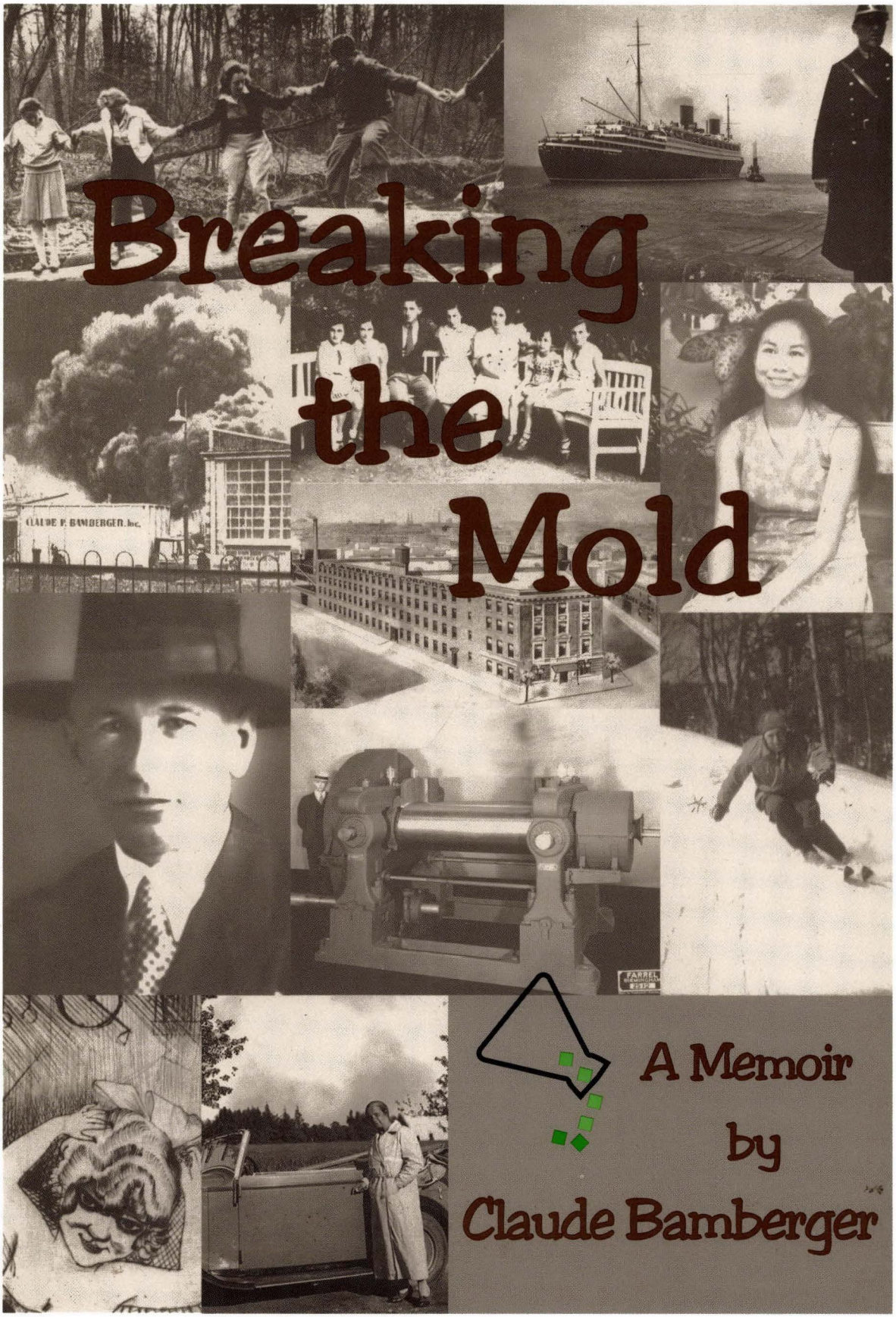

Breaking the Mold
CLAUDE P. BAMBERGER, Inc.
A Memoir by Claude Bamberger

Breaking the Mold

A Memoir
Claude P. Bamberger

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This book is dedicated
to my uncle
Anton Bamberger
(1886 - 1950)
in recognition
for all
he has done for me

A memoir is how one remembers one's own life, while an autobiography is facts, history requiring research, dates, facts double-checked. I've taken the memoir route on the ground that even an idling memory is apt to get right what matters most.

Gore Vidal

Foreword

Writing has been Claude Bamberger's abiding passion. When time was short, he limited himself to writing letters to friends, *many* letters to *many* friends. Later, when he found more time, he wrote various short works. His 1985 *Doctors* describes in a funny and touching way his hip-replacement operation by a world-class surgeon who won't listen to his patient when taking the history but remembers to charge world-class prices. All this in a huge first-class hospital with first-class prices, indifferent nurses, filthy halls, filthy rooms and a thoroughly disorganized administration. It is an experience we all have had but haven't articulated as winningly as here.

This was followed by two intriging travelogues. One was called *Only India is Not Like New Jersey* and describes a harrowing railroad trip in India. Instead of choosing the comfortable first-class trains taken by prudent foreigners, he insists on going native-class and gets plenty raw material for his writings. The other, *South America — An Advenurous Journey*, is a wild trip through Central and South America, especially Peru and its Machu Picchu range, with a vivid description of third-world poverty, unimaginable bureaucracy, and odd floundering foreigners. Why, the reader will ask, expose oneself to these hardships without need? It is here that we discover an important aspect of Claude Bamberger, his search for the unusual, the adventurous, for what is often completely lacking in our ordered predictable daily lives.

On the occasion of a gallery showing in New York of the surviving art works collected by his parents, Claude Bamberger begins to inquire into his family history, as yet only as it relates to the art collection. The Nazis had confiscated the family collection, which was never recovered except for the graphic works here exhibited. His booklet *Art*, written in 1989, colorfully describes the bizarre travels of this collection and how it ended up in this New York art gallery.

This new literary direction now becomes his dominant interest: writing his biography and that of his family replaces recording adventures. In 1993 he publishes *History of a Family,* about the Bamberger family from 1770 to 1992. It is a forerunner of the present volume.

I think that perhaps until now Claude Bamberger had not really faced consciously his being a Jew, a German Jew. Jewish history always seemed related to others. This, I surmise, changed when he dug into the story of his family. He realized that the period of full civil rights and equality for German Jews was very limited, in fact confined to the few decades of the Weimar Republic. He saw that his great great grandfather got (limited) civil rights only after the Napoleonic conquests, making his home before then by the sufferance of the sovereign. Abruptly, the realization must have struck him

that, except for fortuitous circumstances — the grace of God —he too might have gone up a chimney.

America had grown prosperous and strong on the work of its immigrants. But the truism that, when immigrants are allowed to work, they will enrich the country that receives them, is soon forgotten when there is a crisis. Even though it has been shown that immigrants create more jobs than they occupy, there will always be politicians willing to propagate the myth that immigrants are stealing jobs from native workers. Except for the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, a shameful, racist law enacted to mollify nativist agitation against the very people who had with their blood built the West and its transcontinental railway, immigration was unfettered. In the 1920's, with the Great Depression and a wave of anti-foreign sentiment, Congress passed the first restrictive immigration law for Europeans and excluded all Asians. The total quota allotted to countries affected by the Nazis was 40,000 immigrants a year.

Until 1938, restrictive practices insured that the quota was never filled. That year Roosevelt gave orders to ease the restrictions so that people from countries affected by the Nazis could come to the United States to the full extent of the quota. This policy lasted two years, till the autumn of 1939. After that immigration was even more tightly restricted than before 1938. In the war years, 21,000 Jewish refugees were admitted, 10% of the number alloted under the law. Filling the quota in 1938 and 1939 and permitting a trickle of immigration in the war years, was all the help that the Roosevelt administration was willing to extend to rescue Jews who found themselves in the path of the Nazis. By simply ordering the established quotas to be filled, Roosevelt could have, without the need of new legislation, rescued another 200,000 refugees. Since no organization was pushing him forcefully, the order never came. Each night 1,000 bombers would fly over Germany but not one could be spared to bomb Auschwitz, not one could be diverted to destroy the rails leading to the camps. 100,000 souls were rescued and 6,000,000 abandoned. Roosevelt's disgraceful inaction in the face of the destruction of European Jewry is passed over and forgotten. It behooves us to work against this mindlessness.

Taking advantage of the less restrictive immigration, Claude Bamberger came to the United States in 1938 (as did I — and Henry Kissinger). With the coming of the war, skiing being his abiding passion, Claude Bamberger enlisted in the ski troops. After a knee-cap removal he was discharged, came to New York and joined his "plastic" uncle's staff. On Friday nights he would go to the Polish National Home to dance to Ukrainian, Polish and Yugoslav tunes, a most exciting business. Here he met his friends (amongst them myself and "Big Bob" Kantrowitz, who would become the firm's terrific and terrifying legal counsel. Here, with his infectious enthusiasm, Claude Bamberger arranged our hikes, ski trips and beach outings. We became good friends, in

time very good friends. It was here also that he met his first wife with whom he had two children. In time that marriage broke up.

In the early 1950's I was training to become an accountant. The prospect of spending my life with accounting books had me in the dumps. Now Claude proposed that I should come to work with him in his plastics business. For one, the field was expanding at such a pace that it was impossible to cover it singlehandedly. Furthermore, and I suspect very importantly, he was tied down and could not leave to go on extended trips. During his absence there was nobody to mind the store. With me in the fold that would change. I would handle the existing business while he was travelling and make new contacts for him when he was back. With his help I would get the hang of the plastic scrap business pretty quickly. And he would have a partner whom he could trust. This is how our long and fruitful collaboration began. When I got into trouble, he did what he could to help me, at the same time demonstrating his business acumen and ability to solve a problem.

The Bamberger operations involve on the one hand finding supplies of plastic raw materials and on the other hand ferreting out businesses who could use them. Essentially then this is a brokerage operation, akin to the real estate business. The job is to find supplies that a customer wants, or conversely to find a customer for supplies on hand. As in real estate, what is offered cannot be sold, and what is wanted cannot be bought. But here the similarity ends. The Achilles heel of the scrap business is the irregularity in supply as well as quality. This leads to worrisome reclamations by the customer, so-called 'claims' when a scrap dealer cannot deliver the promised quality or quantity.

The great art in this business is not in finding supplies; that requires diligence. Nor is it in finding customers; that too requires application. The high art is settling claims without losing the customer, or the supplier, or both — and not losing one's shirt in the process.

Here is a case in point. The supplier sold Bamberger in good faith a plastic material that he cannot use. Bamberger has a customer for it and makes the shipment from the supplier's plant directly to the customer, as it is economically impossible to bring the merchandise to the Bamberger plant for testing. When the customer tries to use it, he finds that it is contaminated or of a different formulation than he was told. A claim is the result. By now the shipping cost is equal to or exceeds the original cost of the raw material. Even if the supplier is willing to cancel his invoice, who will pay the huge freight costs incurred? Is the material in fact unusuable? Or only parts of it? Could another firm use it? Everybody at Bamberger is in an uproar. But not Claude. In this as in all other tricky situations he is unflappable. That is the first reason why Claude is a master in settling claims. People know that they can trust him. He transmits a feeling of reasonableness, honesty and reliability. What he says has

the ring of veracity and competence. His many years in the industry and the many times he has faced similar problems do make him an expert on the substance of the claim.

Furthermore, Claude has a developed sense of propriety. He would often lose his wallet. Amazingly, he always got it back with contents intact. On one occasion I allowed that, if I had found a wallet (not his, of course), I would not return it. He was shocked. He strongly feels that we need to live by definite ethical rules. Also, Claude is a gregarious, first-rate storyteller. His yarns are full of humor, not mordant, not self-deprecating, but pleasing and warm. With all these qualities it is easy to see why customers and suppliers alike find him fascinating and know that he will do the right thing.

On one of his business trips to Asia, Claude met a beautiful Chinese alumna, Mo-Li Siow, from the University of Malaysia. Soon they married. In New York she pursued graduate studies when Claude shanghaied her for the business. She quickly adapted. "Mo-Li is doing better than the two of us together!," Claude would say to me.

After reading Claude's earlier biography, *History of a Family*, a successful writer and accomplished biographer wrote to him: "The history of your family conveys a good (in contrast to a sentimental) kind of nostalgia, that is, the regret over something worthwhile that has been lost..." I feel that this quotation is fair comment also on the present book. When reading about the various phases of the firm's development, does the reader not become aware that the world of small and middling firms is disappearing? Today the industry is based principally on a few giant oil companies and their subsidiaries. They are the industry. I always pictured us and similar small companies as cockroaches who live in interstices of the plastic industry, never becoming extinct. Not a pretty metaphor, perhaps, but accurate. Today I'm not so sure that extinction isn't near. I hope Claude, the optimist who sees a fine future, is right. However that turns out, in these pages he is giving us an entertaining and instructive history of a little known segment of the plastics industry.

All the qualities that made Claude Bamberger a successful entrepreneur are patent in his relations with friends — yet more broadly, with more sympathy, and always optimistically enthusiastic. Claude and I were able to maintain a secure friendship for half a century, much of it also as partners — an unusual achievement for which I am thankful.

Jacob Suhl
April, 1995

Preface

For some time I have been compelled — almost driven — to write the story of my life. As I embarked on this task, I began to realize that I was recording not just the life of an individual but the history of an industry, the trials of running a small business, and the story of life in America during most of the twentieth century.

My life started when most people used gas and kerosene for lighting and electricity was still a novelty. Though cars and small trucks were in evidence, they were considered a luxury and local transportion consisted largely of horse and wagon. Long distance travel was done mostly by train and steamer. The world of plastics as an integral part of modern life, supersonic planes, cellular phones, halogen lighting, television and compact discs, all considered basic necessities today, came only into being during my lifetime.

I now realize that this account will be of interest not only to readers who look for an entertaining tale of a bygone era, but to people actively engaged in running a business, especially those who like myself have worked in the plastics industry from its infancy. Finally, it will be meaningful for fledgling entrepreneurs, those who own and operate or contemplate starting a small business of their own. In the appendix of the book the reader will learn something about corruption in the plastic industry and possible means of controlling or avoiding it altogether.

I have been asked numerous times questions like these: "How do you start a plastic-scrap business?", "How did you decide to go into the plastic scrap business?", or, "In face of giant conglomerates how can a small, undercapitalized business survive?"

Well, the answers to these questions all lie within the pages that follow.

Basically, I am neither a person born under a lucky star nor a genius who carefully plotted the course of his life. Like thousands before me, I came to this country as a penniless immigrant. Through hard work, perseverance, and a knack of taking advantage of a situation when it arose, I somehow muddled through, and finally, in my mid-seventies, find myself the president of an old and prestigious closely held corporation.

Founded in 1951, the company is still active after forty five years, and still deals in thermoplastic scrap and offgrade materials.

The book thus includes both business and personal adventures. The account of my personal adventures are necessary as without them my business would never have succeeded.

What you are about to read is not just an account of the development of an industry, or the history of a successful enterprise, but it simply represents *a life*.

March 17, 1996

Acknowledgments

Unquestionably, I owe this book to my uncle Anton Bamberger and to my mother who, with her foresight and determination, saved my life. Many others encouraged and aided me in writing it. My wife Mo-Li provided innumerable ideas on what should or should not be included to create a lively chronicle out of the story of my life. Jack Suhl is another person whose help proved essential; indeed, since he was my business partner for many years, he is one of the main reasons that there is a story to tell.

Without the structural input of Earl Rosenblum, the expertise of my editor Esther Jacobson, and the artistic and publishing know-how of my brother-in-law George McCauley, S.J., the book would not be what it is. After my years of searching, credit for the appropriate title of this work, Breaking the Mold, goes to Cathy and John Moliski.

My sincerest thanks also go to Keith Lauer of the National Plastics Museum in Leominster, Massachussetts, who helped me gather historical facts, and to all those others too numerous to mention who selflessly gave of their time.

Without the help of all these people, the publication of this book would have been impossible.

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Chapter One

My Childhood Years

1920 - 1938

That Is How It Was

Upon reading this chapter, my friend Earl Rosenblum wrote: "It seems that until well into your teens, your entire childhood years consist of nothing but one prank after another. I appreciate that life to a young child can well seem to be devoted entirely to play, but somehow I would expect that there would have been some other, more serious aspects in your early years." Reflecting on this comment, I am unable to dredge up anything from my memory that would be more relevant than the games I played during that period. Psychologists claim that for children, play is their work.

More serious aspects of life are brought home to less privileged children, those who grow up in poverty, in war, or with hunger. As for myself, a child of a wealthy businessman living in a villa with a spacious garden at the edge of a small Bavarian town, all my basic needs were provided. I had no concern other than what I would be doing with my friends the next day, and the games we would play.

Mostly, indeed, I had no plans at all, but did what was most attractive at the moment. Since one way or another I always emerged unscathed, both in childhood and later on, I cannot help concluding that I must have led a charmed life.

The First Six Years

As my memory starts only from the age of six, the events predating that age are culled from stories told by my parents and grandparents.

The fact that I was predestined to have an adventurous, unusual life was apparent from the day of my birth — or, to be precise, a few hours before my birth.

In 1920 my parents lived in Lichtenfels, a small town in upper Franconia, part of the larger state of Bavaria, in Germany. They were well-to-do by local standards, owning one of the largest European supply houses of materials used in the basket and rattan furniture industry, of which Lichtenfels was the center. Well respected in the community, my father's firm employed a hundred-odd people full time and possibly a hundred more in a cottage industry, which was then a new concept of employment. It enabled poor farm families in the surrounding countryside to earn extra cash by doing piecework at home making items such as handles and covers for baskets, which were delivered to my father's business for resale to manufacturers of the end product.

The family firm owned a Mercedes car, at the time still a novelty in that part of Germany. Driven by our chauffeur, Herr Hartmann, it was used sparingly to take my father on business trips to nearby cities. But in essence the car was mainly kept for "emergencies." For Sunday family outings into the countryside, we regularly used a shiny, highly polished black coach drawn by two magnificent Arabian horses.

One such emergency arose in the early morning of September 23, 1920. Telephones in private homes were then as rare as Mercedes cars. When my mother, then pregnant, started having labor pains at two o'clock that morning she sent our cook, Kunni, over to Herr Hartmann's house with instructions to get the car and drive her to Bamberg. Since my mother did not consider the hospital in Lichtenfels good enough, she had made arrangements with a more modern maternity clinic in the larger city of Bamberg, some thirty kilometers distant.

Herr Hartmann arrived within an hour (I don't know where my father was, as he was never mentioned in this story), and by the time they were on the way to Bamberg, the matter had taken on a certain urgency.

At about three-thirty, halfway to Bamberg, a hare bounding across the road was struck by the car's bumper and was killed instantly. Unperturbed, Herr Hartmann stopped the car some two hundred feet later and against the remonstrations of my mother, who claimed he would be responsible if the baby was born in a Mercedes — actually not a bad idea — instead of a maternity clinic, said in his heavy Bavarian accent, "It is a pity to leave the hare, it will make an excellent roast for our Sunday dinner."

According to the story, they reached the clinic in Bamberg just in time, and Klaus Bamberger, a healthy yelling boy, saw the light of day at five in the morning.

There was nothing of note, I have been told, during the first six years of my life. My sister Ruth, six years my senior, was already studying in the local Catholic public school, struggling in her math class with the multiplication of millions; because of the postwar inflation in Germany, a typical problem was as follows: "If one loaf of bread costs 1,550,000 German marks, how much do four loaves cost?". Somehow she always lost a few zeros in the calculation, and she failed in mathematics. This was to haunt her the rest of her life. Many years after she died, when I went through her personal belongings, I found a little notebook entitled "Where Has My Money Gone?" It was divided into columns meant for simple bookkeeping functions. There was only one entry, on the first page. Scrawled in my sister's handwriting it said, "That's what I would like to know."

While I never felt deprived of my parents' love, my sister and I were brought up in a climate where parental love and care were not demonstrative. In fact, they were taken for granted. I was not older than a year and a half when I was

parked in my pram in the front garden. My mother felt that the sun was "good for the child". When a concerned passer-by would ring our doorbell to tell my mother that her child was screaming, she would laconically reply, "I know — that's why I put him out there."

Irmgard — First Puppy Love

We all agree that sex is one of the driving forces in life. At the age of six before inhibition takes its toll, boys and girls are quickly attracted to one another. It is only after six that boys pretend that girls are inconsequential and prefer the company of their peers.

One of my earliest memories goes back to a very blond, attractive little girl who lived a few houses down the street from us. Her name was Irmgard. She was the daughter of Mr. Brütting who was a friend of my father. Between the age of four and six, Irmgard was my main friend. We were inseparable and played for hours in either our house or hers. I vividly remember a huge beech tree in her garden, branches bending down to the ground. There was a lot of space between the trunk and the circle of branches, creating a perfect little house.

Irmgard and I pretended to be married. We played endless hours as husband and wife — "father" going to the office, "mother" tending the children and cooking meals under the beech tree, waiting for the husband to come home. Alas this idyllic relationship came to an abrupt end when one day Irmgard's family moved to Bamberg, about twenty miles from Lichtenfels, which was the end of the world as far as we children were concerned. Though Irmgard left an indelible impression on the first part of my life, she had simply vanished.



Irmgard

Later in life, when I returned to visit my roots in Lichtenfels and Bamberg, I made some cursory inquiries of what might have happened to "my Irmgard" during the war. While I found some traces of her in Bamberg, or we may even have met briefly, unlike others in my circle, she simply had disappeared.

Girls turn into women, women marry — some several times in this day and age — and when one only knows a maiden name, tracing a person one knew seventy years ago becomes a problem.

In Irmgard's case a miracle happened. While vacationing on a Caribbean island we befriended Rainer Schwartz, a retired German Wehrmach general and his wife Ruth. We told them the story of the picture of Ruth, which I had described in my *Art* book in 1989.

Rainer, six years my senior and the same age as my sister, told me that he had gone to high school in Bamberg and that is where he went each year for a class reunion of those fellow students who were still alive. In fact he was so incensed reading the story of Ruth's picture that he promised to personally visit Frau Schoepf in Lichtenfels to persuade her to return the picture to our family. I was very pessimistic but suggested that he put on his old uniform and all the medals before embarking on this dubious venture.

As anticipated, the attempt met with failure. While relating this story to his fellow classmates, a woman, also in her eighties said, "But Ruth Bamberger was my classmate in elementary school. Her brother was a friend of my sister Irmgard." And so a breach of seventy years came to an end.

Shortly thereafter, I received a very warm letter from Irmgard, now Frau Dr. Hans Salb and a grandmother of many, suggesting that we arrange a meeting. I enthusiastically responded since I was just about to leave for Germany to attend a plastics show. However, I could not restrain myself from concluding my letter to her as follows: "Of course I have not forgiven you for jilting me. You may recall that we were "engaged to be married" under the beech tree in your garden, and the next thing I knew, you disappeared from my life and moved to the end of the world."

Irmgard promptly responded as follows:

> "Klaus, you are all wrong. I remember the episode distinctly. The engagement took place in the willow warehouse of your father's business, in which we liked to jump around, using the willowreeds as sort of a trampoline.
>
> At one point you suddenly stopped jumping and said, 'Irmgard I must talk to you, we must get married.' I was all shaken up and said immediately, 'Klaus, that's impossible because I am Catholic.' But undaunted you replied, 'I know, it's all right, I have discussed it already with my father and he said it is OK.'

> At that moment I didn't know how to reply. All I remember was that marriage was something 'forever'; it had also to do something with priests, altars, churches and I wanted no part of that."

We were unable to arrange a meeting. Irmgard lived in Hamburg in the north, and my meeting place was in Munich in the south, clear across Germany. However when, one day in Munich I entered the lobby of my hotel, I was greeted with a big smile from a very good looking "elderly" lady who threw her arms around me and said, "Da bist Du es jetzt" (Here you are). "Who are you?" I replied, puzzled. Then she said "I am Irmgard." And so, after a seventy year interval we were reunited once again.

Lichtenfels — Garden Of Eden

Lichtenfels between 1920 and 1930 was a child's paradise. While my parents traveled to distant places like Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and who knows where else, I grew up basically left to my own devices. By 1926 when I was six years old, my sister was already gone from the parental home and lived in a faraway boarding school. The people who were closest to me were not my parents, but Kunni, our cook, whom we had inherited from my grandmother after she died, and Gretl, our live-in cleaning girl, whose parents were employed by our firm.



Otto Dix: one of the "crazy" pictures.

When my parents were home, Sunday would have to be devoted to the family. My parents were very unconventional, and our house was constantly filled with all kinds of interesting people, mostly impoverished artists whom my father partially supported by buying their "crazy" pictures which the art world had not as yet recognized. While my parents' bedroom was usually off-limits to me and my sister, on Sunday morning we had something called the "family bed". The children, as well as any guests staying with us, were cordially invited to join my parents in their large bed, a very bizarre picture, considering that not everyone could fit in the same direction. Though I understood

only fragments of what was being said, I remember the lively discussions about art, politics, theatre and philosophy which dominated these sessions.

I was also required to participate in a Sonntagsspaziergang (Sunday walk) with my parents. Grudgingly, I accompanied them. It took several hours to reach our goal, which was usually some sort of country inn. There, as compensation for our effort, my father ordered thick slices of buttered country bread and jam as well buttermilk followed by a slice of home-baked cake. The adults had coffee mit Schlag — freshly whipped cream. Later on, when my father developed a heart problem, I had to take walks with my mother alone and met my father only at our destination. He usually preceded us riding in our coach.

This was driven by our ancient, loyal coachman, Herr Rosenbauer, who had been with our firm for more than thirty years and had worked the horse teams for my grandfather. On occasions when I did get to ride in the coach, I soon became bored with staying inside. I first wanted to sit on the driver's seat with Herr Rosenbauer, and when the novelty of that had worn off, I was permitted to sit on the axle between the huge rear wheels of the coach, a feat today's fearful safety-conscious parents would never permit.



The Marktplatz in Lichtenfels today.

The only real fun thing I did with my parents during that period was to visit country fairs, which my father loved. To my delight, and to my mother's distress, he took me on my first roller-coaster ride. Dinner consisted of charcoal-broiled sausages and pickles, with a waffle or ice-cream cone for dessert. Afterward my father and I would spend hours listening to the hawkers at the fair, who sold anything from potato peelers to salve for rheumatism and pills to cure impotence. All this was vividly demonstrated, and while I understood only a fraction of what was going on, I saw my father laughing his head off and for sheer joy laughed along with him.

As both my parents were agnostics, religion was never referred to at home. Any awareness of being "different" and a "Jew" came only years later, with the rise of Nazism. Meanwhile, I frequently attended Mass with Kunni, or a Protes-

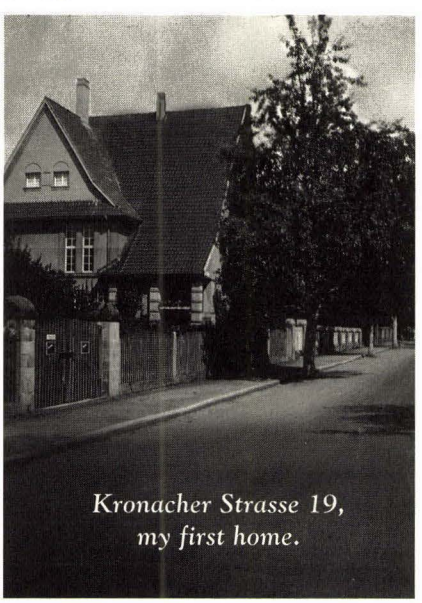
tant service with Gretl when she decided she needed to go to church. Later, when I started grammar school, I quickly developed a circle of Christian friends from whom I was inseparable and with whom I had the time of my life.

Several of the twenty-odd Jewish families living in Lichtenfels at the time had businesses similar to my father's, for the most part related in some way to the basket industry. As they provided steady employment for many and in one way or another contributed to the prosperity of the town, they were highly respected in the community and very much a part of it. The only ethnic conflict was between the Catholics and the Protestant minority.

The conflict between these two Christian factions was so strong that in the Catholic dominated public schools, separate toilets were maintained for each group. Unconcerned about any division between the Catholics and Protestants in Lichtenfels in the 1920's, I can't remember which toilet I was supposed to use.

Some years later when my friend Hermann Schulze, a Protestant, wanted to marry a Catholic girl, his minister told him that he would never succeed in running his father's bookshop, since Catholics had an odor that would drive Protestant customers away. When Hermann nevertheless married the girl, his father predicted disaster and abruptly left town, abandoning son and bookshop for a number of years. In the end he was proven totally wrong; today the once small firm of H.O Schulze is by far the leading bookshop in Lichtenfels, with several branches in the region, and has expanded into a printing plant and a supply house for office machinery and furniture.

Outside school, the river Main, the forests on the surrounding hills, and the numerous little villages which dotted the countryside around Lichtenfels were my playgrounds for many years. I was known by the peasants in every hamlet as "Klaus from D. Bamberger." The population at large was my un-official baby sitter, as invariably one or another member of a peasant's family was either working in my father's business or assembling toys or baskets on a piecework basis in his home.



Kronacher Strasse 19, my first home.

Aside from the occasional forays into the countryside, our large home and spacious garden was the center of our activities during the period when I was six to eight years old.

People often ask, "What was the happiest period in your life?" I think it is impossible to answer this question since as one grows older each period in one's life has its own poignancy, its own highs and lows; in fact each

span of time is unique in a life. If I were to answer this question, I would simply say that there is no period in my life which I regret having lived. However, if the questioner probed further, in an effort to pin me down, the period from 1926 to 1930 would probably emerge as one of the most carefree and happiest periods in my life.

Between the ages of six and eight, before I expanded my horizons by means of extended bicycle trips, my life was centered within Lichtenfels proper. Our large villa with its spacious garden was located at one end of the small town, on the Kronacher Strasse. (The name was later ominously changed to Adolf Hitler Strasse, and later still was changed once again to Kronacher Strasse.) At the other end of town, in the Bamberger Strasse, was my father's large business, which often served as an expanded playground for me and my friends.

Throughout the year my friends and I met in our house right after school. There we played any number of games, seemingly harmless to us, but possibly not so innocent when seen through the eyes of an adult.

Much time, of course, was spent in ordinary games like soccer on our lawn, marbles on the sidewalk in front of the house, or, in bad weather, games selected from a huge collection in my toy chest. But ordinary adult approved games tend to become boring for six- or seven-year-olds, and the need to expand our horizon was compelling.

In our garden were a number of very large, tall trees. We used to climb them to the very top, and after that got boring, we built a treehouse out of scrap lumber from a storage room under our breakfast terrace.

Bamberger cousins, Lichtenfels, 1937. Claude at the left.



My father, an ardent pacifist, never permitted me to have toy guns or tin soldiers, but this didn't prevent us from having very exciting war games, using sticks as sabers and guns. We also managed to dig an enormously deep trench with spades borrowed from Herr Fiedler, our gardener. Then, to achieve some sort of realism we mounted, on the tree above the trench, a contraption consisting of a bucket of water, which when tilted by means of a drawstring operated from the trench, doused the imaginary enemy with what we thought of as boiling oil.

On one occasion, when my parents were giving an important dinner party, my mother discovered to her horror that all her best silverware had disappeared. In those days, the thought that the household help might have stolen anything was inconceivable, and the natural suspects were the children. Rightly so — when queried I volunteered that I had taken the silver and hidden it in the trench, protesting that soldiers had to eat.

Of course kids cannot survive on silverware alone, and in that respect Kunni, our cook, invariably came to the rescue. With great generosity she dispensed an unlimited supply of hard breakfast rolls from the kitchen balcony, to supplement our diet of berries, peaches, apples, and plums, which abounded in our garden throughout the summer.

A residue of this "roll" connection remains with me to this day. Each time I go to Europe I can eat as many as eight of these rolls for breakfast, and then three or four more in mid-morning, before lunch.

Things did not go smoothly all the time. There was a game we called "electricians." This consisted of taking a roll of rusty garden wire from the supply room under the terrace and stringing it all around the outside of the house. Then, standing on a dangerously wobbly extension ladder, we attached this to the gutters. Once the young "electricians" had completed the "wiring," it needed to be connected. This was done by sticking the rusty wire into a live electric outlet which sent off a satisfying number of sparks in the process. In the absence of rubber gloves, we wrapped our hands in yards of burlap; on occasion this was not enough protection and the result was a jolting electric shock.

Thanks to Kunni's intercession, this "innocent" game came abruptly to an end one day when I asked her as usual to throw down a few rolls from the kitchen balcony. "You must wash your hands first," she said sternly, and had me come into the kitchen. Then she said, "Use the water in the sink, it's warm!" When I stuck my hands into the basin I received the jolt of a lifetime. Somehow the drain pipe to which our electric wire was attached acted as a conductor and had given Kunni an equally terrifying shock. This was to teach me a lesson; I was so shaken that we never played "electricians" again.

Another incident of note took place the winter we played "lumberjacks." Borrowing axes and saws from the inexhaustible supply under the terrace, we set about cutting down some trees in our garden. The day was snowy and cold, and, soon tiring in our unsuccessful attempt at cutting down an old willow tree six feet in diameter, we collected some rolls from Kunni's famous balcony, and by means of some salt hay and kindling wood started a fire in the storeroom. Fortunately, the straw was very damp and the resulting smoke billowed around the house and was noticed by some passersby on the Kronacher Strasse. They rang the bell and told Kunni that the house might be on fire. Kunni quickly discovered the source of the smoke and by means of a few buckets of water and some very stern words brought the "lumberjack" expedition to an unsuccessful end.

My father was a realist. Unless they were educational, he did not believe in giving toys to his children. He always believed in giving the real thing. When I felt I needed a wheelbarrow for my trench-digging operations, I got a real wheelbarrow for my birthday, a practical gift, since our gardener, Herr Fiedler, could use it as well. One birthday I got a set of bowling pins with two balls I could hardly lift. These were to be used by both children and adults in the garden on pleasant summer days.

One sunny spring day my friend Heinz and I were at loose ends. The temperature was warm and pleasant and we decided that it was time to initiate the bowling season. The set of heavy pins and balls was stored in my room on the second floor.

Together, Heinz and I pulled the box near the window. Then I said to Heinz, "You go down to the garden and collect the pins when I throw them out of the window." Since I was too small to look over the windowsill, we arranged that each time he had collected a pin or ball, he would yell "OK" before I pushed the next one over the sill. There were nine pins and two balls. All went well for the first six times. After I heard a reassuring "OK" from below, I pushed down the next pin which I had heaved up on the sill in readiness.

After the seventh pin disappeared from my limited horizon, no "OK" was forthcoming from below. Worried, I climbed up on a chair and peered over the sill into the garden. The scene below was distressing. Heinz was holding hands over his head, doing some sort of St. Vitus dance; blood was spurting from everywhere. I rushed down, feeling real bad. Heinz was crying. I said, "You are hurt." He said, "What should I do?" I said, "You better go home to your mother."

A few days after this incident my mother asked, "What is the matter with Heinz? Why doesn't he come to play with you?" "Oh Heinz," I answered innocently, "I threw a bowling ball on his head; maybe that's why he doesn't come anymore." My mother was speechless. She put on a jacket and hat and rushed to Heinz's house, a couple of blocks away. There she found Heinz in bed with twelve

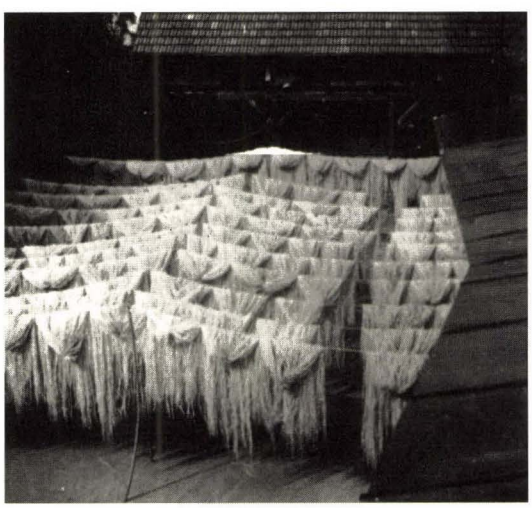
stiches in his head. My mother then bought a box of chocolates and made me go over with it to keep my friend company.

Parents in those days did not squabble with other parents. Lawsuits were unheard of, and parents invariably blamed their own children when something went amiss. "What did you do now?" was the refrain I heard persistently.

The result of one calamity or another was usually Hausverbot — house arrest. I was compelled to stay at home, one, two, or three days, or a week in the most severe cases. During this time I was not allowed to go out after school or have the company of my beloved friends.

About that time, to my delight, my father expanded the D. Bamberger enterprise to include wooden "educational" toys, mostly imported from that part of former Czechoslovakia now known as Slovakia. Frequently he arrived home with the latest wooden puzzle — colorful, odd-shaped pieces which could be fitted into a box or arranged in various shapes — and tested them out on me or my sister.

The best item as far as I was concerned was Toy-Town, a whole town made of colorfully painted wooden blocks in the shape of houses, cars, animals, trees, trains, even hospitals, schools, a city hall, and indeed little wooden people to populate the town, was a child's delight. It came in various sizes, and while of course I coveted the largest set, it was never given to me, as it was considered too expensive. Not brooding long over this loss, I used blocks and other toys from my toy closet in place of the missing pieces.





Above, drying fiber. Right, willowreeds, bamboo poles and basket materials on the way to the rail depot.

When I was grounded, I played quietly by myself for hours, creating a fantasy town, peopled by imaginary folks who teetered from one crisis in their lives to another. At dinner, when no guests were present (when we had guests children were allowed to be present but not heard), I entertained my parents with details of the catastrophes which befell my imaginary families in the toy town upstairs.

The business in the Bamberger Strasse was a place I frequented quite regularly, albeit for other reasons than my father. The multiple warehouses, spread over about six acres, were a heaven for little boys to play hide and seek. In one warehouse, stacks of cane, coco fiber and other elastic materials, served as a giant trampoline as long as Uncle Fritz was not around.

My granduncle Fritz, a brother of my grandfather, was our terror. We felt we were his prey; he stalked us from one warehouse to another, a flexible bamboo stick in his hand, ready for attack. Alas, he was too slow and too old. Invariably we escaped, although he did manage to spoil our fun.

One of my favorite pastimes was to spend hours in the company of our chauffeurs. The garage held a couple of the latest Mercedes automobiles, of which a cousin of my father, Uncle Alfred, was in charge. He loved those shiny new cars and so did I. I had wormed my way into the heart of Herr Hartmann, the head chauffeur. He condescended to teach me how to "drive" on occasion, certainly not when Uncle Fritz was anywhere in sight. With me sitting on his lap, he let me hold the steering wheel while we uneasily navigated down the warehouse-lined alley at five kilometers an hour.

There was also the carpentry shop which had its own attraction. The shop was mostly used for finishing butcher block tops for rattan tables, but it was equipped for all types of essential repairs in factory and office. There I spent many a rainy day busily knocking nails into scrap boards and having a very high opinion of my skill. When my parents gave me a set of real carpenter tools one Christmas, I expanded my carpentry skill by pounding a series of nails into the parquet floor of our living room. At this point my father had enough of my creativity and used the bamboo stick on my behind. Unlike Uncle Fritz, he was impossible to elude on this occasion.

While the feared bamboo stick — also frequently used by our teacher in elementary school — was kept readily at hand, I usually managed to find its hiding spot and destroy it before it could be used. However, the supply from our warehouse seemed inexhaustible and I soon realized that I was fighting a losing battle. The end of bamboo-stick punishment came one day when I was about eight years old. It was a rainy afternoon, and my friends and I were at loose ends. It was too wet to play in the garden, so we played hide and seek in the house. A huge, antique grandfather clock stood in our hallway. It had a door which opened to a pendulum which swung rhythmically back and forth, marking the passing of

time with dignity. The space was just large enough for me to squeeze in. No one will find me there, I thought, and indeed no one did. Listening to my friends looking for me and wondering where I could be, I became hysterical with laughter. Suddenly the ancient clock started leaning forward, then there was an enormous crash, and seconds later, a perplexed Klaus emerged from the wreckage of the clock now lying on the floor.

The crash brought Kunni and Gretl to the scene. They usually acted as my accomplices, rectifying any harm I did, but it was impossible to hide the damage on this occasion.

Alerted by our new phone, my father came home that evening with a new cane to see that justice was done. It was the eve of his departure on a business trip to England. As he tried to hold the squirming Klaus over his knee and mete out the deserved punishment, Klaus's arm snapped back in an effort to break the threatening blow, hitting and breaking his father's little finger. The trip to England had to be postponed by a day. I guess my father decided I was too big to manage; in any event, I don't remember his ever using the bamboo stick again.

As life went on and we got older, Lichtenfels appeared too limited for me and my friends, notably Heinz, and a boy named Christl. The three of us were inseparable, although there were many others as well. In fact I was so involved with my friends that my mother complained that I never had any time for her. She decreed that during vacations at least one day a week was mother's day and had to be devoted to her.



Therese Wolff,
Claude's maternal grandmother.

To make this proposition more palatable, my friends were occasionally invited to join us on excursions which invariably ended in some little village that had a good Konditorei — pastry shop. We called ourselves the Six Cavaliers and even carried a homemade flag with these words embroidered in red on a blue-and-white background, as we hiked through the Main valley.

During summer days, we spent most of our free time swimming in the river Main. Occasionally, long sets of rafts made of trees cut in the Fichtelgebirge, several hundred kilometers upstream, came into view.

These rafts were loosely bound together with twisted branches, and guided by professional raftsmen.They were on their way to some large sawmills located in cities far downstream. It was most exciting to hitch a ride on these rafts and

sit on them for a few miles, the highlight of the trip being when the rafts went through the opening of a dam about one kilometer from where we had boarded. The rush of water as we shot through the drift had the same thrill as when later on in my adult life I negotiated river rapids with my canoe.

I must have been about eight years old when we started making bicycle trips to the villages surrounding Lichtenfels. Getting ever more adventurous we cycled as far as Bamberg and on one or two occasions all the way to Nürnberg.

Once we even cycled to Stuttgart, three hundred kilometers distant, to visit my grandmother. For such a long trip my mother would supply us with the addresses of relatives and friends along the way where we could find shelter or seek help if needed. It was also about that time that we started camping along the river Main and "mountain climbing" on the rocks of the nearby Staffelberg, a rocky hill about three hundred meters above sea level and by far the highest elevation in the region.

A Fateful Visit

When I was 9 1/2 years old my parents decided that they wanted to go to the Canary Islands for a vacation. At that time air travel was unknown, and such a trip by rail and boat took several days, so a vacation of some weeks was quite usual.

Feeling that it was too dangerous to leave Kunni in charge of the rapidly growing, ever more independent Klaus, they sent me to Stuttgart to stay with my very nice maternal grandmother. My aunts Ilse and Lina, my mother's two intellectual, highly educated unmarried sisters, lived nearby, accessible if my grandmother could not handle her lively grandson from the country. I was excited when my mother drove me to Stuttgart at the beginning of the 1929 Easter holiday. This would be my first real city experience. My grandmother had a spacious flat in a six-story apartment house in one of the better sections of the town and was a respected member of the Jewish community in the city.

Unused to the confinement of an apartment, I immediately sauntered forth to explore the neighborhood and to look for potential friends. As it turned out, my first friend was the policeman who directed traffic at the corner. His name was Theo and I was impressed that the many motorcars, which had recently proliferated in the German landscape, obeyed him implicitly at the wave of his white-gloved hands.

The next attraction was the trolley cars which, at regular intervals passed our house with great clanking. In my dreams I had always wanted to become a trolley conductor, a desire which was later replaced by my wanting to become an airplane pilot. I came closest to fulfilling my "conductor" dream in Stuttgart. Having con-

quered the heart of Johannes, the bored conductor, with my charm after a few days, I was allowed to ride with him from one end of the line to the other without charge.

Although I felt perfectly capable of operating the trolley by means of two large cranks which Johannes turned this way and that to regulate the speed of the vehicle, he was not quite so reckless as to allow me a hand at the controls. Frequently, however, he stepped on a large silvery button on the floor, causing a bell mounted underneath to be struck. The bell warned pedestrians, dogs, cats and other creatures crossing the trolley's path, of the oncoming danger. After great persuasion Johannes finally agreed that I could operate at least that. Every time he yelled "Now!" I stomped on the silver button with gusto, delighted at the loud ringing which emanated from below.

After a few days, I tired of the trolley game and somehow managed to make the acquaintance of Karl, who was about my age and the son of the owner of a nearby bar and bowling alley. Thanks to my prior experience with bowling balls and pins, I became a welcome partner for Karl, who invited me in for unlimited bowling in the early morning hours when the alley had no paying customers.

Another fascination was the dumbwaiter in my grandmother's apartment. It consisted of a square wooden box about three feet in diameter in which groceries, coal, ice and other heavy objects were hauled by means of ropes and pulleys to the upper floors of the building.

Karl and I thought it great fun to use this contraption as a sort of elevator. We took turns, one sitting in the box and the other hauling the "passenger" up and down. My grandmother, busy with her own affairs, never noticed this dangerous pastime. One day, when Karl was the passenger, the rope slipped through my hands and the wooden box fell with a great crash to the basement. Fortunately, the dumbwaiter was already at the ground floor, so Karl fell only a few feet. Beyond a good heavy jolt he was unhurt. Not so the equipment. The loss of control caused the rope to slip through the pulley several stories higher up, and now it lay curled like a great snake on top of the dumbwaiter box.

My grandmother was summoned, Ilse and Lina were summoned, and together they made it clear in a solid lecture that such behavior was not acceptable in the city of Stuttgart. I really didn't understand why they were so upset. "It was an accident," I wailed, "I didn't do it on purpose." There was no argument with such logic, and after admonitions to stay away from the dumbwaiter from that moment on, nothing much happened.

Chastised, Karl and I went to his parents' bowling alley and bowled to our hearts' content. Along one wall there were some soft-drink and candy vending machines. Whenever we got hungry or thirsty, Karl would punch a key on the old-fashioned cash register, take out a coin, and use it to get a chocolate bar or a drink. I thought this was marvelous. Since we were friends, he didn't mind if I

did the same, albeit with more frequency. Thus after a while I had accumulated a small mountain of surplus chocolate, which I proudly took home to my grandmother.

Grandmother wanted to know where all that bounty came from. When I explained that the chocolate came from "Karl's autotomat," as I called these vending machines, she was aghast. "But Klaus," she said in a raised, highly agitated voice, "do you realize that this is stealing?" I was honestly perplexed. "How could this be stealing?" I said. "The 'autotomat' belongs to Karl's parents, the cash register also belongs to Karl's parents, so money I took from the register they will get back when they empty the 'autotomat.' How can this be stealing?" No matter how my exasperated grandmother tried to explain, I neither agreed with her nor understood her strange adult logic. All I knew was that she and I had to take the chocolate back to Karl's parents and was made to apologize.

However, the last straw during that fateful Easter holiday in Stuttgart was the matter of the chocolate bunnies.

The Saturday before Easter Sunday was rainy. I was alone in the apartment. Grandmother had gone out for last minute shopping and I didn't know quite what to do with myself until I discovered my grandmother's heavy key ring in a basket on the kitchen counter.

I knew my grandmother had everything in the apartment under lock and key in good German fashion. The pantry, the linen closet, even the ice box. I wasn't interested in any of these. What I wanted to unlock was the imposing, polished walnut credenza in the dining room.

It didn't take me long to find the proper key, and when I opened the sliding door, an unbelievable treasure revealed itself. There was a long row of neatly packed Easter baskets meant to be given out on Easter Sunday to friends, servants, and the needy of the Jewish community. Some of these baskets packed with chocolate Easter eggs were smaller, some were larger; attached to each was a tag with the name of the future recipient. However, all the baskets had one thing in common: each basket was dominated by a long-eared chocolate Easter bunny wrapped in silvery tinfoil. Very attractive. I contemplated this appetizing scene for a little while; then, unable to withstand the temptation, I bit off the ears of one of the bunnies. While munching the delicious chocolate, I surveyed the scene and concluded that something didn't look right — sort of uneven. To even them out, I bit off the ears of a few more bunnies. Now things looked even worse! What to do? Risking a gigantic stomach ache, I thought it best to bite off the ears of all the bunnies. Maybe that would make the first crime less noticeable. This accomplished, and looking over the havoc I had created, I concluded that I had decidedly failed.

There was nothing to do but close the doors, carefully lock them, and perhaps throw away the keys. Then I decided I wouldn't go quite that far. I hid the keys under the carpet in the linen closet.

A few hours later, when my grandmother returned, I was innocently playing in the living room, hoping that whatever had taken place in her absence would vanish. Alas, it didn't. After a while, my grandmother shuffled about the apartment murmuring that she couldn't find her keys. "Klaus," she called sternly, "did you see my keys anywhere?" I professed innocence but offered to help look for them. The keys were not to be found. My grandmother kept on fidgeting, always eyeing me suspiciously, until at suppertime I could hold out no longer. Helpfully I suggested that she might have left the keys under the carpet in the linen closet and indeed, that's where they were.

Very soon the real crime was exposed. Cries of anguish emanated from the dining room when my grandmother wanted to put some final touches on her Easter baskets. The damage was so great that more than "final touches" were needed. In fact, with all the stores closed for Easter, the damage was irreparable.

My intellectual aunts were summoned; they arrived on Easter Sunday. Their brother, my uncle Hans, who was studying for his doctorate at a university in some distant town, also came. By coincidence my parents were due back from their vacation as well.

A Family Council in the true sense was convened. After all the crimes I had committed in that short period were listed in detail along with some embellishments, the question arose of what to do with Klaus, a true juvenile delinquent. Uncle Hans suggested a correctional institution. Ilse, being more medically oriented thought psychiatric help was needed. Lina knew of a school for disturbed children near Berlin. All, except my mother, were in agreement that something had to be done.

She said, "Oh, Klaus was just bored. He didn't know what to do with himself." She would not listen to any of the well-meant family advice, but packed my bags and took me back home to Lichtenfels and the free environment to which I was accustomed.

Juist — School At The Seashore

However, something must have rubbed off. I think it was around that period that my father and mother decided to send me to a boarding school on the remote island of Juist, in the North Sea. This involved a two-day journey by train and boat.

At first I was homesick, but I soon became accustomed to the school's curriculum and loved the island life on Juist. The school, called Schule am Meer, was not an ordinary school. It was not a "correctional" institution; in fact, it was just the opposite. At that time, a group of educators in Germany who opposed conventional educational methods had started several schools such as the Schule am Meer known in certain circles as free schools — Freie Schulen. The principle

of these educational institutions was to give students as much freedom as possible in their choice of subjects, and to allow them a say in the management of the school, within specific guidelines proposed by the faculty.

Thus, aside from a prescribed curriculum, "Juist", as we called the school, was actually run by the students themselves. The co-educational student body consisted roughly of seventy students, half boys and half girls, aged ten to eighteen. The studies ended with the Abitur, the qualifying examination for entering the university. Letting a group of children of both sexes live together and manage their own lives was a new concept, greatly frowned upon by the conservative German public at the time.



Juist on the North Sea.

A student council, consisting of democratically elected senior students (those in their last two years), made the rules. The council meted out punishments and set the school standards in general. The teachers were there primarily to teach and to give guidelines to the senior students.

Each teacher was in charge of eight to twelve students, a group small enough to give each individual a sort of identity and a feeling of solidarity and belonging. In the dining room, each group ate together, at the same table, and a new student and potential member of a group had to spend some weeks alternating among tables to check out his or her compatibility with the various groups. After some months the student applied for " membership" in the group of his choice, which then voted on whether or not to accept the applicant. In practice, one usually applied only when assured of acceptance.

Everything was very democratic. Meetings were held periodically during which the senior council presided and the students in general voted on certain issues. My sister Ruth, who had already been in the school some years prior to my arrival, became famous and was often quoted to point out how really democratic we all were. When, as a junior, she was qualified to make a motion during assembly, she raised her hand, stood up, and said "I vote that I am against voting."

Each morning there were rigorous calisthenics, followed by a swim in the sometimes icy North Sea. Then we had to make our beds and clean our rooms. I shared a room with four other students. After four years, on becoming a junior,

one shared a room with only two others, and students in the last two years, the seniors, were entitled to a room of their own.

Every day except Sunday, breakfast was preceded by a heavy dose of Bach or Beethoven on the piano, to which we had to listen standing up in front of the bountiful breakfast table. Before we were allowed to sit down, the results of the room inspection conducted by a handful of seniors were announced by the school's principal. Delinquent students, those who had not made their bed properly or had surreptitiously swept all the dirt under the carpet, had to leave the dining room to rectify the misdemeanor, perhaps missing out on the two hard rolls and jam which were served just after the announcements.



Claude at 15.

The curriculum consisted of four hours of morning study five days a week, with afternoons alternating between "practical work" (general maintenance of the campus involving repairs, painting, roof shingling, gardening and the like) and sports such as soccer, sailing, and field hockey. Wednesday afternoon was free.

We were required to write to our parents at least one letter a week, something I did gladly and diligently. In fact it was the beginning of my writing career. Until my mother died I kept this habit, even when we were living in the same city I would frequently write rather than phone, to tell her about something which bothered or preoccupied me.

Maria Becker in those early days.



The school had its own symphony orchestra, presided over by a teacher named Zuckmeier, who later became a well-known conductor in the United States. Luserke, the director of the school, was a playwright and author of a number of books. Each year he managed several large theatrical productions, divided between Shakespearean classics and plays of his own creation. The latter were written with certain student actors in mind. One of the actresses was my ten year-old

friend Maria, who later became famous in the German theater as Maria Becker. She is still well known and active today.

The consensus of the German academic community was that one would learn "nothing" in those free schools. My parents almost agreed. They consoled themselves that even if the children didn't get a formal education, at least they were learning to take care of themselves and to cope with the day-to-day life. They figured correctly that with a basic foundation for survival, we could always manage to get a formal education on our own at a later time.

When some years later, at age seventeen, I found myself stranded alone and impoverished, an immigrant boy in an economically depressed United States, the solid foundation of the Juist experience enabled me to manage quite well without feeling sorry for myself. And when I felt there was a gap in my education, I filled it by attending night classes at Cleveland City College.

At Christmas and Easter, and for summer vacations, I made the long journey home to Lichtenfels to be reunited with my parents and friends, whom I appreciated more keenly than if I had lived there the year round.

I was happy and carefree. All of us had a wonderful life. My family had a thriving business and a lovely home, and I believe my parents had a good marriage. By 1933 I had been commuting to the island of Juist for three years, often breaking the two-day journey in Hanover to spend a couple of days with my favorite cousin, Gerald, my senior by only two days.

I loved my school, but also the endless summer vacations in Lichtenfels, which remained to be the base of the Bamberger family until the very end. Each year Gerald would spend some weeks with us. He joined my other friends; we would camp out in our garden or bicycle and hike in the surrounding countryside. Each summer all cousins migrated to Lichtenfels for some weeks to enjoy my parents' hospitable home and garden. There was no question that my sister Ruth would marry, while Klaus would enter the family business and leave it to his children in turn. This was assumed to be the preordained path of our idyllic lives.

Dawn Of A New Era

For some time prior to 1933, there were dark storm clouds on the political horizon. Times were not good, many people were out of work, and with increasing frequency small, boisterous groups of hooligans, wearing brown uniforms, made their appearance all over Germany. Even remote Juist was affected. A group of brownshirts from the poor fishing village, the center of this sparsely populated island, came to the school and began agitating, insisting on the creation of a National Socialist cell in our midst. The majority of both the faculty and the student body vigorously rejected the idea, as it was in complete opposition to the concept and ideals of our school. But the seed of discontent was sown and soon

found fertile ground among some of the disgruntled elements which exist on the bottom rung of every community.

As a result, a Hitler Youth chapter materialized within an otherwise very liberal student body. Soon it became evident that even faculty members were fearful of this unruly element in our midst.

At home in Lichtenfels, around the dinner table, the adults talked about the ambitious claims of Adolf Hitler, the crazy leader of the National Socialist Party. Most people thought him to be a crackpot and inconsequential. Anti-Semitism was one of the more pronounced features of Hitler's political platform, and I slowly became aware that some people, even in Lichtenfels, considered me different. Here and there some boys yelled "Jew" and on occasion I even had to dodge a couple of stones thrown at me for no reason at all. Even my friends Heinz and Christl were affected. They met me clandestinely and told me that they really were unable to associate with me in public, though they promised that privately we would always be friends.

In the aftermath of World War II and the destruction of Germany by the Allies, most Germans, when queried, responded with a tale of woe. All say that while they never condoned the genocide of the Jewish people they would have been risking their lives if they had protested this action. This may have been the case after Hitler started to implement his lethal racial policies at the end of 1938, certain that a pro-Nazi citizenry and an apathetic general public would do nothing to stop his plans. But it is my opinion that between 1933 and 1938 people had the opportunity to protest without endangering their lives or livelihood — though speaking up might have decreased an individual's popularity with his neighbors or compatriots.

In truth, most Germans were unwilling to give up personal gain or promotion to demonstrate their displeasure with the regime, and as time went by, the majority wholeheartedly joined the Nazi pack.

But here and there were exceptions. Even in Lichtenfels, and in contrast to my friends Heinz and Christl, who would be considered the norm, some people did speak out, telling the public where *they* stood. Andreas Dück a highly respected elementary school teacher in a nearby village was one of them. Aside from teaching, he was an artist and a writer. A close friend of my father and a very idealistic person, he made no bones about being in total disagreement with local politics. When one of the Nazi bosses who was president of the Lichtenfels Kulturverein (cultural organization) wrote an anti-Semitic article in the local paper, Andreas Dück resigned as the organization's chairman. He also refused to serve on any other public committee even if doing so would be politically advantageous and would help further his career.

Another fearless one was Hannchen Och. She was one of many children of our immediate neighbors who owned the Och Construction Company, leading

builders in and around Lichtenfels. Before I went away to school, Hannchen was a good friend and a frequent visitor to our house. But the main attraction for all of us were the various construction sites of the Och family business. Hannchen, I and other friends would gravitate irresistibly toward anything surrounded by a scaffold. Houses under construction are ideal places for playing hide and seek. We never tired of using ropes and pulleys to swing from one story to the next, and of walking shakily up and down narrow construction planks, activities cherished the more because they were strictly forbidden.

When I left Lichtenfels in my teens, after the official election of the Nazi regime, contact with my old Christian friends became awkward and unnatural. Later, on the rare occasions when I visited Lichtenfels, as the anti-Semitic climate accelerated, I remember Hannchen being the only one who undauntedly crossed the street and greeted me while other former "friends" carefully avoided eye contact and sought the other side of the street when they saw me coming.

On more than one occasion, when Hannchen stopped to talk to me, passers-by would admonish her that it was improper for an "Aryan girl" to talk to a Jew. Some hooligans even resorted to jostling and shoving her. but Hannchen fought right back telling these people to mind their own business and that she would talk to whomever she pleased.

Only many years later did I find out that, because of that defiance, Hannchen was expelled from the *Bund Deutcher Mädchen* — the female equivalent of the Hitler Youth — in which every young woman was automatically enrolled. Membership was essential to the future success of young people, and dismissal was a permanent bad mark on one's record. Hannchen, not one to swim with the political current of the the times, said later, "Oh, it was just as well; once expelled I no longer had to attend all those boring, nonsensical rallies and endless meetings."

Recently I located Hannchen — now a widow living in a city on the Rhine — after an interval of forty odd years, and we plan to meet as soon as possible.

The Social Democratic Party was not favored by Hitler's National Socialist movement. The fact that my father was a member of this party as well as a Jew made him even more objectionable to the local Nazis. Hence, one day in 1933, while on business in Frankfurt he was arrested and taken into 'protective' custody.

Although there were no specific charges against him, the legal steps needed to get him released were too slow for my mother. She went promptly to Frankfurt, and as she was a likable, positive woman, she was able to get him released after a week. This was mainly through the offices of a police lieutenant she had befriended. She was so grateful to this gentleman that she kept in touch with him over the difficult years that followed. At one point, when he was offered a promotion, he declined, telling my mother, "As long as they (the Nazis) are in power, I don't want any promotion from them. It would only force me to do things for which I have no heart." Here is another example of a German citizen who recognized the coming

evil and while unable to stop its progress, was decent and conscientious enough to want no part of it.

My father came home a broken man. Jail was not a place for Otto Bamberger. Already suffering from a chronic heart condition, he died from a heart attack within a few months after his return.

My mother didn't call me, but asked the principal of the distant school on Juist to break the news. I was told that my father had specifically asked that there should be no funeral and that life should go on without him. Yes, life did go on, but given the circumstances, it was never the same again. The sun had set forever on the idyllic life the Bambergers and their fellow citizens had enjoyed in Lichtenfels. The day of a new regime had dawned, and with it came unimaginable horror in the form of World War II and the Holocaust.

Switzerland — A Wider Horizon

After my father died, my mother decided that Germany did not provide a desirable climate for the higher education of Jewish children. Anti-Semitism was rapidly becoming universal in everyday life, and with it came all kinds of restrictive laws against German Jews, limiting their access to higher education and various professional fields.

At the end of the first semester in 1933, my sister, who had graduated from Juist the year before, was attending a Jewish school in Berlin, learning to be a nursery school teacher. As for me, my mother said, "Now you are finally going to learn something," and enrolled me in a well-known Swiss school, the Voralpines Knaben Institut Dr. Schmidt, in St. Gallen. This was an ultra-conservative school, catering to the sons of Europe's first families, many of them of noble ancestry, and to a fairly large percentage of boys from well-to-do German Jewish families as well.

I was unhappy at first in the regulated, disciplinarian climate of this new, all-boys school, attended largely by the spoiled sons of European high society. There was little room for individuality and personal freedom, which had been the most precious commodities in the island school from which I had come. In contrast to the free-style education of Juist, in which students were encouraged to choose subjects of their liking, the academic disciplines of my new environment were compulsory: the study of business administration, typing, bookkeeping, and mathematics, as well as science subjects, filled in gaps left by my previous education. Like it or not, I realized that my mother had a point.

In fact and in retrospect, this school gave me my first opportunity to practice my inborn entrepreneurial skill. We had a student canteen, selling chocolates, cigarettes, and sundry personal items. This canteen was operated by students studying business subjects. First I was assigned to do the elementary bookkeeping that was involved, but later I was delighted to be appointed "buyer," a position which

authorized me to place orders and even go on an occasional "business trip" to Maestrani, the local chocolate factory. There I was treated as a V.I.P. customer and given generous samples of new products to taste and take with me. I really liked that aspect of my job.

By 1936 the anti-Semitic laws of the Nazi government in Germany had become so restrictive that a return to Germany and a career in my father's business in Lichtenfels seemed highly unlikely. A distant granduncle living in Cleveland, Ohio, was persuaded to apply for an affidavit which would allow me to emigrate to America, should the need arise.

The political climate in Germany went from bad to worse, as far as the Jews were concerned. Affidavit in hand, I now applied for a United States immigration visa. In 1936, knowing that I would have to earn my livelihood in a non-German speaking country, my mother registered me at the École Supérieure de Commerce of Neuchâtel, in the French part of Switzerland. There I was to study English and continue courses in economics and business administration. Since all courses were taught in French, I had no choice but to learn French, almost by default.

Being almost sixteen years old, I did not want to live in a boarding house type of environment, preferring to live with a family instead. My mother found a room with Monsieur Baumann, a retired director of one of Neuchâtel's more prestigious schools, and his unmarried daughter, who took in student boarders. When Mademoiselle Bauman asked my mother what I was and was not allowed to do, my mother simply said, "He can do whatever he likes." She thus placed the entire responsibility for my studies and my life in my own hands — a trust which I deeply appreciated and never violated.

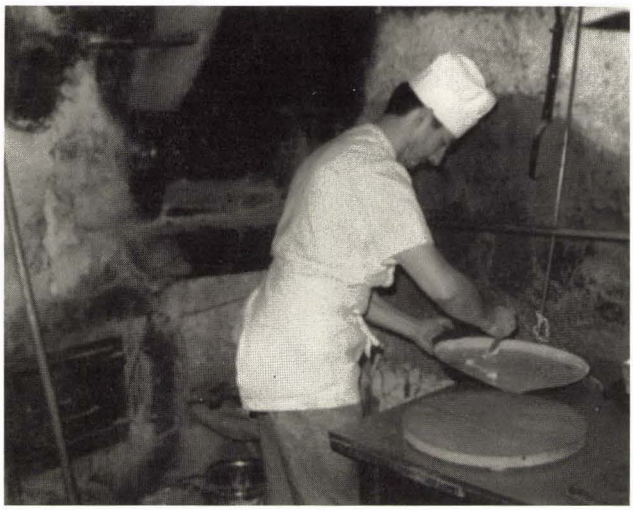


Monsieur Bauman, a father figure.

Living with a family rather than in an institution allowed me to absorb, learn and enjoy much of the culture of this new French environment. Monsieur was a real father figure for me and I represented the son he never had, so we quickly became fast friends.

He helped me hours with my studies in French history, and since I was particularly bad in a subject called "calligraphy," he painstakingly did my home assignments in that subject, for which I invariably got an "A". He also introduced me to a French specialty which had its origin in the Jura mountain range rising abruptly behind the town of Neuchâtel. Six miles north of the town was the medieval village of Valangin, consisting of a cluster of fifteenth- century houses dominated by a huge fortified castle.

Here was located the Pâtisserie Weber, which by appointment prepared and served a dish called *gateau au beurre*. It was something like a very thin pizza, dripping with salt butter and nothing else. This delicacy was consumed with prodigious quantities of white Neuchâtel wine. Most people could manage six slices, but as a sixteen year old I usually managed eight or more. The periodic visits to this village made such a lasting impression on me that to this day, whenever we are in Switzerland, a stop at the Patisserie Weber is *de rigueur*. The Madame Weber presiding over this establishment now is the wife of the grandson of of the Webers who served us during my student days. Over the years the Baumanns too have remained dear and loyal friends of my family.



Preparing the gateau au beurre.

On my urging, my mother persuaded my cousin Gerald's parents to let him join me. Isolated from the political turmoil in Germany and basically unaffected by the Nazi repression of the Jews, those student days in Switzerland can be considered some of the more carefree and happy ones in all my life. Emigrating to the United States seemed like a far away adventure and certainly no concern for worry. Gerald and I were inseparable, frequently joined by Otto Gysler, the son of an Italian cotton broker

Both in Lichtenfels and Juist I managed to form relationships which lasted throughout my life, Otto was the only one from my Swiss student days who remained a friend until he died a few years ago.

After the war we met again. Otto lived in Dallas, Texas, at the time. Though I hadn't seen him in ten years, he now became one of my closest friends. This memoir would be incomplete if I did not include a few pages about Otto since he played an important part in my adult life. Here is his story: Otto was working for an international cotton broker. On the ocean voyage from Europe to America he met Charlotte Lehman, a petite, lovely young girl from Millville, New Jersey, then working as an editor for *Family Circle*, a monthly magazine published by A&P supermarkets. As shipboard romances seem to be more powerful than landlocked ones, they married shortly after the steamer docked.

After Texas, Otto moved to South America and for a while he lived in New York. Finally he ended up having his own successful cotton brokerage firm in Switzerland.

Being entrepreneurs by nature, both of us had a lot in common, though Otto was far more successful in business than I was. For most of his adult life he lived on the slope of the mountains rising sharply behind the fashionable town of Montreux, Switzerland, in a chateau like villa called Le Noyer, so named because of a huge walnut tree which dominated the four acres of his property.

Otto had a penchant to invest in all kinds of risky business ventures which in the last part of his life were his undoing. He owned a vineyard in France, a flour mill in Mazatlan, Mexico, and the Givenchy perfume agency in Hong Kong. In a rash moment, he even bought a decrepit hotel in Zermatt, and a Greek fishing trawler named Astokos whose crew mutinied and deserted ship when they passed the Canary Islands on the way to fish off the coast of Africa.



Otto in the Swiss Army, 1940

At least once a year Otto would stop in Tenafly on his way to buy Mexican wheat for his flour mill. He usually stayed two days to visit his Wall Street banker and during evenings, over numerous bottles of wine which I had saved for Otto to taste, we got slightly drunk and "let our hair down" to talk endlessly about our business and personal problems.

When he sold his cotton business for several million dollars, I implored Otto to put the principal into some conservative investment, so that he and Charlotte would enjoy a carefree, secure retirement in their old age. "With the rest of the money you can buy fishing boats," I told him jocularly. Although he was convinced and promised to do just that, I was told of another financial fiasco on his next visit a year later. When we went over his "finances" during his last visit, I realized that he was almost broke. On this occasion I was very forceful. "For Charlotte's sake," I urged him, "go home and do what we have just discussed," were my parting words. He said, "Claude, this time I definitely will take your advice, I will act as soon as I get home."

A week later, when Charlotte tip toed up to his bedroom with his morning coffee he was dead. He had died in his sleep of a heart attack. Now we all wish such a death for ourselves, though what it does to the family left behind is another story.

Resuming my memoir, back in 1936 Gerald, Otto and I embarked each weekend on bicycle, camping, or hitchhiking trips, exploring most of Switzerland in the process. In contrast to St. Gallen, I enjoyed the freedom of adult life without accountability to anyone. Each month my mother sent me the maxi-

mum amount of money German law permitted to be sent out of the country for foreign education, taking for granted that I would save as much as possible, creating a nest egg which might be needed at some future date.

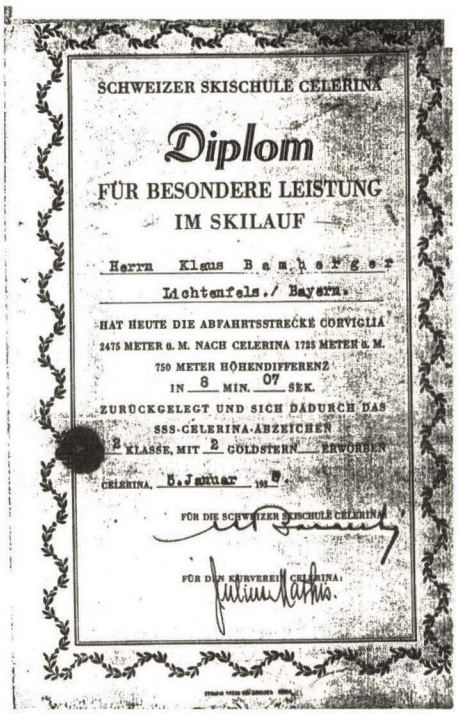
At the time it was obvious to even the most optimistic and pro-German Jews that young Jewish people had no future in Germany, although no one could fathom what terror was awaiting those who did not manage to escape the country. The American consulate in Stuttgart was besieged with petitioners urgently needing papers, visas, all kinds of documents, to escape a clearly life-threatening situation. Far from being sympathetic and helpful, the petty consulate officials, acting on guidelines set by President Roosevelt in the midst of the great depression, seemed to enjoy their power and in fact made things as difficult as possible.

Then for a brief period between late 1937 and 1939, perhaps because of internal pressures brought by religious groups, these guidelines were reversed and European consulates were instructed to facilitate immigration by European Jews threatened by the Nazi regime. Though I didn't know it at the time, I was lucky to obtain my American visa during that very period.

In 1939 President Roosevelt rescinded the more benign guidelines on the urging of his longtime friend, political supporter and campaign contributor, Mr. Breckinridge Long, a rabid anti-Semite. Breckinridge sent Avra M. Warren director of the State Department's Visa Division on a four month trip to all European consulates to impose new rules which made further immigration by Jews, even those with valid documents, virtually impossible and resulted in many deaths. Mr. Long, in fact, became Assistant Secretary of State in 1940, when the Nazis set up their infamous concentration camps designed for the genocide of the European Jewish population.When Warren was later questioned whether Congress was behind these esoteric orders, he said no, but that he was acting on direct orders from the President.

Toward the end of 1937 my visa came through and the American consulate in Stuttgart sent a notice to Lichtenfels that it could be picked up. As a result my mother booked passage on a steamer scheduled to sail from Le Havre on January 10, 1938. Not knowing when or if we would see each other again, and to make my last days in Europe memorable, she had arranged that we meet in St. Moritz in Switzerland, for the Christmas holidays.

I was seventeen years old and an avid skier. The weather was glorious; the skiing was great. On the last day of this vacation, I entered a guest ski race, winning a gold medal. I also got something else! Zooming down the Alpine slopes I lost my hat, and at the finish gate someone said, "You froze your ears." Indeed, when I touched my ears they felt like cardboard. Rubbed with snow, they thawed out, swelled up, and became more than double their size. The consequences of what could happen to me should I injure myself never occurred to me. I was unaware of the orders Roosevelt



SCHWEIZER SKISCHULE CELERINA

Diplom

FÜR BESONDERE LEISTUNG
IM SKILAUF

Herrn Klaus Bamberger
Lichtenfels / Bayern

HAT HEUTE DIE ABFAHRTSSTRECKE CORVIGLIA
2475 METER ü. M. NACH CELERINA 1725 METER ü. M.
750 METER HÖHENDIFFERENZ
IN 8 MIN. 07 SEK.
ZURÜCKGELEGT UND SICH DADURCH DAS
SSS-CELERINA-ABZEICHEN
2 KLASSE, MIT 2 GOLDSTERN ERWORBEN

CELERINA, 5. Januar 19[illegible]

FÜR DIE SCHWEIZER SKISCHULE CELERINA:

FÜR DEN KURVEREIN CELERINA:

Two gold stars and frozen ears.

had given to the various consulates and took it for granted that I could go to United States whenever it pleased me.

On seeing my frozen ears, my mother was horrified. I was scheduled to pick up my visa in Stuttgart the following day. What might they say at the consulate? To keep my hat on would be highly disrespectful. Would they reject me now for some sort of elephantiasis? Who knows? We had a worried parting at the station in St. Moritz as I boarded the train for Stuttgart.

Fortunately my aunt Ilse had a very good relationship with some staff members at the consulate. Posting me downstairs in the entranceway just in case, she went upstairs with my passport and, miracle upon miracle, obtained the much-coveted visa stamp without a problem.

In Le Havre, two days later, with a sense of adventure, eagerly anticipating what America — my new homeland — held in store for me, I boarded the SS *Manhattan* of the United States Line. As the ship slowly pulled away (*below*) and a band somewhere played "Anchors Aweigh," my mother waved from the pier, a lonely figure, getting smaller and smaller as the steamer gained speed carrying me to unknown, distant shores.



Chapter Two

Immigrant Boy

1938 - 1940

Arrival: The First Three Months

A January crossing of the Atlantic is a rough affair. A relatively small steamer, the SS *Manhattan* heaved to and fro, battling high winds and waves, with the result that most passengers were deathly ill. The sumptuous dining room was empty most of the time and the food on the ample buffets remained untouched.

I quickly overcame some initial queasiness and thoroughly enjoyed everything the ocean liner had to offer. Its grandeur was only surpassed by the tumultuous ocean with waves high enough to crash over the lower decks. These decks were criss-crossed with ropes strung by the crew, and were off limits to the passengers.

After six days, the Statue of Liberty came into view and the SS *Manhattan* slipped into its berth at Manhattan's West Forty-ninth Street.

Uncle Gus, whom I had never met and who lived in Cleveland, Ohio, about five hundred miles away, had kindly arranged with some distant relatives to pick me up at the pier and provide a few days' lodging, primarily so I could do some sightseeing in New York. My hosts, Mr. and Mrs. Harris, also distantly related to me, lived on 43 West Twelfth Street in Greenwich Village. They showed me some of the major sights, like the Empire State Building and the famous Rockettes performing in Radio City, but for the most part they permitted me to roam New York at will.

New York City was then rather safe, a very exciting city for a young man of seventeen and I had a thoroughly good time. Coming from a small Bavarian town of only seven thousand inhabitants, I found the sights, sounds, and smells of my future home quite overpowering. I loved America from the minute I set foot on its shores. But all good things must come to an end. After three days in New York, Mrs. Harris took me to Grand Central Station and put me on the New York Central Empire State Express, a luxury train operating between New York and Chicago at what was then a record time of eighteen hours for the 750-mile journey. Cleveland was one of the stops on its route.

Long before my arrival, my uncle had written to my mother that even though he had sponsored me, he could not provide me with a livelihood. "Although I am a partner in a knitting factory which employs more than 120 people, I am in no position to offer Klaus a job," he had written. "The times here are very difficult. Many people are out of work and my partners would not permit employing 'immigrant' labor in preference to good 'American boys'." The fact that the 'good American boys' were agitating to unionize his shop and caused him a lot of headaches I discovered only when he picked me up in mid-January at the Union Terminal Tower in Cleveland.

Although I had never met this uncle, he spotted me easily — a greenhorn — in the hurly-burly crowd eixiting the Empire State Express that morning. After the initial greeting he led me toward a huge black Packard limousine parked at the curbside outside the station and attended by a uniformed black chauffeur. "This is Julian," my

uncle introduced the black man; "he is my wife Pauline's chauffeur. This car belongs to my wife and she has given me permission to use it to pick you up."

On the way from the station to his home, he repeated to me again all that he had written to my mother. He told me that as a junior partner in the business he had little to say and was really poverty stricken. Once again he emphasized that I could not expect him to support me in any way.



Julien with Aunt Pauline's infamous Packard

"My wife has graciously agreed that you can temporarily occupy our guest room. I want you to know that as long as you stay in our home you are a guest," he concluded. I had expected him to say, "Treat our home as your home," or something to that effect, and thought that this was a strange reception. It was only months later that I realized that my uncle was petrified of his wife and that whatever he told me within the first few hours of my arrival was totally unlike him. Being only seventeen years old, I took this news and my new environment in stride. In any event there was nothing to be done.

The trip from the terminal to an upper-middle class suburban district took no more than thirty minutes, and as the car pulled into the driveway of my uncle's home, his wife, Pauline, a woman in her mid-sixties, stood at the side door to greet me.

"So you are Klaus," she said. "That name is too German. We don't like Germans here. I think it would be best that you change your name to Claude." I disliked neither Germans nor my name, but thought it unwise to contradict this forbidding person; I became Claude on the spot and have remained so to this day.

"Now Claude," she continued, "your uncle Gus has been kind enough to sponsor you. You must realize that your uncle has no money. The car, the house and everything you see here belong to me. Your uncle has pressured me to let you use our guest room for the time being, but I want you to remember that you are not ever to come in through the front door. Please always use the servants' door at the side of the house, and wipe your feet well before you enter." This monologue was delivered in a somewhat breathless way, and I deemed it wise not to respond.

Julian, meanwhile, had unloaded my suitcase and handed it to a black lady named Beulah, who turned out to be my aunt's housekeeper and cook. Silently, we all went up the stairs and my suitcase was gingerly deposited on a velvet covered

stool in my aunt's guest room. All this did nothing to make me feel particularly welcome in this new country.

Later, my uncle, who was somewhat embarrassed by his wife's speech, tried to soften the blow by telling me that Pauline sounded worse than she was and it would be in my best interest to try to get on her good side. I didn't know what I could do to get on her good side, as unquestionably I was already out of favor even though I had not uttered a single word.

The weeks that followed, my uncle tried in vain to make me more acceptable to his wife. Considered a black sheep and a burden from the start, I was taken out of moth balls, so to speak, only during our weekly visits to the Euclid Avenue Temple, the social center for Cleveland's Jewish upper crust society. There, after listening to the sermon delivered by the famous Rabbi Brickner, known for exhorting his congregation to be better Jews and better citizens, everyone rejoiced in half an hour of juicy gossip about the latest scandals and doings within this elite group.

Here my uncle would proudly display me, telling everyone who cared to listen that I was his grandnephew from Germany whom, along with the entire family, he had generously sponsored. He also used this opportunity to solicit other members of the congregation to give me a job. Invariably they would answer, "But Gus, you are president of the Bamberger-Reinthal Knitting Mills: you should be able to find some work for him."

Unemployment was high and no one seemed to need an unskilled boy who knew little English. In fact, nothing was to be done with me but to enroll me in the local high school, which was about a mile away from my uncle's house.

Just so that I wouldn't get the wrong idea, my aunt said on the eve of my starting school, "I want you to walk to school every day. Julian takes Gus to work each morning, but I don't want you to ride in my car and make it all dirty. Also don't forget, never" — and she emphatically repeated 'never' — "get it into your head that you should bring any of those classmates of yours to my home. They are not welcome!"

Having come from a comparatively wealthy home where hospitality reigned supreme and the house was always filled with impoverished painters, poets and writers, I nearly felt sorry for the members of my aunt's household. Most of all I pitied my uncle, who was goodnatured and kind, but afraid of Pauline whom he had married soon after his first wife had died some years before. When we were alone he frequently remarked with a sigh, "You should have known my first wife Sarah. She was generous and kind."

Under the circumstances, I was really happy to get out of the house, and despite the cold I didn't mind the mile-long walk to school. My uncle, ensconced in Pauline's luxurious Packard, felt very bad when he passed me, trudging through win-

try slush and rain. After a while he conspired with Julian to pick me up as soon as the car was out of sight of the house. This had to be done with utmost secrecy.

Although my English was limited, I quickly made all kinds of friends in high school, which was largely attended by children of laborers and blue-collar workers of multiple ethnic backgrounds. A large percentage of the students were black. These urban American children were very different from the rural children of our workers and peasants back in Germany. In fact, these were children of a class of people with whom I had no previous contacts.

Interacting with the black students, who fascinated me, I found them somewhat hostile and noncommunicative. I did not realize at the time that in the late thirties there still was a great deal of open and official discrimination against blacks. With the white students, especially the girls, I was extremely popular as I was the only foreigner in the entire high school and therefore a novelty. When on a first date I proudly presented the girl with a bouquet of violets, saying, "I brought you a corset," the news was broadcast all over the school. In contrast to my aunt, who was ashamed of my poor English, and my uncle, who predicted that I would never find employment with my heavy German accent, everyone in school found it exotic and charming. It was only much later that I found out that almost everyone in the United States spoke with some sort of an accent and no one cared.

With my unquenchable youthful spirit I soon forgot the warnings of my aunt Pauline and invited some of my fellow students to visit me. Also, I had removed some of the small pictures which hung in my aunt's guest room and replaced them with framed photos of my family, pictures of my parental home, and scenes from the surrounding German countryside. In fact, the pictures represented my heritage. Coming home from school one afternoon I was met at the side door by my aunt; her expression somber, she greeted me like an arch-criminal. "Come with me," she said brusquely, half pulling me up the stairs. "How dare you pound holes into my wall," she screamed, pointing at the photos I had hung up. "Isn't it enough that I have to put up with you and give you a room? As a reward you now have ruined my walls."

I stammered "But — but — Aunt Pauline — I did not make holes in your wall. I just removed your pictures to hang up these."

"I don't care," she said furiously. "Isn't it enough that your uncle gives you a home? Against my better judgment he gave you this affidavit. If it had been up to me, I would not have tolerated this. We really don't want people like you here."

I felt miserable! I was unwanted, homesick, and unable to cope with this situation. That very evening I decided that I would leave my aunt's house, but I had no clear idea of where to go or what to do. The following morning I confided my predicament to one of my classmates, a sixteen-year-old lad named Eddie Biele.

He frowned a little, then said, "Oh, it's nothing. You can move in with me and my parents. We have a room in the attic which isn't used and you are welcome to live there as long as you like."

A couple of days later I went home with Eddie, who introduced me to his younger brother, Donovan, and his parents, James and Sadie Biele. "I am Jamie," Mr. Biele said, extending a friendly hand, "and this is Sadie, my wife." I was struck by the informality of these American people. How could I call Mrs. Biele 'Sadie'? The thought was incongruous. Eddie had told me that they owned a combination bar and nightclub."They sleep during the day and leave for work at nine in the evening. I hardly ever see them," he confided to me when I expressed concern about disturbing the family routines.

Now Mrs. Biele said, "Welcome Claude, Eddie told me all about you." Eddie said, "Mom, Claude needs a room and I thought that he could take the room in our attic." "That's fine." Mrs. Biele responded. "You can move in anytime you wish."

I replied, "Thank you very much, Mrs. Biele, but I cannot accept this unless you allow me to pay for my room and board."

"That's up to Eddie," she declared. "Whatever arrangements you make with Eddie are OK with me."

When I subsequently raised the question of the cost of room and board with Eddie, he was kind of vague and said, "Oh, it doesn't matter. You don't have to pay anything."

I was amazed at the generosity and informality of these Americans. This would never have happened in Germany or Switzerland. Since I did not feel free to accept this unquestionable hospitality, I decided to pay them four dollars a week. The money was to be paid from a small cache of savings which I had accumulated from my room and board allowance while at school in Switzerland.

When I went "home" that afternoon, no one was in sight. Beulah was rummaging in the basement and Julian was out driving Pauline. Furtively, I climbed the back stairs and packed my few belongings. Before leaving I removed my photos from Aunt Pauline's precious walls and replaced them with her pictures, which I had put into one of the drawers. Then I tiptoed out of the house and vanished from Pauline's "hospitality" forever.

In my new attic home there were no restrictions as to the number of nails I could pound into the wooden walls. I hung up my family pictures, rearranged the few sticks of furniture to suit me a little better, and in a half an hour I felt more at home and at ease in these primitive surroundings than I had ever been in Aunt Pauline's golden cage.

The next morning I called my uncle at his office and told him that I had moved out. "Your aunt worried herself sick last night," he exclaimed accusingly, but I dis-

cerned a note of relief in his voice. "How could you just move out without telling us anything? We were just about to call the police!"

"I didn't feel welcome," I said. "I am sure Aunt Pauline does not miss me." My uncle remained silent. Then, after taking my new address and telephone number, he said, "You know, Claude, I am not master in my own house. Many things are done that I don't agree with, but since I have no money, I can't do what I want. "That's all right, Uncle Gus," I said. "Don't worry about me. I will call you regularly at your office because I really like you very much."

During the following weeks I did call my uncle regularly and on occasion he clandestinely invited me out for a modest lunch, surely without the knowledge of his wife.

Meanwhile I settled into my new surroundings as well as I could. The Biele household seemed strange, but I attributed this to the 'American way' about which I knew as yet very little. Apparently the family operated without a visible head. Eddie and Donovan had a 'business' of their own, distributing a free paper called the *Shopping News,* which had to be dropped at people's doorsteps in the wee hours of the morning. It came out once a week, and Eddie and Donovan had contracted to deliver five hundred papers in the neighborhood, for which they were jointly paid $5.00.

Now Eddie proposed to the publishers that he could expand his route and deliver three hundred addtional papers for which he would receive an additional $3.00. The deal was that I would take on this extra business, for which Eddie offered to pay me $1.50. It was my first exposure to American entrepreneurial acumen. I accepted with alacrity, as the money would go towards financing my room and board.

Delivering the *Shopping News* was quite arduous. The papers were dropped off in the garage behind the house sometime between midnight and 3:00 a.m. Eddie, Donovan and I had to get up at 4:00 a.m., just about the time when Sadie and James rolled in from their nightclub activities, generally more drunk than not. We had to fold up the papers and pack them into huge canvas shoulder bags. Each shouldered one bag and we set off in various directions. Eddie and Donovan covered their routes by bicycle. I, lacking this type of conveyance, just jogged



1938 and The Shopping News

along, hurling a rolled-up paper with great elan into each driveway. The job had to be finished by 7:00 a.m. so that homeowners could get the news of special sales early and thus plan their day. It was my first job in America, and I was thrilled.

Soon after, my uncle called to say that a friend of a friend of his had heard of a very good position as a delivery boy in a drugstore located in a Jewish neighborhood about four miles from where I lived. "You must put on a tie and coat and meet me at my house at l0 a.m. tomorrow," he told me.

Uberstein's Drugstore

At the appointed hour, Uncle Gus, Julian and I drove in Aunt Pauline's precious Packard to Uberstein's drugstore at Mayfield and Coventry roads in Cleveland Heights. Mr. Uberstein was standing out front examining one of his shop windows when we pulled up. As my uncle and I emerged from the cavernous Packard, with the uniformed Julian standing more or less at attention next to the door, Mr. Uberstein walked over to us and said, "May I help you?"

"We are looking for Mr. Uberstein," my uncle replied. "I am Gus Bamberger, from the Bamberger-Reinthal Knitting Mills. I spoke to a Mr. Uberstein yesterday about a job he might have for my refugee grandnephew from Germany," he continued, pointing at me.

There was a moment of silence, during which Mr. Uberstein stared through thick-lensed glasses alternately at me, at my uncle, and at Julian. I am not sure whether he was more impressed by the Packard or by Julian. In any event, he now said, "I am Mr. Uberstein, Mr. Bamberger. I remember speaking to you yesterday." Then he opened the door of the store and asked us to come in.

We sat down at one of the luncheon tables in the center of the store. Mr. Uberstein said, "We need a hardworking young man who can make short-range deliveries on a bicycle. More distant deliveries are made by our driver."

In the late thirties, with supermarkets few and far between, the neighborhood drugstore was a supply center for personal needs. People would call for anything from ice-cream sodas, cigarettes, the daily paper, soft drinks, and even toilet paper to prescription drugs, and expect prompt delivery. Traffic was particularly heavy on rainy, cold, or snowy days, when people stayed at home and huddled around their fireplaces and listened to their favorite soap operas on the radio.

"Mr. Uberstein," I said in my halting English, "I will work very hard. Please give me the job!" Mr. Uberstein nodded; then, considering the matter settled, he said, "Your hours will be Monday through Friday from 6:00 p.m to midnight and Saturday and Sunday from noon to midnight. Your pay will be $8.00 per week. Can I expect you to report to work at noon this Saturday?"

I nodded enthusiastically, thinking I had struck a gold mine. My spirit was not even dampened when later, upon more sober reflection, I realized that the weekly salary of $8.00 for 54 hours' work came to about fifteen cents an hour. In any event, the time spent earning my wage was of secondary importance. I considered the new job a big improvement over the $1.50 per week I was earning with the *Shopping News*.

We got up and shook hands. When we left the store my uncle said, "You know, you are very lucky. There are hundreds of young boys in this country who would be dying to have this job. Now, how are you going to get a bicycle?"

"My mother has sent me several boxes of personal stuff," I replied. "I asked her to send me two bicycles, and they will arrive soon." Then I continued, "I think Eddie or Donovan Biele might lend me a bike." I wasn't worried. I knew my good German bikes would arrive any day, and until then I could surely, for a small fee, rent Donovan's or Eddie's bike.

At that time, Jewish emigrants from Germany were not allowed to take with them any jewelry, art works, money, or anything else having significant marketable value. They were, however, still allowed to take their personal belongings. Before my departure my mother had shipped thirty-six new shirts, eighteen pairs of pajamas, innumerable socks, handkerchiefs, and underthings, along with my favorite books, photo albums, two bicycles, two portable typewriters, table lamps, a coffee table, and any number of small items like pencils, fountain pens, and pads of paper. She wanted to make certain that whatever could be sent from home would not have to be purchased with the few dollars we had been able to smuggle out through Switzerland.

Next I arranged with Donovan to rent his bicycle for the stately sum of a dollar a week. Donovan would have use of his bicycle from 4:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. each day, but not on weekends.

In the Biele household, Sadie went shopping once every two weeks. She brought home quantities of cereal, chocolate, fruit, milk, soft drinks, canned goods and other foods, which she stacked in the refrigerator and on the pantry shelves. The family feasted on this huge supply at the beginning of the two-week period, not thinking ahead. Hence about ten days later, shortly before the next shopping trip, pickings were extremely lean, and during the end of the period we survived on chocolate milk, cereal, sour pickles, and an occasional hot dog if we were lucky. I had never seen such a household, but, not knowing any better, I accepted this as the freewheeling American style. Nobody cooked, nobody planned anything, everybody opened cans or munched and crunched on what could be found until the supplies were exhausted.

Since my job at the drugstore usually kept me until 12:30 a.m. (we had to clean up the soda fountain and the eating area after the store closed at midnight), I did not get enough sleep to report to school at 8:00 in the morning, and delivering the *Shopping News* at 4:00 a.m. was out of question. I gave up the paper route and quit school,

and during the next month I hardly saw the Biele family. I came home at about 1:00 a.m. the Biele parents came home at about 4:00 a.m., Donovan and Eddie went to school at 7:30 a.m. and did not get back home until after I had gone to work. No wonder my relations with Eddie and Donovan became somewhat distant. Finally, I felt that I had worn out my welcome.

In the "rooms for rent" section of the *Aufbau*, the German language newspaper read by all German Jewish immigrants, I found an ad from a Mr. and Mrs. Alexander, who lived not far from the drugstore. They offered room and board with laundry for $7.00 a week. This was ideal, especially since my earnings had turned out to be more than $8.00 a week, because of occasional tips given by some generous persons who got regular deliveries. These came to another $2.00 in a good week.

For all intents and purposes I was now settled, self-supporting, and so proud that I wrote glowing reports to my mother, then still in Germany, affirming that indeed America was a land of unlimited opportunities. In fact, there was no dearth of offers which seemed to indicate that out beyond the drugstore, the streets of America were paved with gold.

For instance, there was a Mr. Shapiro, an enormously fat man about six feet tall. He came regularly to the drugstore, always ordering a chocolate soda with whipped cream and a cherry, costing eleven cents. He was a Jewish lawyer and liked to talk to me. As a refugee from Hitler's Germany, I enjoyed a privileged status in the Jewish neighborhood in which the drugstore was located. The newspapers were full of the terrible things which were happening to the Jewish population there, and this aroused the curiosity of the American Jews.

One day Mr. Shapiro motioned me to sit next to him on one of those rotating counter stools. While waiting for his chocolate soda he told me, in a conspiratorial whisper, that I was probably wasting my time working in that store. He said, "I don't know what you're earning here, Claude; my guess is probably no more than five or ten dollars a day. I have a job for you where you can easily earn fifteen dollars or more a day, depending on how hard you work. Would that interest you?"

There was no need to answer this question. Fifteen dollars a day was better than eight dollars a week. This was too good to be true. Though a bit skeptical, I was nevertheless very enthusiastic and made an appointment to see Mr. Shapiro at his downtown office, to find out more about this job.

The *American Hebrew* And Other Dubious Enterprises

I presented myself at the agreed-upon time. The secretary said, "Mr. Shapiro is expecting you," and ushered me into an imposing-looking office. After being offered a seat I found myself facing Mr. Shapiro across an enormous highly polished walnut desk.

Without a lengthy introduction Mr. Shapiro began. "You are a Jew! I know what is happening to your countrymen in Germany. Thousands of Jews are persecuted under the Hitler regime, yet in this country nobody knows of the suffering of our people." He paused, looking at me intensely to see my reaction. Since I had come from a sheltered environment in Switzerland and knew little or nothing about the persecuted Jews, and since, indeed, I had been raised more like a German citizen than a Jewish boy, my reaction apparently was not satisfactory.

Mr. Shapiro continued: "In this country, too, we have anti-Semitism and we Jews must do everything we can to disseminate our culture and to educate the public, to make it known that we are a good people." I listened patiently, wondering what all this had to do with this wonderful job which would pay me fifteen dollars a day.

"I am a distributor of a magazine called the *American Hebrew*," Mr. Shapiro now said. "This magazine spreads the word about Jewish culture. Many Jews in this country are not familiar with this wonderful publication. What I would like you to do is to sell subscriptions to this magazine and thus spread the word about the Jewish faith. For every subscription you sell, a gentile preacher, a professor, a priest, or some other person in the field of education will get a free subscription."

"Now all you have to do, Claude, is sell two five-year subscriptions a day at fifteen dollars each, and you will receive a commission of 50 percent, which equals fifteen dollars. You can also sell one- and three-year subscriptions for five and ten dollars. Each time you sell one subscription you will get 50 percent of the subscription price. Supposing you now call on thirty people a day, surely you will sell a total of thirty dollars' worth of subscriptions, which would then net you fifteen dollars."

This sounded logical and reasonable. I exclaimed with enthusiasm, "Mr. Shapiro, I don't know what to say. This is wonderful! Of course I will work very hard and see at least twenty to thirty people. I don't know how to thank you for this wonderful opportunity." To myself I thought that possibly thirty dollars' worth of subscriptions could not be sold so easily in a day. But even if I sold only thirty dollars' worth of subscriptions in a whole week, I still would easily double the salary I was earning at the drugstore. However, I did not throw caution to the wind. I decided I would not give up my job at the drugstore, but would first try and see how this subscription business went.

In parting, Mr. Shapiro handed me a little piece of paper. "Your English is not so good," he said, "so I have composed a little sales talk which you should learn by heart."

After reaching home I dutifully unfolded the piece of paper and read the following message:

> I am a Jew! I have suffered the atrocities of the Nazi regime. You in your smug American surroundings do not re-

> alize how much people suffer in Germany and Eastern Europe. Thousands of people are slaughtered while you pursue a life of ease and comfort. I have seen with my very own eyes people dragged to their death. What are you doing to help these victims of Nazism! I am doing my share by selling this wonderful publication, the *American Hebrew*.
>
> It disseminates the word of Judaism, and for each five year subscription you buy, a gentile anti-Semite receives a subscription entirely free of charge. While educating yourself you are also helping to destroy anti-Semitism in the U.S.A. by way of enlightening those who live in the dark.
>
> As a fellow Jew I implore you to please buy a five-year subscription for only $15.00 and at the same time help to combat anti-Semitism in America. What is happening in Germany could happen here as well.

Having neither suffered persecution nor seen any of the atrocities described in my proposed sales talk, I was quite puzzled. However, as a foreigner I felt that Mr. Shapiro knew best, and with great optimism set out to sell the *American Hebrew.*

Mr. Shapiro had given me a starter list of potential customers. (In retrospect I think they would have killed him, had they known.) One of my first calls was on a Mr. Whiteman, owner of a wholesale-grocery chain. His secretary, after announcing my name, was instructed to usher me into his fancy office. With astonished eyes he listened to my sales talk and then said, "That is a lot of hogwash. Who put you on to all this? You seem to be a nice boy! Aren't you related to Mr. Gus Bamberger of the Bamberger-Reinthal Knitting Mills?"

When I nodded yes, he continued, "Well, because of your name I told my secretary to show you in. Gus Bamberger belongs to the same temple as I do, and I thought you must be the grandnephew he told me about. Now, take my advice, young man, this is no way to make money in America. The future is in the West. Go West young man, that is my advice to you. As for buying a subscription to the *American Hebrew*, forget it. Nobody in his right mind will buy a one-year subscription to such a biased rag, let alone a five-year one."

My head swirled with words unknown to me, "hogwash," "rag sheet," what was this guy talking about? I did gather, however, that he was not pleased with my offer, and was not about to buy a subscription. In fact, he was giving me advice to go West, far enough away so I couldn't bother him again.

As I continued my rounds, calling on the people on the list Mr. Shapiro had given me, the results were even more disheartening. Most people refused to see me,

and those who did lectured me severely as to the nerve I had to waste their time and greatly resented the content of my sales talk. Evidently, what I seemed to be saying was anything but grist for the mill of American Jewry.

After spending countless hours pounding the pavement and having worn out the soles of a pair of shoes without finding someone willing to give me an order for even a one-year subscription, I decided it was time to abandon the search for limitless riches.

Mr. Shapiro, to whom I periodically reported my failure in reaching the goals he had set for me, listened sympathetically to my tales of woe, while he sipped his chocolate soda topped with a maraschino cherry. "You are not a very successful salesman," he told me one day, and promised to find me a job for which I was more suited.

I kept pressuring him to come through, and finally, just to get rid of me, he gave me the address of a dry-cleaning firm, saying "You go and see my friend Sid Cohen. He'll have a job for you."

When I went to see Mr. Sid Cohen, he told me that indeed he had a job. He said, "I have a dry-cleaning business here. See this pile of flyers?" I looked and saw a huge pile of printed sheets and surmised that they were called "flyers." If nothing else, my vocabulary was already enriched by another English word. Mr. Cohen continued, "Now, you take these flyers and go from door to door and tell people about our specials. With any new customer you find, you'll get 10 percent commission on the first cleaning order that comes in."

Having had experience with working on a commission basis I replied, "I don't want any percent of anything. All I want is a job which pays me twenty-five cents an hour and I'll do anything you want me to."

Mr. Cohen frowned and then said, "I don't have a job for you, but my driver Aaron has been looking for a jumper. Perhaps he'll hire you."

Jumper! Jumper? What was that, now? Well, I soon found out. After about an hour, Aaron, the driver, pulled in with a ton or more of soiled clothes which he had picked up on his route. Then Mr. Cohen introduced me to Aaron as his new jumper. Aaron said, "Give me a hand here," pointing to the pile of clothes in his half-unloaded van. I lugged the bundles of clothes into the cleaning store and dumped them all in a bin. After this was done Aaron said, "I can pay you ten cents an hour for helping me to make my pickups and deliveries. All you have to do is take in the clean clothes at the various stops and bring out the dirty ones. Your hours will be from 8:00 in the morning to 2:30 in the afternoon, Monday through Friday."

Since the hours did not conflict with those of my drugstore job, I figured I could earn an extra sixty cents a day, five days a week, which translated into three additional dollars. I eagerly accepted the job, and for the next few months I rode around in the rear of Aaron's van, jumping out when it stopped before a house and running in to make a pickup or delivery. While I was doing this, Aaron dozed at the wheel.

Then it was my turn to doze. Sometimes, especially when traffic was heavy, the ride between stops took ten or twelve minutes, during which I promptly fell asleep. Coming home from the drugstore at 1:00, and getting up at 6:30 to report for my other job, I did not get sufficient sleep at night. Perhaps the most useful thing I learned on that job was how to sleep soundly for a few minutes. To this day I still have this skill, and sometimes even fall asleep while waiting for a traffic light to change.

The job with Aaron ended abruptly when I wrecked his van. Aaron's custom was to stop every day at his home for a half-hour lunch break. He lived in an apartment house and parked the truck in the rear of the driveway. When he'd finish his lunch, during which time I usually slept, he'd jump into the van, open the door on the driver's side and look out as he backed into the street.

Well, I was anxious to drive. Being eighteen years old by then, overconfident and exuberant, I was under the illusion that I already knew how. This erroneous confidence was due to the fact that our chauffeur back home in Germany had allowed me, on occasion, to secretly drive my father's Mercedes around the back of our house and out to the front, always under his strictest supervision.

Now I wanted to show off my skill and said to Aaron one day, "Leave me your keys. I will back out the van and it will then be in front of your house, ready to go."

Aaron asked me where I had learned how to drive, and believed me when I said that I had learned from our chauffeur in Germany. I don't know what went on in Aaron's head; possibly he thought that maybe later on he could let me handle his whole delivery route at ten cents an hour while he slept. In any event, he handed me the keys, admonished me to be careful, and said that it would be OK.

While he was having lunch I started the ignition, put the transmission in reverse, and having observed Aaron open the door on the driver's side and look out as he backed down the driveway, I proceeded to do the same. What I failed to see, however, was the corner of the building along the driveway; I opened the door all the way to look backward, and as I peered intently down the driveway, there was suddenly a thunderous crash, and the next thing I saw was the door lying in front of the van.

Aaron heard the crash and came rushing out, cursing. "What the hell do you think you're doing?," he yelled. "I thought you knew how to drive, but look what you did to my door!" he exclaimed in anguish. I stood by, totally shaken. "I'll pay, I'll pay for the damage," I stammered, feeling like a total fraud.

"How do you expect to pay at your miserable rate of ten cents an hour?" Aaron screamed "Get out of my sight. You're fired!" Then he picked up the damaged door, threw it into the back of his van, and drove away, doorless, leaving a forlorn, bewildered Klaus standing in his driveway.

A few days after I had recovered from the car-door debacle, I was introduced to a refugee like myself whose name was Bauernfreund, which would translate as "Farmer's Friend." He told me that he was a chemist and earned his living by mak-

ing a syrup in his basement from imported Czechoslovakian raspberries. "You know," he told me in a confidential whisper, "I make *Himbeersaft* — raspberry syrup — which you find in every household in Germany, but is virtually unknown here."

In my new environment, where artificial sugary pineapple and cherry syrups reigned supreme, I missed the wonderful, naturally sweet raspberry syrup, made from berries which I had helped to pick in our garden in Germany. Every year, Kunni, our cook, put up dozens of bottles of this wonderful syrup. It was used for all kinds of desserts, had medicinal value for curing colds, and made a most refreshing summer drink when mixed with cold water and a dash of lemon juice. It is now well known and sold in this country, especially in ski resorts, as *Skiwasser.*

So when Mr. Bauernfreund suggested that I might want to sell it, I was enthusiastic. The product seemed to me a lot more practical and appealing than the *American Hebrew*. Mr. Bauernfreund then told me that he also made shampoo, toothpaste, a window cleaner, and a sort of all-purpose furniture and floor cleaner. All were produced clandestinely, and doubtless illegally, in his basement.

"This makes an attractive line," he said convincingly. "You should have no problem selling enough in a few hours to make five or ten dollars."

The proposition appealed to my entrepreneurial spirit. My official working hours in the drugstore were still 6:00 p.m. to midnight on weekdays, giving me some time in the late morning and early afternoon to devote to what I hoped would be more lucrative endeavors.

Equipped with a small suitcase, I set out optimistically to flood my neighborhood with Mr. Bauernfreund's treasures.

As a start, I picked a medium-sized apartment building occupied by middle-class people. After ringing a number of bells and knocking on doors without getting a response, I finally heard some shuffling steps behind the door of apartment 12B. The door opened a crack of four inches, being held by a thin safety chain. In those days people still felt protected by a flimsy chain, which could be broken with a good kick on the door, and still had enough faith in human decency to listen patiently to what a caller had to say.

"Good morning," I said, "I am selling window cleaner, wood cleaner, raspberry syrup, and shampoo."

"What did you say?" the lady asked suspiciously, with only half her face and one eye visible.

"Raspberry syrup," I repeated, hoping that my star attraction would make an impression.

The lady exclaimed, "I never heard of raspberry soap, and my family uses only Pepsodent toothpaste".

I answered, "It is not raspberry soap, it is raspberry syrup made from imported Czechoslovakian raspberries. The syrup is healthy and much better than soda. It can

be diluted in water for a refreshing drink, or used in hot tea to cure colds. It is delicious when poured over ice cream or pancakes. I have a spoon here, why don't you try it?" This spiel was delivered breathlessly lest the lady slam the door shut.

Instead, the lady said hastily, "No, no, I have my own spoon. Wait a second".

The shuffling of feet was heard once more, and a few seconds later a spoon emerged from the allowed crack.

I carefully poured a thimbleful of syrup into the spoon, and after tasting it the lady said, "Mmm, this is really good. How much is a bottle?" I replied, "Oh, the large size is two fifty-five, which is the best buy because it has a lot of syrup."

"My Lord," the lady exclaimed. "Two fifty-five for syrup! That's outrageous. What is it you said about toothpaste?"

"Well, the toothpaste comes in a plain tube. It's made from calcium with a little mint flavor, just like the Pepsodent you buy at the drugstore. But my toothpaste costs only 10 percent as much, because with Pepsodent 90 percent of the price goes for advertising."

"I don't know about that," the lady said; "we don't like things in plain tubes. How do we know what's in that stuff? I would really like to buy something to help you out. What about the window cleaner?"

"It's the same story," I replied. "Our eight-ounce bottle of window cleaner, consisting of a little water with ammonia and some coloring, sells for ten cents. When you buy the same size bottle of Windex you pay thirty-three cents and they charge you tax."

"Then I'll take a bottle of Windex for ten cents," said the lady and again disappeared, to get her money. Upon conclusion of the transaction she said that she was glad to meet me and wished me good luck.

While encouraged by such quick results, I soon found that selling window cleaner, wood cleaner, raspberry syrup, and shampoo was *not* much better than selling the *American Hebrew*. Considering the hours I had to spend to sell a dollar's worth of merchandise, I concluded that this was just as bad as any of my previous jobs. But before giving up, and at the suggestion of Mr. Farmerfriend — as Mr. Bauernfreund had now become known — I concentrated on trying to sell raspberry syrup to wealthy people. "At least they have traveled and know what this is," Mr. Farmerfriend said convincingly.

I had a telephone installed in my room for a monthly charge of $1.10, pasted my name and phone number on a few dozen bottles of raspberry syrup in the hope of getting re-orders, and set out by bicycle to explore Shaker Heights, one of Cleveland's wealthier Jewish neighborhoods.

There, doors were usually opened by uniformed black servants, and occasionally, upon mentioning my name, I was admitted, not on the merits of what I had to say, but because "Bamberger" was a respected name in Cleveland's Jewish society.

With time I did land some orders, not for cases of twelve large bottles, but for three or six bottles of the smallest, cheapest size. Despite writing my phone number on each bottle, the anticipated re-orders never came. My telephone never rang, and soon my expenses outstripped the profits. With the exception of a bonus case of precious raspberry syrup for myself, which incidentally lasted a good many years, this venture too had to be written off as an unprofitable experience.

By now I had held the job in the drugstore for about six months. I had learned the ropes, and Mr. Uberstein had no end of praise for my work. He told me that he had never had such an intelligent, industrious delivery boy and stockroom clerk. Soon my responsibilities were increased, and I was permitted to work on an hourly basis, as many hours as I wished. By luck Congress had passed a new law by that time setting a minimum wage of twenty-five cents an hour. This new law meant a substantial increase for me, particularly since I was now working more than fifty-five hours a week.

In addition to making deliveries and keeping things orderly in the stockroom, which was in an incredibly filthy basement, my duties now included sorting used soda bottles for return to the distributor, restocking the shelves in the store, and reporting any items which needed to be reordered. The job I liked the most was bundling the unsold magazines, which had to be returned to the publisher for credit. I was especially fascinated by an illustrated magazine called *Horror Funnies*, which was not funny at all but full of lewd sexual encounters which captured my youthful mind. Young virgins were abducted by monstrous, lecherous men who subjected them to all kinds of tortures and incredibly acrobatic sexual acts. No matter, this was a *lot* more interesting than the *American Hebrew*. Often I took some of the more exotic issues home with me to devour in the wee hours of the morning.

Working seven days a week and having no free time at all, I was living in a world of sexual fantasies. A number of "regulars," young men aged eighteen to twenty-five who were jobless or students or just plain loafers, hung around the street corner outside the store. They told me about their sexual exploits and especially bragged about their visits to various brothels and the wonderful things they encountered there. One of their games appeared to be like Russian roulette except that the outcome was not to be shot but to go to bed with the woman in question.

Their talk always centered around women and exploits with women. I was on the one hand completely turned off by such talk, but I also secretly wished I could participate in these adventures. Every time these drugstore cowboys talked about the places they frequented and offered to take me along, I vigorously declined. Then, having a vague idea of the location of these places of ill repute, I made several forays in their direction during my time off on weekday afternoons, all ending in total failure. More often then not I knocked at some apartment door and was rudely rebuked when I stammered my mission, obviously having picked the wrong building,

the wrong address, and above all the wrong person. It was most embarassing! I felt I had a split personality, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

The dark side of me fantasized about women who could be bought and with whom one could do as one wished, while the more puritanical side vigorously rejected anything of the sort. Being very immature, idealistic, and young, I was still imbued with the idea of pure love and courtship. I wanted to believe that the woman on whom I would bestow my first kiss was the one I would marry.

Fantasies notwithstanding, I still had to earn a living, and work in the drugstore continued day by day. When deliveries were slack and the soda fountain busy, I was allowed to help out there by washing dishes and, on occasion, even become a temporary soda jerk, preparing sodas and sundaes. The latter involved scooping colored balls of ice cream into tall glasses, pouring flavored syrup over them, sprinkling the concoction with crushed nuts, topping everything with a mountain of whipped cream, and gallantly plopping a red maraschino cherry on the utmost tip.

The customers were very demanding, and if in the rush the wrong amount of some ingredient was used they would reject the order. I loved rejections because the components could not be put back where they had come from, and would instead end up in the stomach of one of the helpers.

Because of my overdose of these sweets during that period, I lost all taste for ice cream. For years afterward I was unable even to look at, let alone eat, any ice-cream concoction. I was also leery of ordering sundaes or sodas in my post-drugstore days, because of my insider's knowledge of the conditions under which these delights were prepared.

As perspicacious gourmets know, one never goes uninvited behind the scenes in a food-serving establishment. The horrors one might discover there could forever ruin one's appetite. One of my duties in the basement was to watch over a boiling cauldron of commercial chocolate fudge poured from huge tin cans. The fountain manager added powdered milk and some chemicals to this brownish bubbling mass to produce the chocolate syrup used for sundaes and sodas.

What appeared to be an unscheduled but unavoidable pièce de résistance was an army of cockroaches. They clung to the pipes overhead, lost their grip because of the hot fumes from the boiling inferno below, and drowned in the chocolate syrup. These creatures originated from a chop suey restaurant next door. Despite Uberstein's frequent complaints to Mr. Chung, the owner of the restaurant, nothing was done to eliminate them. Perhaps Mr. Chung did not know what Mr. Uberstein was talking about.

I did my very best to fish out the cockroaches before bottling the syrup for storage in the huge walk-in refrigerator, but there was always the danger that those I overlooked would clog the fountain pumps upstairs. Then Tim, the fountain man, would hammer away at the clogged pumps and curse under his breath. "To hell," he would scream, "that must be one of those damn cockroaches again." On rare occa-

sions one of the specimens would even end up in a soda or sundae. When that happened, only Mr. Uberstein himself could soothe the wrath of the customer.

An irresistible attraction at the drugstore was an Irish girl named Kathleen, an extremely pretty waitress wearing a pink uniform. I thought myself madly in love with her. Alas, she paid me scant attention as a suitor, but treated me as a confidant, telling me about the problems she had with her numerous boyfriends.

Agnes, the waitress on Kathy's day off, was a less attractive, middle-aged woman. I never got to know her well, as she got fired soon after my arrival — when her dentures dislodged from her mouth as she laughed at a customer's joke and landed on top of the maraschino cherry. Knowing that the drugstore job had no future, I made sure that the regular clients on my delivery route knew that I was in the market for a better job. The clients as a whole were very kind; I was known to them as "the German refugee boy," and being for the most part Jewish they empathized with my condition.

One way to reach the heart of prospective employers was through their teenaged daughters, who frequently opened the door to accept the orders I delivered. Mostly, they were attracted to my foreignness, my broken English and funny accent.

In particular there was Shirley, about fifteen years old, the daughter of a manufacturer of men's hats. She was rather pretty. I liked her, and I knew she had taken a great liking to me. More often than not, when I was making a delivery, she asked me to come in and spend a few minutes talking to her parents.

The parents were interested in my "story" and wanted to know all about the Jews and Germany. I was not exactly an expert on the question, but thanks to my association with Mr. Shapiro and the *American Hebrew* I had learned a few things and I could relate some horror stories which plucked the heartstrings of this Jewish family of Eastern European origin.

Solemnly, I told them that Jews could not leave Germany at will, but might be forcibly deported to some sort of work camp in the east. While the parents shuddered, imagining what was happening, their daughter — who had not lis-



Shirley Burger with brother, Milford, 53 years later.

tened to my words but had gazed rapturously at me while absorbing my funny accent — would suddenly screech, "Daddy, isn't he cute!!!!!" A pained silence normally followed, the spell was broken and I would take my leave.

Meanwhile, I heard from my uncle Gus of the possibility that I could be apprenticed in a plumbing-fixture factory, owned by a good friend of his. I went by bicycle to the Sterling Brass Factory on the south side of Cleveland, a distance of seven or eight miles, and applied for the job. Mr. Weiss, the owner, told me that he could offer me a job paying twelve dollars a week, but he could not promise that the job had a future.

I accepted the job, and told Mr. Uberstein that henceforth I could work only on weekends. From then on, Monday through Friday, I spent eight interminable hours a day polishing brass faucets which came from the assembly line, wrapping them and putting them into cartons, six to a box.

My new associates were an assortment of anti-Semitic Ukrainians, Poles and other non-Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. Seeing that I was different, that I did not come from a blue-collar background, they deeply resented my presence from the start and possibly considered me a spy for the management.

Being ambitious and wanting to please, I began working as soon as I arrived, while the others stood around waiting for the whistle to blow. In the afternoon, fifteen minutes before the closing horn sounded, everyone started washing up, while I finished wrapping the few remaining faucets. My ambitiousness was the very antithesis of unionism in America, which was gaining an ever-increasing momentum during that period.

I stuck with this job for a year, until the fall of 1940. At one point I was taught to use a drill press; I had to lower the drill to put the threads into the stem of the unfinished faucet. The faucets came from the assembly line, hour after hour, in a never-ending stream, and I sat there drilling one thread after another, in exasperating monotony.

I had a lot of trouble keeping awake, and not long after I was transferred to that job, I drilled a thread into my thumb instead of a faucet. The result was a small loss of blood. I fainted and woke up attended by the factory nurse. I was told to go home and rest, and soon a message arrived that I was no longer to report to work.

Although I could always fall back on the drugstore job, I now went to my friend Shirley and, cute or not, asked her pointblank to talk her father into giving me a job in the hat business. I also felt I needed some leisure time and wanted to improve my English by taking night classes at Cleveland College.

Shirley's father, a very kind man, happened to be very dissatisfied with one of his employees, an overbearing person named Ethel, whose job was to set out the trimmings — feathers, bands, cords, buttons and the like — to be sewn on the hats.

The actual sewing was done by a rough-looking bunch of women who belonged to the hat trimmers' union. Being paid by the piece, they were speed maniacs, and they were forever screaming at Ethel, accusing her of favoritism, insisting that she had given someone particularly difficult work which slowed her down, while favoring someone else with easier work.

Ethel was not very neat, and although the instructions were spelled out in code on the job order, she often gave out the wrong trimmings, so the hats had to be ripped apart and redone. Then there were fights about who was wrong, and the persistent climate of chaos and frenzy drove poor, gentle Mr. Burger up the wall. Shirley finally convinced her father that if I replaced Ethel, I might put some order into his union shop. This I did with moderate success, at a wage of twelve dollars a week. My hours were from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. allowing evenings for studies. If I chose, I could still work on weekends in Uberstein's drugstore.

Chapter Three

New Roots

1940 - 1942

Skiing In America In 1940

By now I was craving to find some friends and have a bit of a social life. Since I had a full-time job at the hat factory, only nostalgia prevented me from quitting the drugstore altogether. I arranged with Mr. Uberstein to work only three weekends a month and take one weekend off. Mr. Uberstein had grown so fond of me and liked my work so much that he agreed I could work whatever hours I chose.

For a social life I meant to find some adventurous souls who would join me in mountain climbing, hiking, and skiing, the things I most liked to do. However, Ohio is flat as a pancake, so budding alpinists, if there were any, had to go farther afield for their favorite activity.

I did indeed soon discover a small group of unusual people who were interested in skiing, an activity virtually unknown in Ohio in those years. Even though the goal of their ambitions lay beyond Cleveland's horizon, there was no lack of enthusiasm. Their leader was Frank Hockett, who ran the sporting-goods department of Halle's, the city's leading department store. We met every four to six weeks in a local German beer cellar; with unlimited quantities of beer, sausages, and accordion music, this place was as close to the Alpine meadows as one could get in downtown Cleveland.

In the winter of 1940 Frank Hockett actually organized a "snowtrain" which was to take us to the nearest available ski slopes in a matter of four hours. The destination was Westfield, in the extreme western corner of New York State, better known as the home of Welch's grape juice than as a winter resort.

The "snowtrain," filled with winter sports enthusiasts, consisted of a car which was hooked onto the Empire State Express on its run between Chicago and New York City. The car was uncoupled when the train made an unscheduled stop at Westfield.

The participants of this excursion were odd-looking individuals. In the absence of specially designed clothes for winter sports, they wore the most bizarre outdoor clothing imaginable. There were people sporting Daniel Boone hats, all kinds of surplus army jackets, government issue sweaters, and rubber galoshes pinch-hitting as ski boots. Many brought Flexible Flyer sleds; a few even had toboggans, a relative novelty at the time. A tiny minority, the nucleus of the Cleveland Ski Club, clutched eight-foot-long wooden skis imported from Scandinavia, having one large toe strap as a binding.

The ski developments which today cover mountainsides throughout the United States, and which resemble a kind of Disneyland, had not yet come. Gone now is the solitude, beauty, and quiet which were the goal of the outdoor enthusiast and nature lover in the winters of the early forties. Today skiers, dressed in the most colorful Gore-Tex outfits, complete with chemical-soaked foot and hand warmers, jostle in endless lift lines as they wait to ski on machine-made

snow. Loudspeakers blare Austrian polkas and waltzes between ski school announcements. The one-strap toe binding has been replaced by complex step-in release bindings costing five hundred dollars or more, and ski slope owners and equipment manufacturers must deal with legal liabilities.



The Cleveland Ski Club, 1939. A motley group.

The one-strap bindings of the Scandinavian skis were simple, with nothing to adjust; as the only one in the crowd whose skis had the more complex cable bindings, I was easily the center of attraction. Garbed in the "latest" skiwear from Switzerland — gabardine knickers, waterproof ski jacket, and real ski boots — I was surrounded by curious onlookers when, soon after the departure from Cleveland, I took my skis down from the luggage rack and started to mount my sealskins. People had never seen skis with actual bindings, let alone sealskins.

In Europe, before the advent of chair lifts and cable cars, skins were placed on skis to provide traction as the skier climbed up the mountain. People watching me putting on those skins wanted to know whether they were used to "slow you down," since, as it developed later, no one knew how to stop once headed downhill.

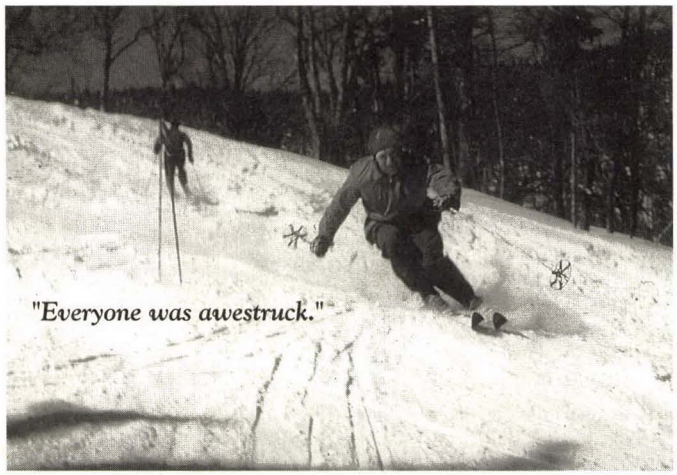
When the train reached Westfield I looked around in great bewilderment. There were no mountains in sight, only undulating vineyards and tree-covered hillocks. The leader of our group assured me that this was not our ultimate destination and that a chartered bus would take us to the ski slopes.

Indeed, a yellow school bus waited near the Westfield station and after a twenty-minute ride winding through vineyards, it stopped. I asked, "Why do we stop here?" To my amazement it turned out that we had arrived at our destination — the golf course of the Westfield Country Club, with an elevation of about 250 feet! It was a far cry from the Alpine meadows I had anticipated, but it was better than nothing.

I realized immediately that my sealskins were totally out of place. The crowd left the bus with hearty shouts and started carrying their sleds and other winter sports equipment up the nearest hill which was covered with a few inches of snow. As soon as the "summit" was reached, everyone prepared for the downhill run. Skiers slid their feet into the single strap mounted on each ski — indeed a true forerunner of the step-in binding — while I, the sole exception, had to

fiddle with the cables and toe-iron adjustments. Sliding wildly down the hill, my fellow skiers would simply jump out of the bindings and hurl themselves to the ground when they wanted to stop, while their skis kept going.

Everybody was awestruck when I started down, stopping myself with a snowplow, or doing an elegant telemark turn. To the great amusement of the sled-riding onlookers, my skiing companions met with disaster when they tried to imitate me.



"Everyone was awestruck."

Soon after this first trip, this small group of skiers unofficially appointed me their "pro" and Frank Hockett promised them he would persuade the management of his department store to import Scandinavian skis with bindings like mine. Thus skiing in Ohio started to take a serious turn.

Before the winter ended, our group discovered the Allegany State Park, some seventy-five miles southeast of Westfield. The slope here, maybe twice as long as the Westfield hill, was equipped with a rope tow run with a motor salvaged from a Model T Ford.

The day of mechanized uphill transportation had arrived! An added attraction was a network of hiking trails which some of us used for cross- country skiing. Given the nature of our bindings, the same equipment could be used for both types of skiing.

A New Year's Eve To Be Remembered

New Year's Eve, 1940. A fateful night when I met the first of many nemeses — the result of my unquenchable optimism.

Instead of the usual New Year's Eve bash with paper hats, champagne and whistles, I had the idea of a small cross-country hike. The ground in Allegany State Park had only a dusting of snow, so it was quite suitable for such an expedition. Being by nature persuasive, I talked a motley crew of the most unlikely outdoor people to join me in my venture, which was supposed to be a trek of four miles and would include a midnight cookout on the way.

A forest ranger kindly agreed to take us by pickup truck the four miles to the head of the trail. After wishing us a hearty Happy New Year, he turned his truck around and its taillights soon disappeared.

Shivering forlornly in the cold darkness and left to their own devices, some of our group of twelve started literally to get cold feet. The temperature hovered around thirty degrees and only a few had adequate clothing. I announced cheerfully that everyone would warm up as soon as we got going. Then I found the trail, and we left the road and went into the woods.

All went well at first, but after a couple of hours, some of the people, especially the women who were not in condition, started to complain that the hike was taking too long. By then it was just about midnight, so we stopped, I made a fire and cooked hot dogs and marshmallows, and we all shouted New Year's wishes at each other.



The beginning of a fateful journey.

The frozen ground, partly covered with snow, ice-coated roots and stones, made progress slow and laborious. By 3 a.m., three hours into 1941, the complaints of my little group were mounting. "You said it would only take two hours," somebody said, and then came a chorus, "We've had it, we want to go home!" Where was home?, I wondered. The lights of the park administration building should have appeared hours ago, but instead there was only darkness, broken occasionally by the moon peeping out from behind the clouds.

Another hour went by; then in the distant valley some lights appeared. The trouble was that they were in the wrong place — on the right — when I knew the park headquarters was on the left. By now some of the women in the group were complaining of frostbite, as their feet were soaked through from the wet snow. We held a quick council and decided to abandon the trail and head for the lights in the valley.

The gray light of a damp wintry dawn replaced the darkness of that New Year's night by the time we finally reached the valley. To my horror I discovered that the broad Allegheny river separated our group from the scattered houses whose lights we had spotted. I realized immediately that we were now near Salamanca, separated by a mountainous ridge from Allegheny State Park and many miles from where we were supposed to be.

After trudging another hour or so along some railroad tracks which paralleled the river, we finally came to a bridge which led to town and the safety of the

old Salamanca Hotel. I called the park headquarters at once, and learned that the rangers were organizing a search party, since we had not returned. They promised to send a pickup truck to fetch us. Meanwhile, the sympathetic desk clerk built a fire in the hotel lobby's fireplace, provided blankets for our frozen group, and served us hot chocolate and doughnuts. It was indeed a somewhat dampened but nevertheless happy New Year, since everybody was grateful to be alive and sitting in front of a warm fire. With the exception of some minor frostbite on fingers and toes, all members of the group had survived unscathed.

I was never allowed to forget this escapade. For years afterward members of the Cleveland Ski Club retold this story, with many embellishments, and all of my proposed excursions were met with great skepticism.

Boys And Girls Sleep Together

For the next two winters the rapidly expanding group of ski enthusiasts went to Allegheny State Park almost every weekend. With the one lonely hill as a goal, we drove six to seven hours over the tortuous two-lane ice- and snow-covered highways snaking through the Allegheny Mountains. Car pools were organized so that those without cars could get to this winter paradise. Inevitably, strong friendships were formed during these long drives. Often townfolk of the small hamlets through which we drove turned out just to watch those cars with skis on top going by. If a car having skis on top stopped by the roadside, other skiers would automatically stop to offer help. Skiers were a clannish group, and special, in those days!

In the absence of ski lodges, motels, or any accommodation other than the common station hotels which were the refuge for traveling salesmen in small American towns, the skiers simply lodged with local folks who supplemented their income by renting out their extra bedrooms. There was no official registry, and the lady of the house didn't care how many people slept in each room or who slept with whom. A night's lodging cost $1.50 per person, and more often than not the landlady supplied fabulous home-cooked meals, with mountains of food, for another seventy-five cents.

Within the ski club, I had become part of a small group of friends. In 1940 rural Ohio there were few cars on the roads, and we started to make bicycle trips, a hitherto unknown recreational activity. Up to then bicycles had been only for kids. Ohio's flat countryside and uncrowded two-lane roads were wonderful for cycling, and our activity soon attracted more and more people. Indeed, the first adult bicycle club in Ohio was formed a short time later.

I was very popular with my friends, always coming up with new and unheard-of ideas. On one occasion, to replace hamburgers and hot dogs on a cookout, I introduced a Swiss cheese dish, fondue, made of melted cheese and wine,

and eaten with cubes of crusty bread. Nobody really liked it, but everyone ate with gusto because it was foreign and strange.

Not satisfied with Sunday excursions to the outskirts of Cleveland, we soon expanded our horizon, cycling to every corner of the state of Ohio. In the end we even went across its borders into Pennsylvania and Indiana.

Nights were sometimes spent in one of the American Youth Hostels, then another novelty. This was a facility where young people of both sexes could safely spend an inexpensive night costing about twenty-five cents. It was usually a barn fitted out with bunks in a farmer's backyard. However, more often than not we simply pitched a tent in some meadow or wood near a brook, and cooked supper over an open fire. The days of Ticketron reservations for campsites, and signs saying "No" to everything from trespassing to pets, fires and swimming, were as remote as the idea that people would someday actually walk on the moon.

At that time, the idea of young men and women sleeping together in tents or in unsupervised youth hostels was totally unacceptable, especially to the parents of the young girls who were persuaded to join us on those long weekend adventures. In the parochial, conventional neighborhoods of suburban Cleveland, such things simply were not done. To the parents of some of my friends, I must have seemed to be the devil incarnate.

Campsite at dawn.



Little did anyone suspect what would happen with the sexual liberation of the sixties, not to mention the seventies and eighties. Today's parents, in our liberated, drug-infested world, would be only too happy to see their offspring involved in the type of innocent camping we practiced in the early forties.

Outstanding among the "regulars" who were game for everything were Earl Rosenblum, my first real American friend, as well as Bill Green and Betty Meyers, then still unmarried. After the war, they were among the first people in the United States to organize commercial ski and bicycle trips all over the world. In their seventies now, they are still active and recently participated in a bicycle marathon clear across Australia.

Until late 1941, I and my free-wheeling friends had the time of our lives. Then, literally, a bomb shattered those innocent days. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and involved the United States in World War II. A wonderful, carefree time came to a sudden halt.



At left, Earl Rosenblum; below, Bill and Betty Green, 1940



World War II

Everyone in our group was anxious to participate in one way or another to rid the world of Hitler, his Nazi cohorts, and their imperialist Japanese friends. Some of us used our skills in war industry, helping to develop new aircraft designs, chemicals, and weaponry. Others, who lacked those skills, volunteered for one or another of the armed services. Quite a few members of the Cleveland Ski Club, which had grown from twenty-five charter members to eighty-five or more, volunteered for the newly formed Eighty-sixth Mountain Infantry, with headquarters in Camp Hale, near Leadville, Colorado.

Thanks to my knowledge of skiing and of European languages, I was among the first to be accepted by this elite corps. After my induction in February 1942, I left Cleveland, touched by the farewell embraces and tears of the friends whom I had grown to love over the last couple of years. A new phase in my personal history was to begin.

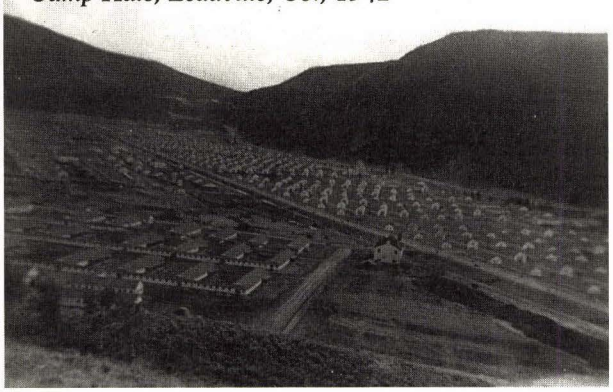
The draft board provided me with a railroad ticket to Denver — Pullman, of course — along with meal tickets to be used during the two-day journey. The U.S. Army did things in style at the time. Unaccustomed to first class luxury courtesy of Uncle Sam, I rolled across the United States. From the comfort of the dome car or seated in the dining car at a table covered with a white damask cloth and what looked like heavy sterling silverware, I admired the wintry countryside as I rolled through the immense heartland of the United States. Today, whether one flies over the Atlantic Ocean, the Pacific, or across the United States, the scenery of world is the same. Only when travelling by car, bus or train can a person visualize the grandeur of our country. In early 1942, I, Uberstein's

star delivery boy, had to pinch myself to make sure all this was not just a dream. Life was a wonderful adventure at that moment.

At Denver, I changed to the Rio Grande Railway. For nine hours my train wound laboriously through miles and miles of Rocky Mountain valleys and gorges. The scenery, awe-inspiring and magnificent, was unlike anything I had ever seen in Europe. Red granite walls rose to the sky on one side of the narrow-gauge railroad tracks, while turbulent mountain streams rushed downward on the other. Finally the train came to a halt on a slope high above a valley. Looking down, I saw hundreds and hundreds of white barracks; we had arrived at Camp Hale.

After settling in, the only relief from the dreaded army routine was skiing on weekends. Each of us, for the purpose of possible mountain warfare, had been issued a pair of seven-and-a-half-foot white wooden skis with cable bindings, bulky ski boots, warm parkas, and other ski clothes unknown in civilian life at the time.

Camp Hale, Leadville, Co., 1942



Usually on weekends when off duty, we rushed to a place called Cooper Hill, five or six miles from the camp. The army magnanimously provided a shuttle service in the form of open, half-ton trucks.

In contrast to the socket-wrenching torture of a slippery rope tow, to which I was accustomed, we had the relative comfort of an army T-bar ski lift, a mechanical device which pulled the skier from the back. The skiing was different as well. Gliding downhill, mostly on untracked, very light, fluffy powder snow, was even better than what I remembered from the Swiss Alps. It was superb! Finally, I was among people who actually knew how to ski, had proper equipment, and could make turns and even stop at will.

GI Claude, Ski Trooper, 1942



It was not by coincidence that half the members of the Cleveland Ski Club had found their way to Camp Hale. Instead of being concerned with a lethal war fought in the world else-

where, we had an immensely good time and enjoyed the free skiing provided by Uncle Sam.

One weekend some of us went to a place called Aspen about fifty miles west of Camp Hale. Someone had said that the slopes there were even better than Cooper Hill. Driving to Aspen we were treated once again to mountain scenery not comparable to anything I had seen in my life. Arriving there we found a town with some fifty houses and shacks in various states of disrepair. Most of the houses were abandoned and the roofs caved in. I was discovering something commonly known as a ghost town, a phenomenon which didn't exist on the European continent. The only sturdy structure in this abandoned hamlet was a decrepit-looking gray brick building sporting a peeling sign with the legend 'Hotel Jerome'.

We checked into this dubious-looking establishment and after a short rest went down to the bar, which was off of the lobby. It was filled with an odd assortment of characters- all kinds of mountain people, trappers, hunters, mining engineers, and a sprinkling of nondescript bohemian-looking types, forebears of the ski bums and hippies of future generations. The charge for the night was a modest eight dollars for a double room.

The hotel had been built in 1889, at the height of the silver boom, and was then the leading hotel of the town. The room charge at that time was thirty dollars a night, polished spittoons were everywhere, and occasionally someone would ride a horse, hoofs clattering, onto the polished marble floors of the gigantic lobby.

We mingled easily with the crowd and soon were approached by a wiry-looking Italian who introduced himself as Mike Magnifico, the local bootmaker and real-estate agent. Mike said that he was a skier and offered to be our guide on the mountain.

The next day was gorgeous, with a blue sky and plenty of snow. I suggested that we put on our GI sealskins and climb to the top of Ajax, better known today as Aspen Mountain, to have a look around. The panorama from that vantage point was breathtaking. Rows upon rows of snow-covered, rugged peaks, some over fourteen thousand feet high, were visible as far as the eye could reach.

Mike told us that in 1939 a Mrs. Elizabeth Paepke had visited Aspen in the company of some Austrian ski teachers. He said that her husband, Mr. Earl Paepke, president of the Container Corporation of America, was planning to build a ski resort in Aspen which would rival any then in existence. Mike said "now is the time to buy real estate; I'll show you around when we get down." After a magnificent downhill run on untracked powder, he gave us a tour of the town.

"Take this block here," Mike said, pointing at a small square city block opposite the Hotel Jerome. On it were four forlorn-looking shells of houses, and yards littered with debris. "This block is offered for $750, but I believe $500 might take it," he added enthusiastically. Our little group of GIs looked bewil-

dered. Who had $500? Of course, among us we could have raised this goodly sum by investing about $100 each, but this seemed a risky proposition.

At that time, putting $100 into real estate in Aspen seemed like a bad investment. Who knew where we would live at the end of the war — if we survived — and how would we ever get to Aspen, a good three-day journey from the East?

It must be remembered that in those days air travel was relatively rare and expensive. Most people going long distances in States took trains or Greyhound buses. Today, Aspen has become headquarters for the jet set. Observing a fleet of sleek corporation aircraft parked wing-to-wing on the tarmac of Aspen's airport, one cannot help thinking that this sight exceeds even Mike Magnifico's wildest fantasies. Aspen is living evidence of the speed with which modern technology can bring enormous changes to an environment.

Aspen is now indeed one of the world's most renowned playgrounds of the rich. Land prices range from $5,000 to $10,000 a square meter. So an investment of $500 for a whole city block would have grown to at least $500,000,000 in today's economy. Such "lost" opportunities, apparent only in hindsight, are in everyone's experience.

My army career was relatively short. I was inducted in February 1942 and was treated to a first-class, luxurious ski vacation in the West. By April of that year, a knee injury I had incurred during a ski weekend at Allegheny State Park resurfaced, and resulted in a medical discharge from the army a few months later.

Downtown Aspen, 1942.
A city block for $500.



Once again, on my homeward journey, I traveled by Pullman, along with a handsome sum of money I had received as severance pay. Not only did I have a wonderful vacation, I was now "rich" into the bargain. God bless America!

Chapter Four

Mutti

1891 - 1978

A Carefree Life

This memoir would not be complete without a special space devoted to the memory of my parents, my mother in particular. I owe my life to her — not just by birthright, but thanks to her foresight, determination, and wisdom.

Since my father died unnaturally and unexpectedly when I was only thirteen years old, the following account deals mainly with my mother. Only in my adulthood, when at the age of twenty-six I moved in with 'Mutti' (the German equivalent of Mom), did I realize what an exceptionally determined and adventurous soul she was. Each year, on July 14, my mother's birthday, I try to devote some time to remembering and meditating on this woman, now long gone. On a tree in our garden is a bronze plaque, stating the dates of her birth and death and bearing the simple words, "Her indomitable spirit shall be with us always." Although she passed away many years ago, her spirit is indeed with us at all times.

She was born on July 14, 1891, into a solid middle-class merchant family in Schwäbich-Hall, Württemberg, Germany, the second eldest of six children. She and her elder brother, Leo, were considered the most rebellious and unconventional of the lot.

When she was twenty-two years old, at the urging of Leo, she answered an ad in the personal columns of a German national paper. As it turned out, the ad was placed by my father. After a somewhat stormy courtship, they decided to marry. Both my parents had pretty rigid ideas of what one should expect from a spouse, and, as these were not always identical, the marriage took a while to settle down.

One of the bones of contention, as I was told by my mother, was the idea that whatever comes to the table has to be eaten. When my mother served spinach and my father refused to eat it, she told him it would reappear on his plate each day until it was eaten. The next day my father didn't go home for dinner, but ate at his mother's place instead. He did not go home until my mother declared defeat and informed him that there would be no more spinach.

Both my parents were interested in art, architecture, and travel. Together, they went to the far corners of the world in search of new items and raw materials for distribution by the family firm. At the same time, they assembled an exquisite art collection. Indeed, in the house on Kronacher Strasse was to be found one of the best collections of German Expressionist art in Lichtenfels. Names such as Chagall, Beckmann, Otto Dix, Kaethe Kollwitz, Kubin and many others, dominant in today's art world as leaders in the expressionist field, were then virtually unknown.

Several years after the war, my mother was able to recover part of this art collection and persuaded a Madison Avenue art gallery to hold an exhibition in an effort to raise money. She found no buyers. The graphics on exhibit were priced anywhere from $ 70 to $ 175. When I exhibited a limited number of what I considered the less valuable pieces (priced anywhere from $ 2000 to $ 5000) of this collection in 1985 in the Gallerie St. Etienne, on West 57 Street in New York, I sold a number of them without problem. This experience, in fact prompted me to write a book called *Art*, published in 1989, telling the bizarre story of this art collection.

The interior of our house had been designed by an avant-guarde architect, Erich Dieckmann, who was a frequent visitor to our house in Lichtenfels. While as a six year old boy I could not care less about his artistic creations. I was more interested in getting rides on the powerful motorcycle on which he usually arrived with great noise and clatter.

Mr. Dieckmann was an associate of the Bauhaus school in Weimar. World famous now, this institution pioneered modern furniture designs in the 1920s, designs which even today can be seen in most contemporary furniture stores.

My father never obtained a driver's license, but my mother in the early thirties was the first woman in Lichtenfels to obtain one, and could often be seen driving the rather fashionable Mercedes convertible to distant parts to visit friends and family.

Disaster Brews

When my father died prematurely in 1933, my mother was widowed at the age of forty-one. Living in Nazi Germany with two teen-aged children she had a difficult time. Being Jewish did not make this task any easier. Stranded in the land of her birth, now dominated by a government which had embarked on a course of genocide of her race, she needed courage and determination if she was to survive.

As mentioned earlier, she enrolled me in a boarding school in Switzerland, and thence I later emigrated to the United States and settled in Cleveland, Ohio. My sister, graduated as nursery school teacher from a vocational school that trained young Jewish women, had found a job as a mother's helper with a family in England. In the interim, my mother, who had stayed behind in Germany, had problems of her own.

At first, she had no intention of emigrating herself. One does not easily abandon a family business in its third generation and well over a hundred years old, a villa with its lovingly tended garden, a huge library, an art collection, and custom-made Bauhaus furniture. No reasonable person living in Germany at the time

thought that this maniac Hitler and his Thousand-Year Reich could last for more than a couple of years. Like many who later perished as victims of Hitler's Final Solution, she too thought she could remain and weather the Nazi storm.

Having taken care of the immediate future of her children, my mother, who had been a housewife all her life, decided to take an active part in our family business, which had been managed since my father's death by his younger brother, Ludwig, his cousin Alfred, and two loyal managers who had been with the firm for many years. Before his death, my father had expanded the business by adding a line of educational toys not unlike the items later produced by Playskool in the United States. This was a totally new concept, since up to that point toys consisted mostly of replicas of miniature railroads, cars and mechanical objects of all sorts.

Unfortunately, it soon became evident even to the most optimistic that there was no future for any Jew in Germany. My mother and my uncles had to flee, and the business was appropriated by the two "trusted" managers, who promptly asserted their ownership by changing the name of the firm from D. Bamberger to Friedrich, Knorr and Company.

This firm is still thriving today, operated by the children and grandchildren of Messrs. Friedrich and Knorr. Ironically, the only remnant retained by the present owners of the old Bamberger firm is the logo of a bee, first created by my great-grandfather David, who in 1837 had started this business in the nearby village of Mitwitz. He was a confectionary baker at the time, supplying baked goods to the squire of Würzburg and the people of the surrounding countryside. To provide attractive packaging for these baked goods, David started to manufacture baskets from local materials such as willow reeds and wood fibers. This may have been the origin of the breadbasket now found on almost every breakfast table in the world. The honeybee he used as a symbol on his letterhead represented industriousness and frugality. My great-grandfather's story as well as the story of the family business in Lichtenfels is recorded in the *History of a Family, 1770 - 1992* chronicle I published in June, 1993.

By mid-1938, the repression against the Jews had reached even my old home town, Lichtenfels. One night, just before midnight, there was a loud knock at the back door. A nocturnal knock on the door of a Jewish home during this period was sufficent cause to frighten its residents. Kunni, our loyal cook, who had been with us for twenty-five years, furtively opened the door a crack to ask who was there. It turned out to be our neighbor Herr Aumer, whose son had been my classmate in elementary school.

Herr Aumer, who was an official in the Lichtenfels city administration, looked disconcerted and uncomfortable as Kunni let him in. "I must see Frau Bamberger," he said nervously. " You understand, I had to come at this hour as I do not want to be seen." Kunni led him into the foyer and asked him to wait a moment while she called my mother.

"Ah, Herr Aumer," my mother said, as she hastily tightened the belt of her housecoat, "what brings you here at this hour?"

Herr Aumer, who worked in the Department of Records at the town hall, said "Frau Bamberger, we have known each other for a very long time. You know what is happening in this town and all over Germany. I don't really agree, but I have a job and a family to feed." He hesitated a moment, and shifted his weight from one leg to the other. "I hope you understand that I cannot be seen to communicate with you in an official capacity. I came to tell you that orders have arrived from Berlin today stating that within the next two weeks we will have to confiscate the passports of all Jewish families living in our district. I know you still have a valid passport, and I urge you to leave as quickly as possible." "How much time do I have?" my mother asked, shaken by this sudden news.

"I can hold up the order on my desk for two or three days, not longer," Herr Aumer replied, "so it would be best for you to leave no later than the day after tomorrow." He looked miserable. " Perhaps you can visit some relatives in another part of the country, but it would be best for you to leave Germany altogether."

"What am I going to do with all our things?" my mother exclaimed, with a sweeping motion of her arm.

The thought of giving all this up, and of leaving without saying goodbye to her friends of a lifetime was frightening, even though in those days, one never knew who one's friends really were.

Herr Aumer looked distressed as well. "I understand, Frau Bamberger," he said. "Please realize that it is not easy for me to come here and ask you to simply abandon all that must be very dear to you." He coughed a little, as if to suppress some emotion.

"However, I can do no more than tell you that, for your safety, leaving would be best, as further orders may be coming which could even endanger your life." After a pause, he continued: "Perhaps, you can return at a later date, after things settle down a bit." Then he said, "I had better go now, and please forgive me for intruding at such a late hour." With these words, he opened the back door and disappeared into the darkness.

My mother sat stunned for a while. She was alone. Kunni had retired to her own room after admitting Herr Aumer, and in any event, was not the sort of person with whom my mother cared to share the events of the preceding half hour. She first had to sort out by herself the impact of the news.

She was a practical person and quickly recognized the immense favor Herr Aumer had done her, at great personal risk, and also the urgent need to act quickly.

At breakfast the next morning she told Kunni, "Herr Aumer came late last night and suggested that I leave town for a short while because of some crazy new laws which have just come out. I will be visiting my mother in Stuttgart and hope you will take care of things as usual. I will call you from Stuttgart and let you know my plans." Kunni, a person of few words, absorbed this news in silence. She was used to taking care of our house during the extended trips my father and my mother had taken in the past. Both I and my sister Ruth had been away from home for many years. Now the moment of my mother's own departure had arrived. She packed a few of her belongings into a small suitcase and left for Stuttgart to visit her mother. Once there, she went to the American consulate and arranged for a visitor's visa, enabling her to "visit" her son in the United States.

Since she had a valid passport, the officials at the consulate had no reason to deny a visa, and a travel agent subsequently booked passage for her on one of the steamers of the United States Line, which had weekly service between Hamburg and New York.

USA — A New World

While I was struggling with my first real job as a delivery boy for Uberstein's drugstore in Cleveland, Mutti, who had arrived in September 1938, settled in Louisville, Kentucky, to take care of the household of a recently widowed distant cousin who had small children. He was in desperate need of an inexpensive housekeeper, and my mother fitted the bill perfectly, being an impoverished, distant relative who was willing to work essentially in exchange for room and board.

In the middle of 1939, my sister arrived from England, was accepted by a branch of the wealthy DuPont family as a refugee "house-daughter" and subsequently became head of a newly formed nursery school for Louisville's Jewish community. My mother's maiden sisters Lina and Ilse Wolff also managed to escape Germany in 1940 and settled in Louisville as well.

On several occasions, at the urging of Mutti, I had hitchhiked the three hundred or so miles from Cleveland to Louisville in search of better work. But I preferred cosmopolitan Cleveland to the sleepy southern way of life in Louisville, and no job with a future could be found there. Later, after I injured my knee while skiing I was compelled to spend four weeks in Louisville, while I convalesced. When I returned to Cleveland after my recuperation, my mother was convinced that I would never move.

While Mutti felt useful raising the two little children of her cousin Phillip, the pettiness of this middle class household, and Louisville's small town atmosphere, was also not my mother's cup of tea. Most of all, she felt that I needed her, and was anxious to live near her favorite child. As soon as her cousin's children reached their early teens, Mutti decided that their care could be handed over to a hired housekeeper. She then fled to Cleveland, primarily to keep a watchful eye on her restless son.

That was 1941. My earnings barely supported me alone, so the first thing she had to do was find a job. The choice occupation for well-bred refugee women like her was as a housekeeper, then very different from a cleaning lady. Before World War II changed all that, most upper-middle-class people had a housekeeper to run the household, supervising the cleaning personnel, cook and chauffeur, as circumstances required.

Mutti was lucky to find a position with a member of Cleveland society, Victor Tlach, ex-consul of Austria. When Hitler annexed Austria in his famous "Anschluss" of 1938, Mr. Tlach had resigned as consul and obtained political asylum in the United States. Though somewhat impoverished, he lived on fashionable Eastern Parkway with his ninety-year old mother, an ex-opera singer. Mr. Tlach needed someone to keep an eye on this eccentric person, who from time to time burst into operatic arias. She always took her meals standing up, so as not to obstruct her vocal cords. My mother was ideally suited for the job; she was a good cook and sufficiently educated and presentable to help him entertain his guests.

Indeed, Mr. Tlach felt Mutti had been sent from heaven. And Mutti could count her blessings as well: she not only had room and board but received considerably higher pay than my salaries from the hat factory and the drugstore combined.

At first she had her difficulties with Mr. Tlach's mother, who thought she was being overpaid and overindulged. Afraid that Mutti might steal something, the old lady followed her all day from room to room. Finally, my mother won her heart through her German-style cooking and especially her pastries, the kind Mrs. Tlach remembered from life in Austria. "No one who bakes like that could possibly steal something," she told Mutti eventually.

Another perk, as much for Mr. Tlach as for Mutti, was a huge, gleaming gold Cadillac convertible that had been rotting away in an obscure garage. When Mr. Tlach had resigned as consul and lost his regular income, he could no longer afford a chauffeur. In his late sixties, he felt he was too old to learn to drive. But he persuaded Mutti to get her driver's license, which was no problem, since she had driven her own Mercedes convertible — a modest gray, not gold one —in Germany.

Mr. Tlach had no objection to Mutti's using the car on her days off. So on the rare occasions when my mother and I managed to have time off together, incongruously Mutti picked up her delivery boy son in her gold Cadillac for a drive or a picnic in the country. At those moments we felt that America was indeed a land of unlimited opportunities.

But all good things must come to an end. After old Mrs.Tlach died, Mr. Tlach pressed Mutti to marry him. Cleveland's practical society thought it a good idea. My mother was alone and penniless; Mr. Tlach was old, with a moderate income from his investments. Why not? I too thought it a good idea but Mutti, always practical, thought otherwise. "What should I do with such an old man? Besides he has not enough money to support me," she said repeatedly.

When I joined the U.S. Army in 1942, I was leaving Cleveland for good, although I didn't know it at the time. After my discharge later that year I was offered and accepted a job in my uncle's plastic-scrap business in New York. Mutti stayed on with Mr. Tlach in Cleveland until 1946. Then she decided that her son was dating all the wrong women, was footloose in the big city, and needed a home. So she moved to New York. Soon after she arrived, we purchased a small house in Bellerose, Queens.

Mutti stayed in that house until 1961, when she found it becoming too isolated and burdensome for her. Taking advantage of a good real-estate market she sold it, and rented a comfortable apartment in Washington Heights, in uptown Manhattan, called the Fourth Reich because of the many German residents in the area. She lived there for the next fifteen years, and with easy access to New York's concerts, theaters, museums and movies, and plenty of German friends to join her in these activities, Mutti had a good life.

When in 1970 I married a young Malaysian girl Mo-Li, I once again thwarted my mother's ardent wish that I marry what she thought was a more suitable German-Jewish woman. Mo-Li came from a town near Melaka, Malaysia, famous for the Melaka cane, which our family firm in Lichtenfels had imported. Strangely, my mother's family nickname was Mollie, and Melaka was a place she always wanted to visit. Mo-Li promised to take her there although this promise could never be realized.

Though my mother liked Mo-Li very much, there was a bit of a strain in the beginning. There was also some inevitable ethnic conflict. One day, when Mutti came for dinner and Mo-Li cooked a Chinese meal, my mother, in her blunt Germanic way, objected to her using chopsticks to eat it. "Put down those barbaric things," she said; "you are now in America."

After a few days Mo-Li wrote my mother asking politely why she kept up her German tradition by preparing German meals, baking German cakes and

cookies, and frequenting a German butcher. "I will not use chopsticks, if you no longer follow German customs," she wrote logically.

Mutti, always quick to recognize a mistake, profusely apologized to Mo-Li and in fact asked her to teach her some Chinese cooking and how to eat with chopsticks.

Thereafter, Mo-Li and Mutti became great friends and each was willing to learn from the other. She and Mutti exchanged recipes and each tried to learn something from the other. Among Mutti's friends, there was a constant friendly rivalry about who could bake the Haselnusstorte (Hazelnut cake) — containing only one tablespoon of flour — that would rise the highest. Mutti was unbeliev-

Mutti at 83 — an indomitable spirit.



ably proud when one day Mo-Li produced the highest cake of all. (See recipe in appendix).

At eleven o'clock one night, when Mutti was almost eighty, she was traveling home in the subway after attending a theater performance. She was astonished to encounter Mo-Li traveling home after evening classes at the university where she was studying for her doctorate. "But Mo-Li, what are you doing here

at this hour of the night?" she exclaimed, and Mo-Li countered, "Mutti! And what about you?"

Mutti was always very athletic and liked to go for hikes and long swims. But age has a way of catching up with us all. I remember her getting really upset when, at eighty-two, swimming in a four-foot surf on Nantucket Island, she had some problem getting ashore and needed a hand.

When she reached the age of eighty-four, life in New York became too difficult. In 1976 she moved back to Louisville to join my sister, who was retired and lived in a duplex which seemed more suitable for a person my mother's age. But after the initial euphoria passed, it turned out that this move had been a mistake. Until shortly before she died, my mother was interested, alert, well read, and flexible. Life in Louisville, centered around churches, temples, and the Jewish community center, all with programs to keep old people busy, was not suitable for my mother's temperament. Lacking the stimulation of New York's cultural scene, and feeling her life was without purpose, she aged rapidly, and she died in 1978, at the age of eighty-six.

She had lived, I think, through one of the most exciting eras in the history of mankind. This era began at a time of gas-lit homes and horse-drawn carriages and extended to the advent of telephones, electricity, automobiles, supersonic planes and man actually landing on the moon. It also included the rise and fall of the Nazi regime, and thus goes down in history as a period in which the most degenerate, cruel, inhuman, and despicable crimes were perpetrated by one people against another.

Chapter Five

A Bit of Plastic History

1740 - 1946

The Early Years

Long before Claude landed in the United States in 1938, not knowing what he would do, where he would live, or what the future would hold for him in his new country, there was an industry known today as plastics.

Although plastic materials began to be produced by major chemical companies in the 1930s in commercial quantities, the general public at the time was only vaguely aware that a new era — the plastic age — had dawned. Much of what follows was gathered from works referred to in the bibliography; a picture can be formed from them of how the plastic age came about.

Most people think of plastic as an artificially produced chemical concoction which has become an integral part of modern life. This impression is only partially correct; half of the materials we know today as plastic originate from organic substances which have always been present in our lives. Indeed, although the word 'plastic' is commonly thought of as referring something ultra modern, it merely means that the material in question can be formed in any desired shape when heat and pressure are applied. It will retain that shape when it has cooled.

To complicate things a bit, there are really two basic types of plastic. One type is 'thermoset plastic'; when heat and pressure are applied this substance takes a final shape, but once the article has been formed it must be discarded when it breaks or becomes obsolete. The other type, 'thermoplastic', can be reshaped and used many times over by the application of heat and pressure.

Both plastics come in the form of powder or granules which when heated becomes liquid and can be molded to the desired shape. Additives to the powder enhance color, toughness, and flexibility.

The thermoset family of plastics was developed by Dr. Leo H. Baekeland (1863-1944), a Belgian immigrant who founded the Bakelite Corporation in 1910. In 1939 this company merged with the Union Carbide Corporation. Though thermoset plastic played an important part in the development of the plastics industry, this book will essentially be about thermoplastics, since the remeltable property of this material led to the creation of "recycling" — now a worldwide industry in which my family played an important part.

This initial brief history will basically be confined to the origin of the thermoplastic industry, and to the development of the first two synthetic thermoplastic materials, cellulosics and acrylics, which found wide acceptance both in the military and private sectors during World War I and World War II.

The first thermoplastic material in America was a substance called keratin. Horses' hoofs and animal horns are largely composed of this. Chicken feathers and human hair also contain keratin. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, professional hornsmiths, or horners, plasticized animal horns by submerging them in boiling water or soaking them in alkaline solution until the material softened and could be pressed into thin sheets. These sheets were used for translucent windows in log cabins and as diffusers in

lanterns and street lights. After glass appeared on the market in 1740 and was widely adopted for windows, the horners found other uses for their raw material.

For example, it was extensively used to produce sheets of artificial decorative "tortoise shell," which was made into combs, pins, and other ornamental objects. The industry expanded rapidly, using not only horn but other natural substances containing keratin. Hoofs, for example, were ground up, colored in water solution, and compression-molded in various molds for a multitude of luxury consumer items. Chicken feathers and human hair were used to produce the first plastic fibers.

The cradle of this industry was Leominster, Massachusetts, which a century later became the plastics capital of the United States. There the first large fabricating plants were established at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The fabricating process was of course very primitive. Comb teeth were cut with small hand saws; the end product was polished with sand and water.

Over the succeeding hundred years the industry progressed from manual operation to primitive machinery. An example is the "one horsepower engine." Located on the top floor of a building, this 'engine' consisted of a wheel twenty feet in diameter driven by a horse going round and round. The shaft of the wheel was connected to gearing in a comb-manufacturing device on the floor below. A stick hanging over the horse was attached to a rope; when the horse slowed down, the comb mechanics would forcefully yank the rope, the stick would hit the horse and spur it into action and production would accelerate once again.

One of the major nineteenth-century manufacturers of buttons made from hoof horns and shellac resins was the Waterbury Button Company, known today as the Waterbury Companies. One branch still manufactures buttons, mostly for uniforms; the other, now called the Commercial Products Division, does custom molding of industrial parts.

Celluloid — The First Thermoplastic Compound

While in the late nineteenth century a number of young scientists developed synthetic plastic compounds, John Wesley Hyatt (1837-1920) must be considered the originator of the synthetic thermoplastic industry. He invented a synthetic thermoplastic material, called Celluloid. Treating cellulose nitrate with camphor and alcohol, he produced a substance which could be used as a cheap substitute for such basic materials as ivory, tortoise shell, amber, and even keratin. He started the Celluloid Corporation in l872. It was eventually purchased by the Celanese Corporation in l927.

Hyatt's incentive to produce Celluloid was the offer of an award of $l0,000 for a cheaper substitute for ivory, which was much in demand for the production of billiard balls. Hyatt, then owner of the Albany Billiard Ball Company, managed to produce a pool ball made of a composition material covered with the cellulose nitrate coating he had developed. Although he did not get the award, his company did continue to manu-

facture this item. He once received a letter from a saloon owner in Denver, Colorado, in which the writer complained that an occasional violent contact of the billiard balls would produce a mild explosion, with the result that everyone in the place instantly pulled out his gun. Nevertheless, the product found wide acceptance at the time.

Because of its easy workability, clarity, toughness, and cementability Celluloid had many applications by the beginning of the twentieth-century. In the form of sheets, it was marketed as a lightweight substitute for glass in the burgeoning aircraft and automotive industries. It was also used for many household and personal items, often replacing a heavier weight thermoset plastic called Bakelite. During that period, women carried quantities of Celluloid upon their person in the form of many combs and costume jewelry. The plastics industry suffered a severe crisis in 1923, when fashion changed and bobbed hair became the thing.

The first large fabricator to accept Hyatt's Celluloid had been the Pro-phy-lac-tic Company of Florence, Massachusetts, founded by Alfred P. Critchlow, who had emigrated from England in 1845. Initially he produced buttons and picture frames made from a composition of his own invention, probably a thermoset material. He claimed it to be the first plastic material and called it "Florence Compound." After many transmutations the Pro-phy-lac-tic brush company emerged in 1885 (forty years later) as the world's first producer of toothbrushes made from Hyatt's Celluloid. Thereafter production was expanded to hairbrushes and all types of plastic handles. Enjoying a reputation as the world's largest manufacturer of plastic toothbrushes, the company had offices all over the United States as well as in Europe, China and Australia.

Until 1932 these brushes were fabricated with very primitive machinery. When modern injection-molding machines and new plastic materials came on the market, the Pro-phy-lac-tic company was the first to use them to produce plastic handles. Production expanded into soap boxes, cosmetic and jewelry cases, and a multitude of related products. After many changes in ownership the company emerged in 1989 as the Pro Corporation, wholly owned by its employees. Today it is still one of the most important producers of toothbrushes in the world.

The one great defect of Celluloid was its lightning-like burning property, which created serious hazards. Although a number of scientists had made experiments to produce cellulose acetate, which burns more slowly, it was not until World War I, when the demand arose for a less flammable material for use in aircraft, that cellulose acetate came into its own.

Cellulose Acetate Makes Its Debut

The Swiss brothers Henri and Camille Dreyfus initiated commercial production of cellulose acetate lacquers used to reinforce airplane fabrics as early as 1910 in England. But it was not until World War I, when the American War Industries Board asked them to start an American plant, that cellulose acetate largely began to replace Celluloid. The American Cellulose and Chemical Company was founded in 1917, but the plant was still incomplete at the time of the Armistice in

1918. The name of the company was changed to the Celanese Corporation of America in 1927, the same year the Celluloid Corporation started production of cellulose acetate rods, sheets, and molding powder under the trade name Lumarith. Subsequently, the Celanese Corporation took over the Celluloid Corporation and continued these operations. It also was the leading producer of cellulose acetate yarns, used extensively in the textile industry, particularly for the manufacture of ladies' underwear.

To make their entry into the plastics field, E. I. DuPont de Nemours and Company, primarily a manufacturer of gunpowder, acquired the Arlington Corporation, a producer of Celluloid products, in 1915. Its Fibersilk Division, already a producer of cellulose acetate yarns, soon became Celanese's largest competitor.

In the early 1880s, the Reverend Hannibal Goodwin of Newark, New Jersey, patented the idea of substituting Celluloid film for the glass plates used for lantern slides. George Eastman, founder of Eastman Kodak, acquired the patent and changed the history of photography by replacing glass plates with rolls of Celluloid film. He introduced the small camera, using this film, around 1890; the film was also used for the first motion pictures. In 1927, Eastman Kodak switched production to nonflammable cellulose acetate film, which revolutionized not only the motion picture field but other industries as well. Thereafter colorless transparent cellulose acetate film and sheet were widely used in attractive display boxes for confectionary and jewelry. Until acrylic sheet was available in commercial quantitites, cellulose acetate was used for automobile and aircraft windshields as well.

In 1930, the Eastman Kodak Company assigned their enlarged cellulosic molding powder production to a subsidiary, the Tennessee Eastman Company in Kingsport, Tennessee. The parent company retained all cellulosic sheet and film production.

The development of modern injection-molding machines in the early thirties created a great change in the consumer market. In contrast to the thermoset compounds hitherto used for housewares and furniture, the appearance of the new inexpensive lightweight break-resistant cellulosic materials had great consumer appeal. Available in many bright colors, the materials found acceptance for costume jewelry and cosmetics, largely replaced wood and the heavier Bakelite in toys and household goods, and supplanted other basic materials formerly used for pens and eyeglass frames.

Acrylic— A New Plastic Material

The Röhm and Haas Company and E. I. DuPont de Nemours, the first two producers of acrylic monomer and acrylic sheet, were originally established in entirely different areas of the world, but by the late 1920s both had become giants worldwide in the manufacture of pharmaceuticals and other chemical products.

The E. I. DuPont de Nemours and Company had its origin when Éleuthère I. DuPont de Nemours came to the United States in 1802. In 1804 he and his family started the production of gunpowder in the Brandywine Valley, Delaware. Supplying gunpowder for the War of 1812 and later to the Union forces in the Civil War, the firm prospered.

It took the company a hundred years before it ventured, in 1902, into the plastics field. Using nitrocellulose, the company produced a smokeless gunpowder, paint, varnishes, lacquers and solutions for the coating of fabrics.

Simultaneously the company began research on the manufacture of synthetic fibers. At the beginning DuPont produced acetate rayon; later it produced nylon, polyester and acrylics such as Orlon yarns, which revolutionized the textile industry.

Otto Haas founder of the Röhm and Haas Company, was born in Germany. In 1901, at the age of twenty-nine, he emigrated to the United States in the hope of finding a better future. He had worked with the German branch of G. Siegle and Company, a manufacturer of dyes and chemicals, and now found a job with the parent company located on Staten Island.

While Otto earned a modest living in the United States, his much younger friend and classmate Otto Röhm earned a degree in chemical engineering from the University of Tübingen. His doctoral thesis was a dissertation on the polymerization of acrylic acid. After his graduation in 1904, Röhm worked as a chemical engineer for the municipal gasworks in Stuttgart. The gasworks office was located near a tannery, which, in curing and tanning animal hides, used a bathing solution made with fermented dog manure. The result was an incredibly bad odor which permeated the entire neighborhood. In addition the gasworks produced a gas/water waste material which had a bad odor of its own.

Röhm believed that these unsavory conditions could be improved. With the help of some friends in the tannery, he developed an odorless concentrate of gas-water and salt which could be used in tanning instead of the odoriferous, expensive dog manure.

Certain of his success, he persuaded several tanning companies to help him produce this new tanning concentrate on a commercial scale. He quit the gasworks to start a small company of his own, and asked his best friend, Otto Haas, to investigate whether this concentrate could be marketed in the United States. As it turned out, the industry in America had the same problems as its counterpart in Germany, since it too used dog manure.

Röhm then persuaded Haas to return to Germany to become a partner in his new company. Haas agreed on condition that eventually he would return to the United States to head the American branch of the company. The partnership agreement for this new enterprise, the Röhm and Haas Company, was signed on August 30, 1907. By 1909 the company had outgrown its orginal location in Esslingen, a suburb of Stuttgart, and moved to Darmstadt, where it has remained ever since.

As agreed, Otto Haas returned to the United States and established the American branch in Philadelphia. At first this branch acted as the Western Hemisphere distributor of the tanning compound produced by the parent plant in Germany. When this supply was threatened by the advent of World War I in 1914, Haas opened an American manufacturing facility in Chicago; it was later relocated to a sixty acre tract in Bristol, Pensylvania, just twenty miles upriver from the home office in Philadelphia. The plant is still operating in 1995 at the same site, with no plans or reason for any changes in the near future.

Before World War I the international supply of chemicals for the tanning industry, and of dyes and medicines synthesized from coal tar, was dominated by the Germans. The war disrupted the supply lines and brought about an acute shortage of all types of chemical raw materials in South America and to a certain extent in the United States as well. Otto Haas with his new factory knew how to take full advantage of this situation. In addition to producing the much needed tanning compound he added other chemicals used in the tanning industry, and he brokered chemicals from other American producers to his South American connections. By 1917 the American Röhm and Haas Company approached annual sales of a million dollars a year, and made profits in excess of a quarter million dollars. This was a spectacular success, considering that in less than a decade Haas had built this company from scratch, with hardly any starting capital.

Between 1920 and 1930 Röhm and Haas became DuPont's biggest competitor. To reduce competition and minimize duplication of expensive research, both companies made reciprocal agreements with British and German firms working in parallel fields, such as ICI (Imperial Chemical Industries) and I. G. Farben.

While the technology of casting sheets from methyl methacrylate monomer, an acrylic, originated with Röhm in Germany, ICI in England had developed the cheapest and best process to produce methyl methacrylate monomer. In 1935 the two companies exchanged licenses so that each could use the other's technology in monomer and sheet production.

The "invention" of acrylic sheet had come about almost by default. In 1928 Röhm developed a process for manufacturing automobile safety glass by coating two pieces of glass with a layer of acrylic solution and then laminating the two. The trade name for this product was Luglas; the layer was called Plexigum. Trying to reduce cost, Röhm and an associate poured some liquid monomer between two glass plates, using heat to effect polymerization. To their astonishment they discovered that after the process was finished, the glass plates did not adhere to the sandwiched acrylic mass; inadvertently they had created the first acrylic sheet. Immediately recognizing its potential, Röhm set to work during the next three years to develop a market for his new "organic glass," now known throughout the world as Plexiglas.

Acrylic sheet first came on the market in 1936, with an annual production of four thousand square feet priced at $3.25 per square foot. The DuPont version, called Lucite, appeared in 1937. But it was not until the New York World's Fair in 1939 that the American public was exposed to this new material. Displayed in the pavilions of the two producers, Röhm and Haas and DuPont, was a dazzling array of lustrous lamps, illuminated picture frames, brilliantly colored room dividers, glistening desk sets, and jewelry items made of Plexiglas (Röhm and Haas) and Lucite (DuPont) acrylic sheet. General Motors exhibited a car body made entirely from crystal-clear acrylic sheet, allowing one to view the engine and car interior without having to lift the hood or open a door. This elegant material had immediate public appeal. It was a far cry from its cheap cellulosic cousins which had flooded the market largely with inexpensive give-away items and toys that broke within minutes of their use. Acrylic had CLASS! Alas, because of World War II another ten years were to pass before the public at large had access to this miraculous product.

By 1939, given Hitler's aggressive tendencies and political ambitions, a new world war seemed inevitable. The United States government was quick to recognize the usefulness of acrylic, and indeed all plastic materials, in the production of aramaments, then just getting into high gear. With the advent of World War II in l941 all plastic materials became critical for the war effort.

Acrylic production in the United States took on a meteoric aspect. From the annual production of 4,000 square feet of Plexiglas in 1936, it soared to 2.2 million square feet in 1941, used mainly by the U.S. Army Air Force. By 1944, when the United States had reached an unprecedented annual production of 86,000 warplanes, the annual production of acrylic sheet rose to 463,000,000 square feet, used for canopies and aircraft windows. Annual sales exceeded $28,000,000.

World War II Results In Further Expansion

As we saw, prior to 1938 the first widely accepted thermoplastic material was in the cellulosic family. Acrylic, the first truly synthetic plastic, made its official debut at the New York World's Fair in l939.

All along, scientists and chemists were also looking for other possibilities in synthetic plastics. Funds for research were scarce, however, and the need to develop new products did not seem urgent. Then, just as World War I had been instrumental in firmly establishing thermoset and cellulosic materials, so World War II gave rise to a whole new industry. The demand for synthetic products to replace scarce natural materials, many of which had to be imported, was now urgent, and the Justice Department permitted plastic, chemical, rubber, and petroleum companies to pool their resources and exchange information freely.

In 1938 the United States government itself entered the plastics business, financing the expansion and operation of plants owned by such major producers as the Dow Chemical Company, the Union Carbide Corporation, and the Monsanto Chemical Company. Research was concentrated on the development of a synthetic rubber, since in case of war the fragile supply lines of natural rubber from Southeast Asia might be interrupted. This foresight paid off when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, l941, and forced the United States into active participation in the war.

The following annual production figures show the meteoric rise of synthetic rubber in a span of eight years, from 1938 to 1946:

before l938	*4,000 metric tons*
1938 - 1940	*120,000 " "*
1940 - 1943	*182,000 " "*
1944	*670,000 " "*
1945	*719,000 " "*
1946	*850,000 " "*

Similar increases in production where exhibited by other synthetic plastics which in the 1930s were still in the development stage. Because of World War II, the government

not only lifted restrictions curtailing exchange of information among competing producers, but actively financed these expansions. The production of plastic materials catapulted to unprecedented heights. The creation of a totally new industry was the result.

As new formulations and ever more sophisticated plastic compounds kept appearing on the market, the 1940s marked the birth of the so-called "commodity" plastics, which could be roughly divided into the following three groups:

POLYVINYL CHLORIDE (PVC) was discovered by a Frenchman, Henri Victor Regnault, back in 1838. It was first introduced by the Union Carbide and Carbon Corporation at the 1933 world's fair in Chicago. There the company introduced vinyl as a replacement for natural rubber in electric-cable insulation, vinyl flooring as an improvement over traditional linoleum, and the long playing vinyl phonograph records which would supersede fragile shellac records in the future. After the war, PVC largely replaced leather in automobiles and in kitchen and office furniture

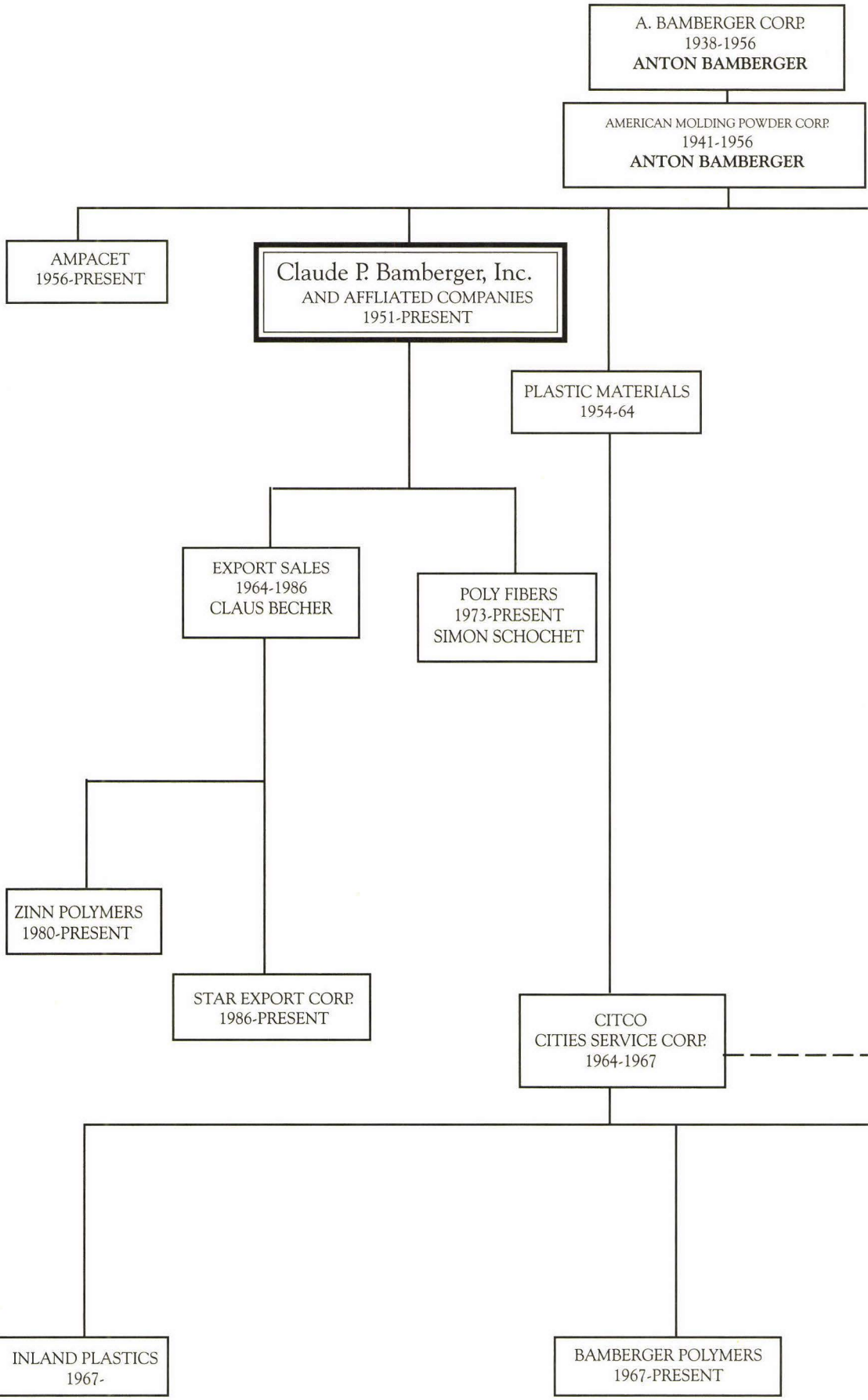
Polymerization of ethylene, a byproduct of the petroleum industry, was first worked on by ICI in England in 1931. The company was unsuccessful until 1936, when an accidental leak in the laboratory apparatus caused a drop in pressure, which turned out to be the missing step in the polymerization process.

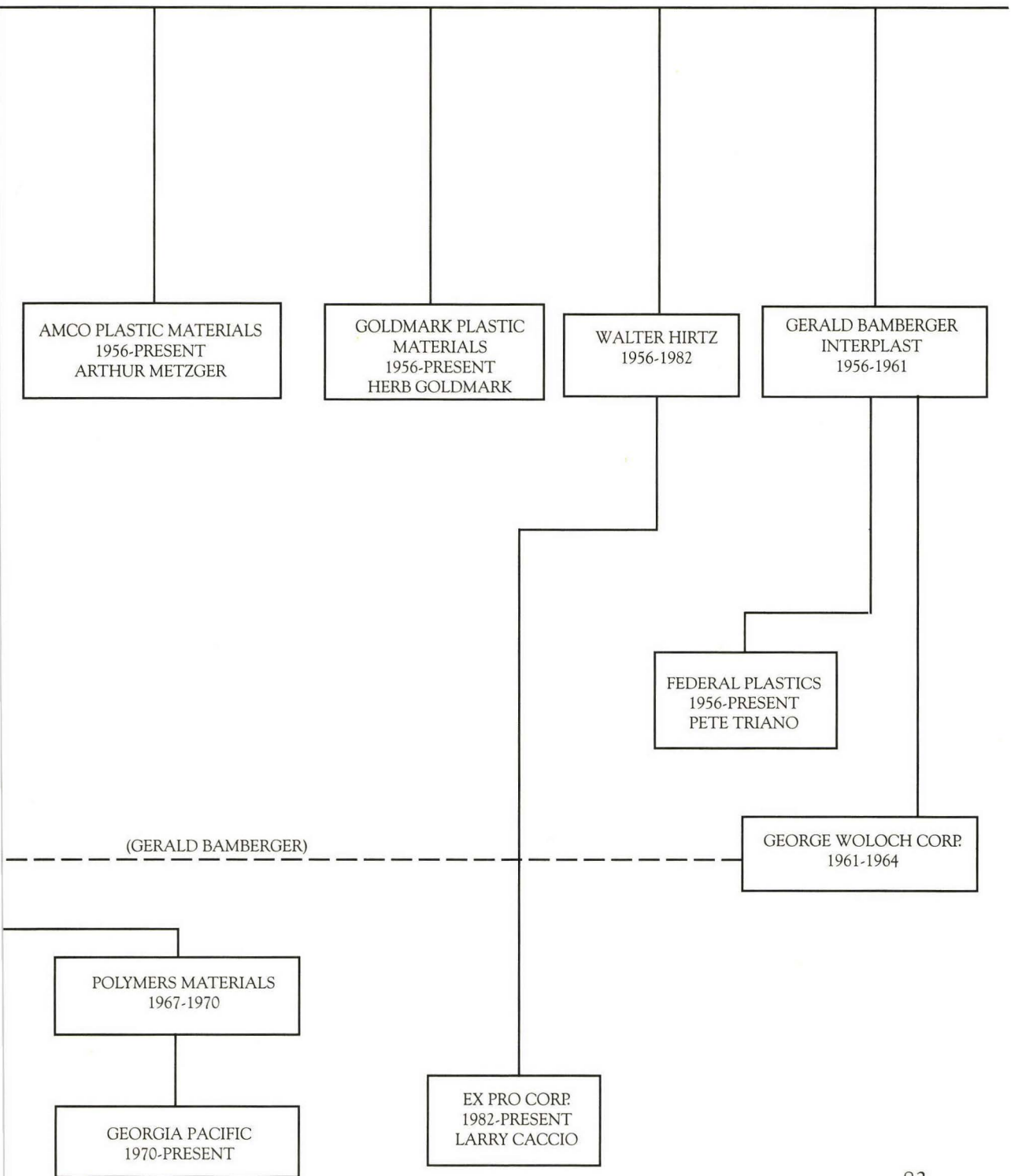
In 1942 samples of the resulting product, POLYETHYLENE, were sent to DuPont and Union Carbide in the United States. They promptly started using it in the production of lightweight cable insulation, much of it for the radar which eventually enabled the Allied air forces to detect and knock out waves of attacking German planes.

While polyethylene was thus first used for military applications in World War II, a deluge of new products flooded the market almost immediately after the war. Many items that we thoughtlessly take for granted today, such as lightweight plastic containers, garbage cans, garbage liners, housewares, and toys — just to name a few — were made before the war from heavier, more unwieldy or less durable raw materials, such as metal, wood, and paper.

POLYSTYRENE had its origin when Herbert Dow, fresh out of college, invented in 1889 a bromine extraction — a compound later used in the production of flame retardent polystyrene. Though Dow Chemical dates back to that period, polystyrene monomer was only developed in the early 1930s. However it was not until World War II that production of this material expanded under government auspices and in utmost secrecy. Annual production rose from 190,000 pounds in l938 to 1.5 billion pounds over the following twenty-five years. Styrene polymer was not available in commercial quantities until l947. After the war polystyrene, much cheaper than acrylic, was used in consumer goods requiring rigidity, clarity, and luster, properties which were absent in items made from polyethylene and the more expensive cellulose acetate.

During all these developments, plastic scrap arising from the production of these new materials played no role at all. In fact, officially it did not exist; the producers of the prime materials simply landfilled their waste, and few end-users were aware that their plastic scrap was salable. Although the A. Bamberger Corporation and Gehring Brothers had been buying, processing, and selling cellulosic and acrylic scrap for some years, it was not until 1946 that the plastic scrap industry reached full bloom.


A. BAMBERGER CORP.
1938-1956
ANTON BAMBERGER
AMERICAN MOLDING POWDER CORP.
1941-1956
ANTON BAMBERGER
AMPACET
1956-PRESENT
Claude P. Bamberger, Inc.
AND AFFLIATED COMPANIES
1951-PRESENT
PLASTIC MATERIALS
1954-64
EXPORT SALES
1964-1986
CLAUS BECHER
POLY FIBERS
1973-PRESENT
SIMON SCHOCHET
ZINN POLYMERS
1980-PRESENT
STAR EXPORT CORP.
1986-PRESENT
CITCO
CITIES SERVICE CORP.
1964-1967
INLAND PLASTICS
1967-
BAMBERGER POLYMERS
1967-PRESENT


AMCO PLASTIC MATERIALS
1956-PRESENT
ARTHUR METZGER
GOLDMARK PLASTIC MATERIALS
1956-PRESENT
HERB GOLDMARK
WALTER HIRTZ
1956-1982
GERALD BAMBERGER
INTERPLAST
1956-1961
FEDERAL PLASTICS
1956-PRESENT
PETE TRIANO
(GERALD BAMBERGER)
GEORGE WOLOCH CORP.
1961-1964
POLYMERS MATERIALS
1967-1970
GEORGIA PACIFIC
1970-PRESENT
EX PRO CORP.
1982-PRESENT
LARRY CACCIO

Chapter Six

An Opportunity Beckons

1938 - 1946

Plastic Scrap — Unknown And Unacceptable

By the mid 1930's thanks to its versatility in a multiple of applications, plastic was finally recognized by the western world as an integral part of modern life.

Items hitherto laboriously fabricated from highly inflammable Celluloid or thermoset material could now be rapidly molded with injection machines. Many fabricators adapted their products to this new, more economical method of production. Most of the firms doing this kind of work were scattered in small New England towns along the Eastern seaboard but many of them were in and around Leominster, Massachussets, which all along was known as the capital of the plastics industry in the United States.

In the infancy of a new industry the novelty carries the day. Everything that is produced seems acceptable until enthusiasm turns into disillusionment when the products do not live up to the customers' expectations. It takes years of competition and refinement to develop some sort of quality control until the general public whole-heartedly accepts a new material as a substitute for established products. Not until some years after World War II did people who hitherto had considered items produced from plastic compounds as a cheap substitute for more solid basic materials, begin to accept products made from plastics as superior or at least equally good as conventional raw materials.

In the development of a new industry, scrap resulting from misapplications, production or defective products, is the least worry of a producer. A manufacturer's prime concern is to create a perfect product. Scrap, which becomes an intregal part of any manufacturing process, is simply calculated as production cost and incorporated into the price of the final product. Thus in the eyes of the manufacturer scrap does not exist and is not carried as an asset on the books. Proceeds from the sale of scrap are merely considered a reduction of overall production costs.

Manufacturers in a new industry are primarily concerned to find public acceptance by producing quality products. The thought of using scrap is an anathema. In absence of any stringent regulations scrap is simply "dumped" into landfills, rivers, or open fields behind a plant.

The idea that a whole line of "inferior" products could be made specifically from scrap and find public acceptance comes only with the maturing of an industry — only after a manufacturer has perfected and found acceptance for his first quality products. In the infancy of a new industry not only the question of quality makes scrap difficult to sell, but the problem of quantity is an equally important factor. No one would be interested in spending money in developing a new product based on a raw material where the supply is uncertain and limited.

In the late 1930s this was precisely the case. There was no market for thermoplastic scrap, even if it could be remelted and reused, because the quantity available was limited and even plastic products produced from first-grade material had a difficult time being accepted.

The Birth Of A New Industry

Anton Bamberger the second child of Philip Bamberger, was born in Lichtenfels, Germany on April 4, 1886.

For unknown reasons, he did not join the family firm, D. Bamberger, established by his grandfather David and managed, at the time of his birth by his father Philip and uncle Fritz Bamberger.

Instead he became an apprentice, working for a chemical company in Hanover, Germany. In 1924, when he was only 24 years old, he was sent by this firm for one year to the United States as part of his training.

Returning to Germany he eventually founded his own company, trading in both rubber and chemical waste materials.

In 1937, Anton was forced to sell his firm to one of his key employees, obeying the new anti-semitic regulations made by the Nazi government, which promoted the genocide of Germany's Jewish population. Seeing no future for him and his family, Anton decided to emigrate to the United States.

To pave the way, he and his wife Else traveled to New York for a brief stay. They arrived in January, 1938, on the SS Manhattan, the same steamer which carried me to my new life in the United States. Six months later, they returned with their son Gerald and daughter Vera to establish permanent residence.

Anton had been dealing in chemical waste materials in Germany, but he found that in the United States this field was already dominated by other firms, so he had to look for something else.

He soon discovered that the production of plastic, hitherto considered part of the chemical industry, was beginning to have an identity of its own. Anton realized that in contrast to thermoset scrap which had no market value, thermoplastic scrap generated by the rapidly expanding plastics industry could be melted down and reused.

At first Anton bought cellulose nitrate (Celluloid) scrap from a number of small fabricators. When he had accumulated a truckload, about ten tons in those days, he sold the material to the original producers, who would not purchase anything less than a truckload. Since the industry was still small and the quantities of scrap limited, my uncle had little competition; he was soon known among Celluloid users as the only outlet for their scrap. Still, there was not enough of this scrap for my uncle to make a living. To make ends meet, he dealt in whatever other surplus chemicals crossed his path.

Shortly after my uncle started his business, then known as the A. Bamberger Corporation, the first quantities of cellulose acetate scrap appeared on the market. At that time the relatively new injection-molding machines produced a certain amount of scrap called purgings — bulky lumps which a molder could not utilize. The tough, small granulators now in use in every molding and extrusion

plant did not exist then and the manufacturers had no choice but to dump this waste material.

When Anton realized that cellulose acetate lumps could be colored and reused after they were ground, he looked around for equipment capable of grinding these lumps. He quickly found out that the producers of prime-quality acetate used a grinder produced by the Ball and Jewel Company. This manufacturer had developed heavy cast-steel grinders used in the food industry to grind grain and cereal, nuts and the like. After some trials it was evident that this equipment would be able to handle cellulose acetate lumps as well.

Soon the A. Bamberger Corporation collected cellulose acetate lumps from most molders within four hundred miles of New York. Once ground in the new grain granulator, the scrap material was sold to molders of cheap combs and inexpensive toys and giveaway cereal premiums, products in which neither quality nor color but only price was of importance. For instance, General Foods distributed 8,400,000 colorful plastic Mickey Mouse cereal bowls made from acetate scrap, a premium during the late thirties to each purchaser of a particular cereal.

A year after Anton Bamberger started his small business centered around collecting thermoplastic scrap and preparing it for resale World War II seemed imminent. While not yet at war, the United States in support of its European allies planned huge war production, in which the relatively new plastic materials began to play an important part.

Cellulosics suddenly became a supercritical item. The newly developed cellulose aceto-butyrate was used for gas-mask parts and lenses. Ethyl cellulose was found best suitable for vital inhibitor strips for explosives, bullet core tips and detonators. Visors were made from acetate sheet. Even bugles, canteens, messkits, tool handles and spittoons for army use were molded from cellulose plastics.

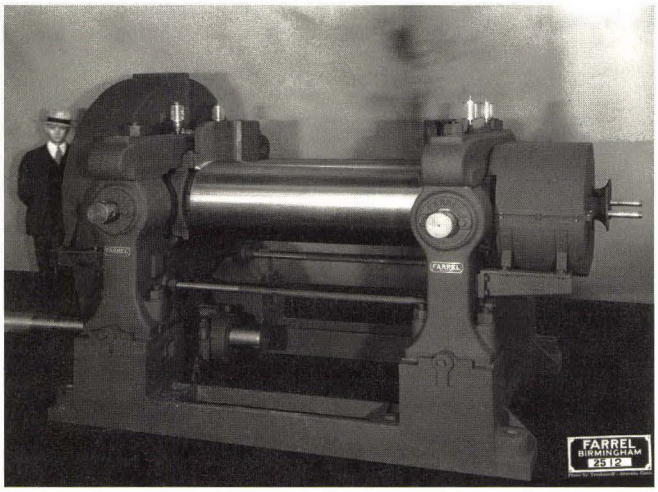
Acrylic sheets, then hardly known, were produced exclusively for military applications in cockpit enclosures and unbreakable windows for military aircraft.

In 1941, when the war actually started, the United States government set up a number of new committees to control the use of plastics, monitoring safety and suitability in military applications. By far the most powerful agency was the War Production Board, which regulated the flow of these materials. As a result very little prime plastic material was released for civilian applications, and then only to those fabricators and processors who were already producing items for the war effort.

With all this talk about allocation and scarcity of prime materials, the question of what should be done with the considerable amount of scrap resulting from this feverish, highly quality-conscious war production occurred to no one.

At about this time Anton went one step further in what was almost a natural expansion of his business. Instead of just grinding cellulose acetate scrap and selling it, he started the first reprocessing operation — coloring the the reground scrap

into a uniform material. He purchased a set of rolling mills, traditionally used to compound rubber, but presently to be standard equipment for compounding plastics as well. Scrap of mixed colors could be turned into a uniform black utility compound. Clear cellulose acetate film and sheet scrap generated in the packaging industry could be ground up and, by the addition of some plasticizer, transformed into bright colored molding powder on this equipment.



A rolling mill, ca. 1940

Finding a use for this plastic scrap, and making it available to a public starved for ordinary as well as luxury items, was not only patriotic but also profitable for the A. Bamberger Corporation.

As the war effort moved the plastic industry into high gear, only one person besides my uncle recognized the rare opportunity for the birth of a whole new industry. Simultaneously with my uncle, Larry Gehring, an ex-employee of Monsanto (then a prime producer of cellulose acetate), founded the firm of Gehring Brothers to manufacture reprocessed cellulose acetate. This new and only competitor of my uncle also dealt in whatever other plastic scrap materials could be gleaned from the humming war production.

January 1, 1943 — Claude Gets A New Job

When I was discharged from the army in September 1942, I realized that I had reached another watershed in my life. Like any soldier returning from service, I headed immediately for "home." For me, this was in Cleveland at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander, with whom I had lived from 1938 to early 1942. Kindly, they had kept my room vacant for my potential return.

Notwithstanding the warm greetings I received from them and the welcome from Mr. Burger at the hat factory, my prospects in Cleveland did not seem bright. If a break had to be made, the time was now. I just couldn't see myself as a salesman of men's hats, which was the optimum goal I could achieve at the Burger establishment. Fortunately, no other career opportunities presented themselves in Cleveland at that moment.

Now that I had seen what the West was like, I was tempted to follow the advice, "Go West, young man," that Mr. Whiteman had given me years ago when I tried to sell him a subscription to *The American Hebrew*. Remembering what Mike Magnifico had said about Aspen, I envisioned a promising future in the winter sports industry and was tempted to pack up my belongings and heed the call of the wild. But life never turns out the way one imagines or wishes.

My cousin and best friend Gerald, with whom I had spent much of my youth and student days in Neuchâtel, had been working in his father's business from the start. Whenever we had a long holiday weekend, Gerald and I met somewhere halfway between Cleveland and New York to go hiking. We were closer than ever and always discussed the possibility of some day working together. His attempts to persuade his father to apprentice me in the plastic business had failed so far. The firm was too small and Anton could not take the responsibility of employing his nephew.

In early 1942 Gerald joined the Tenth Mountain Division, in which I was already serving. Once again we were together. When it became evident that I would be discharged from the army on account of my knee injury, we thought that the time was ripe for him to get his father to give me a job as as his replacement.

We supposed that sooner or later his father would retire and the two of us could then run the company, realizing our ideals and perhaps somewhat immature philosophy. We intended to use the business as a vehicle to earn money for living, instead of living for the sole purpose of making money, as most business owners seemed to do. Youth is forever optimistic! In 1942 everybody thought the war would last no longer than a year at the very most.

When Gerald approached his father once again in my behalf, Anton didn't think much of my ability as a businessman. However, all the talented young people were either in the armed services or in high-tech war industries, and he conceded that I was better than nothing. On January 1,1943, I became an apprentice in my uncle's firm, the A. Bamberger Corporation.

The Key Word Is "Contamination"

Somewhat sadly I left my friends in Cleveland and moved to New York, where my first home was a boarding house at Broadway and 103rd Street. Every morning I took the subway to the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, where my uncle had rented a three-thousand square foot loft in the old Gretch Building.

My uncle's company, which specialized in recycling and reprocessing plastic scrap, had been in existence for four years. In the absence of sufficent quantities of plastic scrap, it dealt in all kinds of exotic materials among them ant eggs

imported from Finland, candy waste from the Hershey chocolate factory in Pennsylvania, and some chemical and rubber wastes.

Because of the war effort a host of new, plastic scrap materials began to appear on the market by the time I started working. The sensitive prime materials were sold by the producers strictly for miltary applications as well as those considered essential for civilian use. As mentioned before, no one really knew what to do with the scrap coming from this new industry.

Once the war had started, the government instituted ceiling prices for almost everything in order to curb inflation and prevent wartime profiteering. Ration coupons where issued to limit the purchase of civilian goods, ranging from meat, butter, sugar and coffee to such essential articles such as shoes and gasoline as well.

As the people in Washington knew next to nothing about chemicals and plastics and supposedly had other worries, they formed a regulatory board consisting of members of firms like Dow Chemical, DuPont and Union Carbide. Its job was to look after the pricing of both prime plastic and plastic scrap.

My uncle protested that there was a conflict of interest in having the producers of prime plastic regulating the prices at which scrap could be bought and sold. Rightfully, he claimed that the interests of the scrap industry were not properly protected. As a consequence, he and his only competitor, Larry Gehring, president of Gehring Brothers, along with the head of a waste-rubber firm, H. Muehlstein and Company, were invited to join the board to regulate the pricing of plastic and rubber scrap.

Everybody got a big kick out of these appointments, which were much like putting the fox in charge of a chicken coop. The new regulators decided to set a low price for what was called 'contaminated, mixed plastic materials' (a conglomeration of various plastic materials), and to set much higher prices for uncontaminated segregated plastic compounds. In a firm like my uncle's, the earnings would come from upgrading and segregating plastics from one category to another.

A case in point was an offering of 200,000 pounds of cellulose acetate gasmask parts by the Picatinny Arsenal in New Jersey. Sealed bids were to be opened in the presence of three army officers at a specified date and hour.

My uncle suspected that the material would be contaminated, but since it was advertised as pure acetate, we were worried that our competitors would bid the ceiling price for that material, which was then $0.22 per pound, as opposed to the ceiling price for 'mixed plastics' at $0.06 per pound.

On the day of the bidding, my uncle asked me to go along, since the experience would help me to learn.

We arrived at the arsenal about an hour before the bids were to be opened and went to inspect the material. It turned out to be a mixture of identical looking acetate and butyrate parts. These two incompatible materials could only be separated by flotation, a messy, expensive process.

Now here was a real dilemma. The bid specified "acetate" when the material was actually something else. We went to see the officer in charge, a Captain Moloney, to explain our situation.

My uncle said, "Captain Moloney, there is a mistake in the description of the acetate bid which opens in half an hour. The material is really not acetate at all. It is a mixture of plastic materials for which the ceiling price is $0.06 per pound as opposed to the ceiling price for acetate of $0.22 per pound. How should we bid now?"

Captain Moloney:"Well, sir, we cannot permit you to violate the law. If you know this is a mixture of material you are not allowed to bid more than the ceiling price."

Uncle: "But our competition may not be aware that your 'acetate' is a really a mixture. Supposing they bid the ceiling price for acetate?"

Captain Moloney: "If the material turns out to be otherwise, we will reduce the price to comply with the law."

Uncle (incredulously): "You are asking us to comply with the law and bid no higher than the ceiling price for mixed plastics, while our competition, not knowing that the material is other than described in your offering will naturally bid a higher price. You would then award the material to the highest bidder and subesequently reduce this price in conformance with the law? Do you think that is fair?"

Captain Moloney:"You can't expect us to violate the law and sell material at an illegal price."

At that moment the bell rang, the hour of the opening bid had arrived. My uncle quickly scribbled a price of $0.06 per pound, with an explanation, sealed the bid envelope, and dropped it into a locked box marked BID.

Now Captain Moloney, joined by two solemn-looking officers who had come into the room, portentously placed the BID box on a long conference table. One of the officers took out a small tally sheet for recording the bids;the other busied himself with the lock on the box. Captain Moloney then said to the audience of bidders, which consisted of my uncle and myself: "It is April 12, 1943, 11 a.m., Eastern Standard Time. The ordnance officers of Picatinny Arsenal, Section 12 B, are present to open a bid for 200,000 pounds of cellulose acetate gas-mask parts as described in Bid B-352. The material will be awarded to the highest bidder." The suspense was killing me. What was going to happen? Would there be a dozen bids or more? What if people bid the wrong price?

It didn't take long for my apprehension to be relieved. The box was opened and Captain Moloney reached in and in a sonorous voice, as if addressing a huge crowd, said, "First Bid: A. Bamberger Corporation, Brooklyn, New York $0.06 per pound. Second Bid: H. Muehlstein and Company, New York $0.015 per pound."

Then, after a moment of silence Captain Moloney continued, still unsmilingly addressing a nonexistent crowd: "The Board will announce their decision within the next three calendar days."

The decision came, all right. Having offered four times as much as the next highest bidder, we were awarded the material. Subsequently, we discovered that not only were the parts a mixture of acetate and butyrate, which could be separated in our flotation process, but deeply imbedded in each part was a rubber gasket, which had to be removed by hand. We lost our shirts on that deal. Claude counted his blessings: it was his uncle who had made the decision. Claude also had learned the importance of looking very carefully during an inspection. Had we done so we would have discovered the rubber gasket before making a bid.

I quickly learned that contamination played a big part in the scrap industry.

I first became aware of its importance when we received a telephone call from a Mr. Stern, also a refugee and an ex-classmate of my uncle. Max Stern had arrived in the United States with a flock of canaries with which he opened a small pet shop. Later, when his son Leonard joined the firm at the age of twenty-one, the business became a supply house for pet food, on Houston Street in New York. It was called Hartz Mountain Pet Foods.

In the early days my uncle could not make a living on plastic scrap alone, and one way to supplement his income was by importing ant eggs from Finland. These eggs, packaged in twenty-five-pound. burlap bags, were sold to Hartz Mountain, which repacked them in little two and four ounce boxes and then resold them to pet supply shops at a markup of 1000 percent.

During the aforementioned call, Mr. Stern informed my uncle that the recent shipment contained more pine needles and soil than ant eggs, and was in no way acceptable. My uncle adopted a conciliatory tone and suggested that Mr. Stern come for lunch at Peter Luger, a classy restaurant on Broadway in the Williamburg section of Brooklyn, which to this day is one of the most famous steak houses in New York.

Nevertheless, shortly thereafter Mr. Stern came to our office and the following confrontation took place:

"Herr Bamberger," Mr. Stern said in an agitated voice, "that shipment of Finnish ant eggs you delivered a few days ago is totally worthless."

"Worthless?" my uncle said hoarsely, his face reddening, "how can you say worthless! These are grade A ant eggs and come from a very reliable Finnish exporter, who never gave me any trouble back when I was in Germany and purchased ant eggs from him."

"This is not Germany! This is America — a free country. These ant eggs you delivered are contaminated with pine needles and I am not going to pay for them!" Mr. Stern shouted.

To emphasize his point, he produced a small cardboard box containing a bunch of brownish looking pine needles, some soil, shreds of burlap and mighty few ant eggs.

"It can't be that bad," my uncle remonstrated. "This sample is in no way representative of the quality of the shipment."

After a pause my uncle continued: "All right, I'll tell you what we'll do. I'll send my truck over to your warehouse and pick up the shipment. We'll remove all the pine needles with our plastic sifter and give you a hundred percent credit for any loss of weight."

There could be little argument with such an approach. Mr. Stern said that this arrangement would be satisfactory. Although it turned out that the shipment did indeed contain a small percentage of pine needles, our Finnish supplier indignantly denied their presence, refused to give us an adjustment, and even threatened to cut off the supply of this exotic product, knowing full well that he had no competition.

Then there was another problem. Rats aboard ship spent their time chewing large holes in the burlap bags. What they could not eat would leak out of the bags when they were unloaded, which resulted in a loss of weight.

Thus I was exposed almost from the very start of my job to the vagaries and hassles of an international import and export business. I found out years later that when purchasing unmentionable and officially non-existant scrap material from producers of prime resins, one way to lose the supplier is to make claims, justified or not. A producer has dozens of other buyers in the wings and will deal with the one who causes him the fewest problems. Therefore the rule of thumb in our business is never to make claims unless the discrepancy is so large as to involve us in an actual loss.

Over the years that followed, Mr.Stern prospered. He and his son Leonard had purchased thousands of acres of then worthless swamp land, known at that time as the "Jersey Flats," just across the Hudson River from New York.

The Jersey Flats was a huge, swampy wilderness, teeming with muskrats, herons and an endless variety of shore birds, not to mention turtles and myriad species of fish. This vast "worthless" wilderness, unbuildable with the technology of the sixties, became in the seventies the site of a multi-billion dollar development under the aegis of the Hartz Group. A vast array of huge warehouses, modern factories, Hilton and Sheraton hotels, shopping malls and even a complex of townhouses with marina facilities sprang up in a matter of a few years. This was followed by the constrtuction of the world-famous Meadowlands Sports Complex. All this is a far cry from ant eggs put into four ounce boxes — though the huge markup on them seems quite in line, when one considers the net worth today of Mr Stern's formerly almost worthless swampland. Mr. Stern's personal fortune alone now exceeds several billion dollars. Though less flamboyant, he is considered one of the archrivals of Donald Trump.

Far from being wealthy, my uncle paid me sixty-five dollars a week, which I considered very generous. It certainly was more adequate than what I had earned in Cleveland. In contrast to my Cleveland days, when I was fully occupied from Mon-

day to Friday at the hat factory and on weekends at the drugstore, I now worked only eight hours a day, Monday through Friday. Evenings and weekends were my own.

Living Boarding House Style

When I first moved to New York I rented one of the two rooms available in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Wolfinger, a German refugee couple. The other was rented to Mr.Erhardt, a bachelor, who was also a victim of Nazism.

Besides furnishing room and board to us two gentlemen, the Wolfingers increased their income by serving meals to an assortment of individuals who rented rooms in the neighborhood but had no access to home-cooked meals.

It was a rather mixed group of people that gathered nightly around Mrs. Wolfinger's fleshpots. All were refugees from the European catastrophe. The star attraction of the so called "dining table" was Miss Abigail Schneider, aged twenty-eight, who worked as a secretary for a millinery firm in the garment district. Miss Schneider was the object of male adoration in this group. She was admired especially by Mr. Erhardt a chemist, and Mr. Bloomfield, an accountant. Both constantly vied for her attention. Each night they tried to outmaneuver each other in an effort to sit next to her.

Competing as well was Mr. Metzger, (which means "butcher" in German), a portly gentleman in his mid-fifties. His name was most appropriate, since he claimed to have been the most famous butcher in Saarbrücken. Now, working as an elevator man, which he thought a considerable comedown, he felt it his duty to let everyone know that back in Saarbrücken he was really "society."

"Ah," he would exclaim to anyone who would listen, "every Friday we went to the opera, veddy, veddy bootiful." Mr. Erhardt, eager to impress Miss Schneider, would deprecatingly comment, "Opera in Saarbrücken, dat's not opera, dat's operetta. Bei uns in Berlin, ve have a *real* opera."

Mr. Metzger, rising to the challenge, his face now crimson, would cry, "Vat do you know — did you live in Saarbrücken? It vas an opera!"

Before the argument got out of hand Mrs. Wolfinger would say, "Mr. Metzger, why don't you have another slice of dat guten sauerbraten I made today?"

Mr. Metzger, certainly the argumentative type, was not so easily appeased: "Dat sauerbraten is *nothing*. Ven I marinated de meat in my Metzgerei in Saarbrücken, even de mayor's vife vould come all de vay from de Neustadt — *everybody* vould come."

Now Mr. Bloomfield might interject, "Ja, ja, in Frankfurt there vas a restaurant....." and then proceed at great length to explain what was served and what he ate there "in the good old days."

This would prompt Mr. Wolfinger to say defensively: "If vat you ate there was so gut, then vhy don't you go back there?"

Mrs. Wolfinger, bringing in another bowl of steaming dumplings, would interject, "Now vere on earth can you get dumplings like this!"

I was by far the youngest member of this 'table'. Finding the company much less than scintillating, I began to look elsewhere in New York for diversion.

Ultimately, I ended up with a folk-dance group meeting every Friday night at the Polish National Home on St. Marks Place in what is now the East Village. This group included an assortment of bohemians — mostly people who were active in the creative arts, such as painters, musicians and designers - and other characters considered unfit for the wartime army. As for me, this company suited me just fine.

Before long I had a nucleus of friends who shared my interests and philosophies. At the age of twenty-two I still harbored the illusion that a person can actually *do* something about the human condition or the political structure of a country or even replace the establishment with a more utopian system.



Greenwich Village Party, ca. 1946

Each Friday night after folk dancing we went to the Waldorf Cafeteria on the Bowery, then considered a hotbed of socialists, communists and even worse. There, until the wee hours of Saturday morning, we engaged in heated political discussions, which, like all such discussion, ended pretty much nowhere.

An Air Force Contract

Meanwhile, at work I was a fledgling plastics entrepreneur. My uncle put me in charge of administering a recent contract for the purchase of mixed plastic materials from the U.S. Army Air Force. Actually, the material consisted mostly of a new plastic called methyl methacrylate, an acrylic, commonly known as Lucite. It was used for airplane windows and cockpit enclosures. Each Air Force installation had its own repair shop. When replacements were installed, the old damaged windows and canopies were classified as "mixed plastic scrap," and thrown into a box, complete with hinges, fiberglass, and aluminum attachments. All this we had purchased at the ceiling price of $0.06 per pound.

When the first shipment of so called "mixed plastic scrap" arrived from a base in Waco, Texas, my uncle and I went to the warehouse to inspect it. Being a

greenhorn, I thought it all looked more or less the same. "This is not all plastic," my Uncle said, pointing out a piece of plastic which had an aluminum edge. "This is not plastic at all, and therefore the shipment must be considered contaminated with other than plastic material."

Since we paid for the scrap by weight our contract allowed us to deduct the weight of any extraneous, non-plastic material. The scrap consisted, of course, mostly of acrylic, but somebody had to determine the weight of the non-plastic material.

Even though I had been working for my uncle only a very short time, I already knew that the matter of contamination was of critical importance. In fact it was to haunt me for the next fifty years.

The administration of the acrylic-scrap contract was somewhat easier than the importation of ant eggs. At least, the rats did not eat our profit.

Everything was supposedly regulated by ceiling prices, which in turn were meant to forestall wartime profiteering, but the realities of life were a whole lot different. Regulations imposed by the control board, which gave my uncle and his competitors authority to set the pricing, included a ceiling price for scrap, but were mute about usable acrylic offcuts and pieces.

Practically half the material we received from the Air Force consisted of such offcuts. Primarily they were large cuttings, strips and pieces of acrylic, perfectly usable for small novelty items, though unsuitable for fabrication of windows or aircraft turrets.

Acrylic, virtually unknown to civilians, had enormous consumer appeal. In the wartime economy of 1944, any sort of luxury item was scarce. Employment was high, wages had tripled and quadrupled, people had money but nothing to spend it on. Acrylic had a sparkle and luster far superior to glass, and people were willing to pay a lot for a heart-shaped picture frame to hold the photo of a loved one serving in the armed forces.

My uncle taught me how to classify the pieces according to size and thickness. In a time when first-quality sheets of acrylic were unobtainable except for military production, the availability of these offcuts gave rise to a new small industry, the "loft shops." These were small undercapitalized factories, located in lofts and vacant stores. Primitively equipped with saws, ovens, forming jigs, and punch presses, they produced all kinds of acrylic novelties for a luxury- starved consumer market. In addition to picture frames in every conceivable size and shape such as hearts, fancy loops, even pianos with a glass vial for a solitary rose, they made ornamental buttons, transparent shoe heels, umbrella handles, and costume jewelry. Soon I was selling the acrylic offcuts at whatever the market would bear. There was no limit to what the fabricators could charge the public, which was glad to be able to buy something without using ration coupons. Thus, everyone was happy!

The acrylic offcuts comprised about 50 percent of the material received from the Air Force. Now there remained the task of selling the remaining half, consisting largely of formed acrylic aircraft canopies with non-plastic attachments. Once salvaged, this material could be converted into reclaimed methyl methacrylate (acrylic) monomer, the basic material used in casting acrylic sheets. To do this work required special cracking equipment; only the original producers, Röhm and Haas and DuPont, had this equipment at that time. Since monomer was also in short supply, these two firms gladly purchased this scrap at the established ceiling price.

From the Air Force side, the contract was administered by Captain Hendrick C. Johnson, working out of the Air Force headquarters in Rome, New York. We agreed with him that we should keep all this extraneous non-plastic material aside, and periodically an officer from Rome would come to visit us to determine the weight of the non-plastic components and certify the deduction.

While on the official records all this looked clear cut,nothing was further from the truth. We were supposed to issue a report at the end of each month, on the scrap we had purchased. This was impossible since the material came flooding in from all over the country, some from as far away as Hawaii, and often had not even reached us by the time the report on it was due. Also there was no practical way to estimate the weight of the worthless material, short of actually removing and weighing the contaminants at a high labor cost.

As today, there was no use then in trying to deal with a bureaucracy by changing the wording in the contract so that we could do what would have been logical, in this case removing the contaminants and deducting their actual weight when accurate figures were available. Since we could not remove the metal attachments before the monthly report was due — most certainly not on shipments which were still in transit — the only way to conform with the monthly reporting requirement was to simply estimate the weight, make a report and actually do the removal work whenever convenient.

Next to our factory in Brooklyn was a dilapidated old brick building which we called "the warehouse." There, on my uncle's instructions, all questionable material was dumped to await the monthly inspection by someone from the office in Rome. "Let them decide what weight to deduct for this," he told me.

Captain Johnson had a girlfriend in New York. As it turned out, he looked forward to his monthly visits to "Brooklyn" to check the weight, verify our findings and approve the deductions. His routine was to call us from New York when he got in. "This is Captain Johnson," he used to say in the beginning. Later on it was just "Henry from Rome." Then he would give his instructions: "I am in the Hotel Warwick, Room No. 420. If my office should call, you just tell them that I

am in the warehouse checking weights. Then call me; if there is no answer leave a message at the front desk."

Periodically, when he wanted to come during the middle of the month for whatever personal reasons, he asked us to write a letter requesting that he come soon because we were "running out of space." He usually stayed in New York three days, and at the end of that period would pay us a hasty visit, ask us for the papers we had prepared, sign them and flee to his base in Rome.

It was up to us to estimate the amount of weight to be deducted from the huge pile of acrylic windows, canopies and the like, which filled an entire loft. Since nobody seemed to care what that weight really was, I made sure not to short change our company.

Claude Learns That Folk Dancing Is Not Important

Notwithstanding my passion for things other than plastics, I sensed that my uncle was genuinely fond of me, as I was of him. I was always aware that while proclaiming that I was absolutely a "good-for-nothing", my uncle gave unstintingly of his time and taught me as much as he could. He discussed with me all major decisions concerning the company, and from these discussions I learned that running a business involved a whole lot more than just buying goods at a low price and selling them at a profit. "Connections" were just one of the most invaluable assets of a business, and they had little to do with actual business transactions. They had something to do with friendship, giving advice unrelated to business matters, and being generous with your time. Consequently I had to make some sacrifices, like having to give up an occasional evening or weekend to attend a meeting, show, or conference which my uncle thought important.



Folk dancing was not important.

No company can function without PR — public relations. One day, I believe it was in 1944, my uncle told me: "This Friday is the annual dinner of the United Jewish Appeal, given by Mr. Seidman of Ace Plastics, president of the United States Society of Button Manufacturers. I want you to go with me."

I was not enthusiastic. Friday was my folk dance night at the Polish National Home. Sacrosanct! Nothing could be allowed to interfere with that, especially since I had fallen in love with a sixteen-year-old Russian beauty by the name of AnnaLee. She always reserved our favorite dance, the "Swedish hambo," for me.

Of course, I knew my limits! I had no choice and could only glumly nod my head, signifying that I would attend. My uncle's remark — "Don't dress like a slob; wear a jacket and tie" — didn't make things any better.

The dinner was given in a banquet room of the Plaza Hotel, New York's finest. Cocktails were served. I opted for ginger ale. The crowd was made up of business people in their forties and fifties - old men by my standards then - talking about investments, cars, business deals and so forth. I couldn't contribute anything. I just stood next to my uncle and listened.

The food was unimaginatively standard fare: shrimp cocktail, salad, roast beef, potatoes, limp vegetables, and peach melba.

Just when I thought this dreadful affair was about over, someone knocked a spoon against a glass, commanding the attention of the diners. It was Mr. Schluessel, of Streamline Plastics, who, after a few witty comments and thanks for the lovely dinner given by Mr. Seidman, introduced Mr. McCowan, who would say a few words on behalf of the United Jewish Appeal.

Mr. McCowan, an Irishman, was a professional fundraiser hired by the United Jewish Appeal. He proceeded to give an impassioned speech intended to make everyone present feel guilt-stricken and uncomfortable. The gist of the message was that while we were here, fat cats all of us, were dining in style in a banquet room at the Plaza, American boys were dying on the European battlefields and Jews all over Europe were being herded into extermination camps.

"How can you sit here, enjoying your roast beef," Mr. McCowan almost screamed, "when there is so much suffering of your fellow men, Jews in particular?" Pause. Then, almost with tears in his eyes, Mr. McCowan continued: "There is only one way, the only way, you can help. You must donate money! If last year you gave five thousand dollars, this year you must give ten thousand. Yes - you too must make a sacrifice - you cannot sit here smugly bemoaning the state of the world without doing your share."

Now, eloquently in conclusion: "I know your hearts are in the right place. I know that you are anxious to do what you can from your end. I have faith in you, I know, deep in my heart that you are good and generous, and so I call on... (here Mr. McCowan fumbled for a list among the papers in front of him) ... eh, excuse me — Mr. Seidman! Mr.Seidman, last year you contributed five thousand dollars to our cause. How much will it be this year?"

Mr. Seidman deprecatingly said in a clear voice, " Seven thousand." After a moment of stunned silence, there came a thunderous applause.

Mr. McCowan, consulting his list, now called on the gentleman sitting next to Mr. Seidman: "Mr. Fish, last year you contributed twenty-five hundred. How much is it to be this year?" Mr. Fish responded, "Thirty-five-hundred." The audience clapped.

I was making eighty dollars a week at the time. It was quite a respectable salary for the period and sufficent to meet the needs of a single person in New York, but not enough for me to save a lot of money.

As Mr. McCowan called on each person, and the space between myself and the person called on grew ever smaller, I grew both hot and cold under my collar. No one had given less than a couple of thousand dollars and inevitably my turn would come soon. What was I going to do?

I whispered to my uncle, "I am going to give twenty-five dollars." My uncle whispered back fiercely," You can't. Don't dishonor our company! You have to donate a lot more."

Then came his turn: "Mr. Anton Bamberger, you donated a thousand dollars last year; this year you must give at least three thousand," Mr. McCowan coaxed my uncle. He sheepishly acquiesced.

I was next. I knew that my twenty-five dollar donation would go over like a lead balloon. Then I heard Mr.McCowan say, "We have a new member in our ranks, Mr. Claude Bamberger. As a refugee from Germany, we all know that he will be most generous. How much will it be?"

My uncle stepped on my toe at this point and whispered, "Five hundred dollars; I'll pay." And thus the honor of the Bambergers was preserved. However this five-hundred-dollar donation came to haunt me over the next decade or so, during which I received numerous dunning calls and letters urging me to do better than in previous years.

An Expansion In Molding Powder Production — *Ampacet*

Acquisition of the acrylic scrap contract was not the only reason why my uncle decided about that time to abandon the highly troublesome and unprofitable ant egg business. By now he had started to supply Mr. Stern of Hartz Mountain with molding powder to be used in the production of feeding trays, water baths and other small inexpensive items needed for the comfort of our feathered, furry and reptilian friends.

While my uncle had been producing reprocessed cellulose acetate using a rubber rolling mill, he was catapulted in mid-1941 into a big expansion in that area by a quirk of fate. He received a visit from three gentlemen: Herbert Preiss,

Benjamin Kretkowski, and a fellow by the name of Bernie Peterson. They told him that for some years they had been working for a Mr. Hoffman, who operated a small company called American Molding Powder Corporation. This company was located on North Ninth Street in Brooklyn, just about twelve blocks from our office. Mr. Hoffman had just died.

His company had originally produced cellulose acetate compounds from virgin acetate flake. When the use of acetate flake was restricted to war-related applications, Mr. Hoffman, a chemist, had found a process whereby he could convert acetate rayon waste resulting from the production of ladies' underwear into a usable general purpose acetate molding compound. American Molding Powder had developed a thriving business producing a reprocessed acetate molding powder from this unrestricted source of raw material. While there was an official ceiling price for virgin acetate made from flake which in turn was sold primarily to firms with defense contracts, there was no ceiling price for reprocessed acetate made from textile waste and other scrap.

Mr. Preiss said Mr. Hoffman's widow was liquidating the company. He proposed that my uncle should acquire it, as he and his colleagues didn't have the money. They wanted to be partners and would supply the technical know-how while my uncle would finance the venture. My uncle immediately recognized this as an opportunity to expand his fledgling scrap business. He agreed to purchase the company, reserving 75 percent of the shares for himself and 25 percent for Preiss, Kretkowski and Peterson.

Since my uncle was not in a position to purchase the building in which American Molding Powder was housed, he leased a large old warehouse on Hewes Street in Brooklyn, to which the entire operation was moved. Lacking extruders, Banburys, and other newly developed sophisticated compounding equipment, American Molding Powder had only a couple of ordinary rubber rolling mills, and a Ball and Jewel grinder.

Sometimes seemingly complicated techniques are amazingly simple. Hoffman's "secret" process for producing acetate molding powder fell into that category. Just throw the textile waste onto the heated rolls of a standard rubber rolling mill, where it melted into a doughlike mass. Add a minimal amount of chemical lubricant called plasticizer, to prevent the mass from sticking to the rolls.Add some pigment to obtain the desired color. When the batch evenly coated the rolls of the mill, the two mill operators made a large cut across the doughlike mixture and, wearing asbestos gloves, pulled it off and placed it on an aluminum covered table. Before the mixture hardened, it was quickly cut into segments of about one square foot each. While these cooled, a new batch was prepared on the mill. Eventually the acetate "biscuits" were ground in the Ball and Jewel grinder. The granules fell directly into a fiber drum placed beneath the grinder

and the "molding powder," consisting of rough-edged granules much like small pebbles or rock salt, was ready for shipment.

My uncle registered the trade name 'Ampacet' — American Molding Powder Acetate — for this product of doubtful quality, a far cry from the Ampacet of today, the world's largest producer of color concentrates, with factories all over the globe. But I am getting ahead of my story.

During the war years, Ampacet acetate was sold primarily to molders, favorite customers of my uncle because their credit was good and they paid the best price. These molders primarily produced combs, brushes, cheap housewares, toys and other inexpensive consumer items in short supply during the wartime years, Like the acrylic picture frames, these were among the first thermoplastic plastic consumer items available and were much coveted by the American public.

Being still very young, I was understandably concerned not only with my career but also with finding enough time to "do my own thing." Skiing, camping and mountain climbing were activities my uncle viewed as "nonproductive and frivolous." He heartily disapproved every time I asked for an extra day off to prolong a holiday weekend. Above all, he could not understand why I preferred skiing or mountain climbing to reading *Modern Plastics* magazine on summer Sunday afternoons.



"All he thinks about is skiing."

"Ach, Klaus," he would exclaim to anyone willing to listen, "he has no head for business: all he thinks about is skiing!" This was not so far from the truth, and in fact, in many ways things are not so different now — fifty years later. He never realized that I readily absorbed everything that was happening around me, even if I did not read *Modern Plastics* to learn about the latest developments. After all, *he* did the reading and in his way communicated this knowledge to me.

It was during that fateful moment in my personal history that I embarked on a calamitous part-time venture called: the Alpine Ski Club.

Chapter Seven

The Alpine Ski Club Disaster
1948

Like the plastics industry, skiing, camping and hiking were in their infancy in the United States. These activities were essentially restricted to the Boy Scouts and to high society. Outdoor equipment was available from only two sources: Abercrombie and Fitch, for high society and the very rich, and Army and Navy surplus stores for the rest of the world.

During and after the war a few adventurous bicycle shops began to stock skiing and tennis equipment. Back in my Cleveland days, the skiers had made a sort of a social life by congregating during winter evenings in Lee's Bicycle and Ski Shop. Old customs die hard, and in early 1944 I became a habitué of the Telemark Ski and Tennis Emporium, a hole-in-the-wall store on West Fifty-fourth Street in Manhattan, despite its grand name. Soon I was a friend of Bill Brentwood, the owner, who had the idea of organizing weekend ski trips to Vermont's wintry countryside.

He chartered the bus, made arrangements for discounts at hotels and ski slopes, and supplied the customers with complete ski outfits. "One phone call takes care of everything, even free ski lessons," his ads read. For lack of a qualified ski teacher, he hired me. He also hired Irene, a girlfriend of mine who, despite her rotund appearance (she was only five feet three and weighed about 175 pounds) was a nimble skier. She played the guitar and had an enormous repertory of folk songs. Her voice was as clear as a New England village church bell on a sunny winter morning. Our remuneration was a more or less "free" ski weekend in Vermont plus five dollars in pocket money.

The buses left at about seven on a Friday night, winding their way slowly northward on icy two-lane highways, to reach their New England destination usually about two in the morning. Breakfast was at seven, then it was on to the slopes, where I would spend the better part of two hours getting everyone's skis adjusted. By the time I fitted one person, the one I had previously fitted had already fallen and didn't know how to get back into his ski bindings. Finally we would be ready to start the snowplow lessons. There were more lessons in the early afternoon; then it was back to our hotel and dinner, followed by an evening spent singing with Irene or attending a square dance at a nearby grange hall.

Our "free" ski weekend allowed us little or no time to do any skiing on our own. We were kept constantly busy cajoling the reluctant, often cold and uncomfortable, clientele into "enjoying" their weekend, for which they had paid hard-earned money.

In the beginning, Bill Brentwood and Barbara, his girlfriend, went along, but toward the end of the first season they just put me and Irene in charge of the trip and enjoyed a weekend on their own somewhere else.

At the end of the 1946-47 ski season, Irene and I felt that we actually didn't need the Telemark people to run these trips and decided to organize our own

weekend ski trips the following winter. With the help of a law-student friend, Bob Kantrowitz, we set up a partnership called the Alpine Ski Club for the sole purpose of operating all-expense ski trips. Since we had no money to compensate Bob for his legal work, we offered him a partnership in this promising enterprise. Foreseeing all kinds of lawsuits pertaining to broken limbs, broken romances, and accidents on Vermont's slippery roads, Irene thought it would be great to have a lawyer as a partner.

During the summer, Irene and I scoured the countryside for romantic inns nestled among the foothills of the Green Mountains. We discovered to our amazement that there were no hotels or inns which would set aside eighteen or twenty rooms for a bus tour. Indeed, there were hardly any places that had more than ten or twelve rooms, and these few were loath to commit their entire inn to an unknown company for the Christmas/New Year period, the most important holiday of the season. Furthermore, we discovered that ski areas with adequate lift facilities were very scarce, so the nearby innkeepers had all the business they could handle and wouldn't even talk to us. Arranging transportation was difficult too. Bus companies were hesitant to promise us up-to-date, modern, reliable equipment, leery about chartering their better buses for expeditions on New England's wintry roads with a bunch of wild, unpredictable skiers.

For accommodations, our best bet appeared to be the somewhat decrepit-looking hotels of almost defunct industrial towns such as Brattleboro, North Adams, and Pittsfield. These establishments had fallen on hard times, and were large enough to accommodate a busload of people. That they were not located anywhere near a ski area was beside the point.

All this was a far cry from the picturesque, romantic setting described in our newly printed brochure: "After a day of vigorous exercise on the slopes of the Green Mountains, we return to our small country inn nestled under a blanket of snow in a fairy-tale Vermont village. Evenings are spent square dancing, having a hay-ride under a star-sprinkled wintry sky or just lazing around the fireplace at the inn, with singing accompanied by Irene's guitar."

That first summer, in our search for something comparable to a country inn, we stumbled across a small roadside building with a wooden shingle in front of it that read," Marlboro House. A Wayfarer's Refuge Since 1878." The inn was located on a mountaintop not far from Hogback Mountain, a new ski area with a T-bar lift. Upon our entrance, Irene and I were ushered into the living room by a Mr. White. He told us that he had recently retired as an executive of one of the major oil companies, and had just acquired the inn, which would be his hobby in retirement.

"We are from the Alpine Ski Tours," I said, flashing a calling card with a miniature skier making tracks down an unseen slope; "you have heard of us, of course!" Mr. White nodded, being unwilling to confess his ignorance.

"As you know, we are operating ski trips throughout New England, and we are presently looking for space for thirty-six people in the Hogback area for the forthcoming New Year's weekend. Do you think you can help us out?" Mr. White thought he could, but wanted to know what we were prepared to pay. "Normally we pay $7.50 per day, including breakfast and dinner," I said, quoting the rates which I knew Telemark had been paying the previous year.

Mr. White said, "Our regular rate is $8.50 per person. We serve very large, wonderful home-cooked meals, family style, and everyone can have as many helpings as they wish."

I replied, "Normally we get 10 percent off the regular rate, and free accommodations for a staff of three."

Mr. White thought this was reasonable, and we agreed that our group would come for a five-day weekend, starting with New Year's Eve, which happened to fall on a Wednesday that year.

Mr. White then showed us the accommodations. There were only five rooms in the main house. On a slope close by were five flimsy-looking "winterized" summer cottages, which could accommodate ten more people, ". . . and then we will have space for sixteen people in the dormitory," Mr. White exclaimed enthusiastically, pointing with a sweeping motion of his right arm to what looked like a construction site some five hundred feet down the hill. We descended to have a closer look. Mr. White, scrambling among the building materials scattered all around us, described the layout of his future dormitory and assured us, with utmost confidence, "It is only September now. The contractor says the building will be completed well before the holidays."

Not being wise to the real world, wanting to believe everything Mr. White promised and for lack of an alternative, Irene and I nodded agreement. Mr. White, who didn't know us from Adam, trusted our claims implicitly for the same reason. This combination proved absolutely lethal.

Ready to advertise the ski trips, we now needed an office and a telephone. The office was no problem. My mother had by now resigned her position with Mr. Tlach in Cleveland, and she and I had bought a small house in Bellerose, Queens. I persuaded my mother to act as our Alpine sales agent, answering the telephone at this Bellerose "office." But because of postwar shortages of telephone equipment, we had only a party line shared by several parties. The number of times the phone rang indicated which party the caller was trying to reach. A neighbor sharing the line could listen in and even interrupt your conversation, asking you to cut it short. This would not do if we were to sell ski trips.

To get a private line one had to prove to the telephone company that one had some sort of business. In due time, while I was working in plastics in Brooklyn, a representative of the telephone company came to see my mother to make sure that we had a legitimate business.

He must have been impressed with my charming mother, who raved about her son. "He is a veteran," she declared, "who was in the ski troops, he is a crack skier and a patriot." The man listened patiently to the lady, who obviously was very biased about her son, but after a while he remarked, "All this is very well, Mrs. Bamberger, but what about the window drapes?" Now my mother was perplexed."What about my drapes? They were just cleaned!" she responded somewhat peevishly, not knowing what the state of her drapes had to do with our application for a private phone..

"Excuse me," said the telephone man, "I didn't question their cleanliness, I mean . . . what I want to say is . . . about this business of yours, the window drapes."

"I don't know what you are talking about!" my mother said. "My drapes are fine, and my son is working in plastics and wants to do these winter 'drips.'"

"Ah, pardon me," the telephone man exclaimed, "now I understand. My girl must have misunderstood your accent on the phone, it's *winter trips*, not *window drapes*. Well, we can only grant a private line to people who have a full-time business; but, Mrs. Bamberger," he smiled, "I can allow one here, since you will be doing this business full time."

These were still the innocent days when bureaucracy was minimal, payoffs at the lower level were practically unknown, and people were both honest and human.

Next we designed a brochure giving a glowing description of our New Year's weekend trip. Five days, everything included for $54.95. We advertised in the *New York Times*, and left our leaflets in every ski shop, on university bulletin boards, in public libraries, and wherever else likely customers might see them.

The result was phenomenal! The phone never stopped ringing. The idea of going "skiing" without having to worry about transportation over wintry roads, accommodations, how to get to the slopes, where to get skis (never mind putting them on and —God forbid — careening unsupervised down a snow-covered mountain!), had tremendous public appeal.

My mother's phone personality, plus what people surmised was a genuine "Alpine" accent, accomplished miracles. Deposit checks kept pouring in over the next couple of months. People rarely asked probing questions, mainly because they couldn't fathom in their wildest imagination what they were in for. For instance, they did not realize that they might be compelled to share a double bed with a stranger. The idea that the bath and toilet might not be in the same building as the bedroom, but rather across an icy catwalk one might have to negotiate in subzero temperatures in the middle of the night, never occurred to anyone. It all just sounded romantic and exhilarating, a barrel of fun.

My mother's greatest coup was booking Dr. Schwimmer and his Viennese family of five. They actually canceled their New Year's reservations at what was

then the most elegant hotel in the northeast, the Eastern Slopes Inn in North Conway, New Hampshire, where the rate for one day was what we charged for the entire five-day package, including ski rental and ski lessons.

Meanwhile, we stayed in touch by telephone with Mr. White, at Marlboro House. In early December he reported that work on the dormitory was "a little behind schedule," but assured us that it would be ready for the holidays.

By the time the great holiday weekend grew close, our bookings exceeded thirty-six persons. We could not accommodate the extra people on our bus, so we suggested that they take the scheduled bus of the Vermont Transit Line, with a taxi for the final leg of the trip. We would deduct the cost of transportation from our price. Mr. White thought there would be no problem in stuffing an additional ten people into the dormitory, whose construction, he assured us, was in its final stages. "All that is missing is the heat and running water," he announced optimistically, as if these were extra luxuries in Vermont's subzero temperatures, to be granted at a whim. In any event, there was nothing we could do about that situation but pray.

The day of departure arrived! We had arranged with the Alpine Ski Shop on Lexington Avenue to supply the rental equipment and to allow our bus to depart from the street in front of the shop. We were scheduled to leave promptly at five that Wednesday afternoon, so as to arrive just before midnight for the big New Year's celebration Mr. White and his staff had promised us. But the bus, chartered from an obscure outfit in New Haven called Eagle Transportation, didn't show up until around seven.

While waiting, our guests were all jammed into the small ski shop, the overflow spilling into the cold foyer. To keep the crowd from complaining, Irene frantically strummed her guitar and made everyone sing "Old MacDonald Had a Farm." Our group consisted mostly of single professional people aged twenty to thirty, pretty evenly divided as to sex, plus one family of five, the Schwimmers.

The bus finally came, just in time to prevent a mutiny - after all, how long can one keep a crowd singing "Old MacDonald"? Then, after calling Mr. White to tell him we'd be a little late, we were off to enjoy what most of us expected to be a relaxing weekend.

All went well until about 11:30 p.m. Most of the passengers were asleep when suddenly terrifying noises began to emanate from the engine as the bus climbed the first foothills of the Green Mountains. Then, after some coughing and wheezing, it began going ever slower, finally rolling to a stop. The driver said with assurance, "Engine is dead as a doornail." There we were, stranded on New Year's Eve somewhere between Lexington Avenue and nowhere. Outside, we saw nothing but snowy woods. A single lonely light shone in the distance.

The driver and I headed for the light, and fortunately it turned out to be from a farmhouse with a telephone. The farmer and his wife were listening to a radio broadcast of the New Year's celebration on Times Square and the music of Duke Ellington's band at the Plaza Hotel.

When we reached the owner of Eagle Transportation, he said that it would be impossible to find a mechanic in Vermont at that hour of the night, let alone on New Year's Eve. He proposed to send a replacement bus from New Haven "as soon as I can find a driver." I calculated that New Haven was a hundred miles to the south, so this would take at least three hours even if a driver could be located at that hour on New Year's Eve. However, what choice was there? Irene and I thought this an ominous beginning for the first Alpine Ski Club expedition.

The ensuing three and a half hours are better left to the imagination. No amount of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" helped. But somehow we all survived the wait, and when the bus replacement finally drew up alongside our disabled machine, a cheer from the crowd broke the silence of the New Year's night. Everyone scrambled to help transfer the baggage and skis from one bus to the other.

We reached Marlboro House around four in the morning. Mr. White and his staff regaled everyone with hot chocolate and doughnuts. Our overflow customers, who had arranged their own transportation, had reached the inn hours earlier and were fast asleep. They had appropriated the very best rooms, and preferred customers, those who had made reservations many weeks before, like Dr. Schwimmer and his family, had to be relegated to the dormitory, which still had no bathroom facilities. At this hour no one had the strength to argue, and we promised that we would sort it all out in the morning, after a few hours of sleep.

I shall never forget the nightmare of New Year's Day, January 1, 1948. Bleary-eyed, I was kept busy on the slopes, adjusting bindings and trying to get on with the promised ski lessons. This was a lost cause: I would put three or four people on their skis, and while I was busy helping the next group, the first ones, having "skied" down a mild twenty-foot incline, would be lying at the bottom of the hill in a helter-skelter heap of poles, skis, and arms and legs, screaming for help. It took the better part of that day just to teach people to put on their skis and stand on them.

Meanwhile, back at the inn, Irene was busy rearranging the accommodations, moving people, without their knowledge, in and out of different spaces. She was able to find in Wilmington, six miles down the road, a lovely bed-and-breakfast place which had six vacant rooms. A miracle! She booked all of them and transferred the Schwimmers and some others to this new location. Any-

thing was better than a primitive dormitory, with the nearest bathroom in the main house, five hundred feet up a steep hill.

Since the inn was not meant to accommodate more than twenty people, our party had to be fed in two shifts. The twelve people lodged in Wilmington were supposed to be ferried back and forth by our bus. Although exhausted, we were satisfied that we had done all we could. Everything went well that evening and even on Friday, the next day. Bob, our lawyer partner back in New York, gave us moral support by telephone and offered to come up and help. Irene and I discouraged that idea; under no circumstances did we want him to come up with his family, further burdening the overstrained accommodations.

On the next day, Saturday, all hell broke loose. Between Friday night and Saturday morning the temperature dropped to 15 degrees below zero. Lacking experience, Mr. White had not anticipated such low temperatures, and no precautionary measures had been taken, so the entire plumbing system froze. None of the bathrooms worked, and of course no Vermont plumber could be found on a holiday weekend, especially for an outsider like Mr. White. All he could do was arrange to have water for both cooking and personal needs brought in by tank truck, at an outrageous price.

During breakfast that morning, I heard Mrs. White grumble that it had been a mistake to offer food "family style." As she was frying a mountain of bacon, she mumbled, "I never saw people eat this much — these are not human beings, they are animals." No, I corrected her, they were skiers, and skiers were known to have great appetites.

In a very bad situation someone always says, "Cheer up, things could be worse." I was thinking of that when indeed things did get worse that evening. We had already had bad luck on the slopes that day, with several severe sprains and one broken ankle in our crowd of novice skiers.

Because of the impossible water situation at Marlboro House, Irene had arranged with the bed-and-breakfast place in Wilmington to allow all of our group access to their facilities. While the first shift ate dinner, we would shuttle the second shift over there to use the bathrooms and take showers. Then we would switch, taking the people who had finished eating to Wilmington, while the second shift, which included those occupying rooms at the bed and breakfast, had dinner. To get a few laughs, we called the shuttle the Hydrant Run.

Irene and I were amazed that up to this point there had been no movement among our customers to tar and feather us and ride us out of town on a rail. Quite to the contrary, everybody thought that these calamities were a great adventure. Who knows, maybe in those early days of the sport, people almost expected as much. It also helped that in our group the men and women were about

evenly divided. A number of romances were in the making, and who cares about discomfort when one is in love!

On Saturday evening, after the first shift had eaten an enormous quantity of roast beef and mashed potatoes and had been dispatched on the Hydrant Run, two even more terrible things happened. The bus broke down in Wilmington, and the Whites ran out of food. I was helping out in the kitchen when Mrs. White exclaimed, "I have no more roast beef!" I looked at some gristly, fatty remnants on the carving board and said "I think we can get two more portions out of that." I gathered up the unsightly mess, arranged it on two plates, and delicately covered it with garnish and a sprig of parsley. A few minutes after the waitress had disappeared into the dining room, I heard a crash; then Dr. Schwimmer's voice loudly exclaimed " Now I have had enough! This is not food! This is only good for a pig to eat!" (In his excitement he used the German word *Schwein.*) Irene and I rushed to the rescue. Looking at Dr. and Mrs. Schwimmer's plates, I exclaimed in dismay "There must be some mistake! I fully agree. We will make arrangements for something else." After a hasty, whispered conference with Mr. White, he produced a piece of steak from his "private collection." I went out into the dining room and asked Mr. Schwimmer: " Would you like a steak? How would you like it? Medium rare? Well done?" What human could withstand such charm? Dr. Schwimmer was satisfied and said: "Rare to medium will be all right."

After dinner that evening. Irene led the crowd in singing rounds and playing parlor games, while I went over the accounts with Mr. White. He proclaimed that he could not break even at the price he had quoted, saying that he had miscalculated the rate at which "those people" consumed food. Just then the phone rang "It's for you," Mr. White said, handing me the receiver. "Bad news," came a voice which I recognized as that of our bus driver, "the engine blew a piston, and the bus is as dead as a doornail." This seemed to me to be his favorite expression. He further informed me that he had called his boss, who promised to send yet another bus, but it wouldn't be arriving before the next morning. Now what to do? The Marlboro House occupants were in Wilmington; the bed-and-breakfast guests, after their late dinner, were at Marlboro House. Hurriedly we arranged for two taxis to come up from Brattleboro fifteen miles away,and asked our guests to be patient until a shuttle exchange could be made late that night. The thought of having to face Dr. Schwimmer, whose room was in Wilmington, with this latest calamity was not appealing.

However, by then, the crowd had become by then so fatalistic that each new crisis was considered just another challenge, to be met bravely and with ingenuity. This was a New Year's weekend no one in this crowd would ever forget!

In any event, this was the last night; the end of the long weekend was finally approaching. When the next day dawned, it was to a freezing rain. No one was in the mood for skiing, so we decided to head for home in the relatively new-looking, clean bus which had arrived early that morning. To most, the bus looked a lot more inviting than the disheveled rooms they had been occupying.

Once homeward bound, everyone was cheerful. All knew that they had gotten their money's worth of adventure, and they felt so sorry for Irene and me that someone proposed to take up a collection to subsidize the final dinner, at the Yankee Pedlar Inn, which we had offered as part of our package. But despite all the troubles, we had actually incurred little extra expense, since we did not have to pay Mr. White for the unoccupied spaces in his waterless dormitory. So we declined, stating that what we needed more than money was the good will of our clients, as this had been our very first trip. Curiously enough, we had made many new friends during that weekend, and in subsequent years, many people were referred to us by our customers of this first trip — although I am not sure whether they recommended us to their best friends or their worst enemies. I don't remember any actual repeats except by one party, the Schwimmers. As Mrs. Schwimmer told me some years later, "One day in November, when Dr. Schwimmer came home from the office, I said to him, 'Look, Jim, I found this brochure in the library. It sounds wonderful! So I booked with these people and canceled the Eastern Slopes Inn.' My husband protested, saying, 'How can you book with those people if you don't know anything about them?' So I replied, 'The lady who answered the phone was so charming, and she is the mother of the young man who runs these trips. These people are our type. Anyway, what can happen in five days?'" Then she laughed and said, "No one could imagine what could happen; everything happened and more." After a reflective pause she had an afterthought: "No amount of money could ever buy a trip like that; my kids — if not I and my husband — had the time of their lives, and that's why I want to book space for them next weekend."

There is a postscript to this adventure. This fateful New Year's trip was the only one on which the partnership made any money. We cleared $500 — a fortune in those days. In subsequent years, as skiing became more popular, we found that we had a lot of competition and endless problems. It was long before the days of artificial snow, and the snow conditions in New England were erratic at best. Sometimes we found ourselves with a busload of people, but no snow in the vicinity of our hotel. Other times there would be plenty of snow but not enough people to fill a bus, and of course there were times when we had snow and people, but couldn't get a bus.

After this trip, Irene and I decided that we did not need Bob as a partner. He was busy with law school and did not have time to pull his weight. So we

figured that we would buy his share. He had put $100 into the venture at the beginning, and we offered to pay that back, plus $150, which was a third of the profit made on the trip, giving him a return of 150 percent on his investment.

Bob was crushed. He didn't want a return on his investment; he wanted to be part of our venture. The argument seesawed back and forth, and finally, when Bob saw that we really didn't want him, he argued that the Alpine Ski Club was now a business with a reputation (what kind of reputation?) and the market price of his share in this new and thriving enterprise should be $500. Irene and I thought at the time that we could make that kind of money on any weekend, and quickly and mistakenly agreed. Years later, when Bob became my company lawyer and one of my best friends, he and I had a standing joke between us. On many occasions he would say with glee, "The only one who ever made any money on your ski trips was me!"

Following this misadventure Irene and I tried to make some money with our Alpine Ski Club Tours. We even branched out and attempted to run something called "Alpine Music Tours," arranging week-end tours to the Tanglewood Music Festival and Jacob Pillow Dance Festival during the summer season. Trying to combine any number of variables in this business, largely depending on the weather, we never again managed to make ends meet.

The lesson I learned from the ski business was the realization that if I really wanted to ski, the one way to do it was to make money elsewhere and join ski trips run by others. So in the end I was content to work for my uncle in plastic scrap, and pay for real ski holidays out of my earnings.

Chapter Eight

An Advanced Course in Business Administration

1946 - 1950

Plastics In The Postwar Era

All along, scientists and chemists were at work developing new plastic compounds with ever better physical properties. As time went by, offshoots of basic PVC, polystyrene and polyethylene, appeared in the form of ABS, high-density polyethylene, polypropylene and other new materials.

In 1946, when polystyrene was first available for consumer products, it rapidly replaced the thermosetting materials hitherto used for radio cabinets and appliances. It also made inroads in the houseware and toy industries by largely replacing more expensive wood and metal. Although very attractive because of its high luster, it was very brittle and broke easily. To improve the quality, the producers first added rubber to the original polystyrene compound to give it more strength. Still later they developed an even better high-impact compound by combining acrylonitrile, butadiene and styrene to produce ABS, a break-resistant material from which most appliance housings are produced.

Perhaps most spectacular was the development of high-density polyethylene spearheaded by Phillips Petroleum, Standard Oil of Indiana and W. R. Grace and Co. Giving the soft, pliable polyethylene film some rigidity, this new material revolutionized packaging, since it could be made into blow-molded bottles, which largely replaced the heavier, more cumbersome glass containers. It also made an immediate impact on the toy industry; in 1956, 150 million pounds were required for the production of the Hula Hoop alone.

Acrylic too went through an evolution. Competing with high priced polycarbonate, a multitude of modified acrylic molding compounds were developed for products with good impact strength and weatherabiltiy.

The decade from l960 to 1970 could be considered the age of engineering plastics. New materials — polysulfone, ethylene vinyl acetate (EVA), and polyester, just to name a few — made their appearance on the market. Acetal resin made headlines as a substitute for nylon. Polyester was found to be more suitable than PVC for bottling soft drinks.

Almost every month new applications were publicized. Plastic was found more suitable than steel for high-pressure pipes, and as noted largely replaced metal, glass and other heavier materials. In the medical, chemical, electrical, and textile fields plastics began to replace raw materials which had been in use for many generations.

Every time a new plastic material appeared on the market, producers recommended it as a substitute for items already made from other plastic compounds. It was only in the 1960s that a maturing industry recognized which of the dozens of new plastic materials were best suited for specific industrial or consumer products.

Plastic Scrap Expands As Well

Long before a new compound is commercially produced and publicly accepted, the producers begin to make known its existence and propound its merits for certain applications. Once the compound has been accepted,

it takes another five years or so for secondary materials and scrap to accumulate in sufficient quantities to be of interest to the recycling industry.

Until the mid-fifties, the impact of chemical waste materials on the environment was not a consideration. Most producers of plastic materials opted to landfill their thermoplastic offgrade compounds and scrap materials rather than sell them, for fear that this material would find its way into their prime markets and further denigrate the reputation of plastic goods. During the war and some years following it, items made from plastic compounds were often considered "cheap" substitutes for products made from better known and more conventional materials. It was not until the mid-fifties that plastic, now freely available, was accepted as a viable material in virtually every industry serving the consumer market.

By 1946 my uncle's firm, the A. Bamberger Corporation, was recognized as one of the most prominent plastic-scrap dealers and reprocessors in the United States. During the war the few firms which had tried to get a foothold as dealers in plastic scrap had a very hard time to obtain sufficient materials on which to build a business.

Now along with my duties in the handling of acrylic scrap, I was given the responsibility of buying cellulose acetate and butyrate sheet scrap used for transparent packaging. This material came in small quantities in bulky unground form. It was ground and checked for contamination in our Brooklyn warehouse, and then resold to producers of reprocessed molding compounds. Our affiliated firm, American Molding Powder, received first choice as a favored customer.

Next came PVC and polyethylene scrap, which began to appear on the market in ever-increasing quantities. It came in the form of soft, pliable cuttings accumulated during the manufacture of upholstered furniture, shower curtains, and especially inflatable toys and swimming pools, items which had become wildly popular after the war. The scrap was usually collected by textile waste dealers, who in turn sold it to companies like the A. Bamberger Corporation.

Headquarters, A. Bamberger Corp., Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn



Soon rigid PVC sheet began to be used as a cheaper substitute for high- priced cellulose acetate in packaging and playing cards. It conquered the record industry, in which the traditional phonograph records



Staff Christmas Party, A. Bamberger Corp., 1946

were made from highly breakable shellac, by introducing nonbreakable, long-playing vinyl records.

We purchased scrap from all these operations and brought it to our factory in Brooklyn, where it was checked for contamination and reground. Once classified and consolidated into larger lots, it was sold to producers of second-quality vinyl records, manufacturers of waterproof coating solutions and cements, maufacturers of secondary film for use in the production of cheap handbags, belts, flexible garden hose and the like.

After the war, A. Bamberger' continued to manufacture reprocessed cellulose acetate molding compounds from textile waste and cellulose acetate sheet scrap.

As color concentrates did not yet exist, American Molding purchased its first extrusion machine, for the production of colored virgin polystyrene and cellulose acetate molding compounds in pellet form. These were made from crystal clear polystyrene and virgin cellulose acetate flake purchased from the prime producers. Now only virgin acetate and polystyrene were marketed by the firm under the registered trade name *Ampacet*, while reprocessed material was sold under its generic name by the A. Bamberger Corporation.

A Bad Deal And A Disastrous Marriage

Now twenty-six years old, I had worked for my uncle for three years when my mother left her employment with Mr. Tlach in Cleveland

and moved to New York. Perhaps she felt that her precious son was dating all kinds of unsuitable females and needed someone to look after him. With the help of a veteran's loan we bought the small house in Bellerose, Queens, for $12,000, a considerable sum at the time.

When we asked my uncle for advice prior to making this "risky" purchase, he said, "Considering that the house, now twelve years old, orginally cost only $7,000, it is not cheap. You are buying at the peak, but chances are that you will lose very little if you have to sell it." He could not have imagined that when we finally sold the house twenty years later it would bring $25,000. Today it is probably worth $110,000, if it is still standing,

Now, for the first time in sixteen years, Mutti and I actually lived together. I was responsible for the mortgage payments and in addition paid my mother a modest sum for room and board. While this arrangement provided her with food and shelter, Mutti felt the money was insufficient for her personal needs. She decided to supplement her income by taking in some boarders. After a series of odd birds, among them a Japanese observer attached to the United Nations at nearby Lake Success, and a crazy girl from Columbus, Ohio, whom I had picked up at the New School, she finally found the ideal tenants. Mr. Leonard Davis needed room and board for his mother, aged seventy, and another room for himself. This arrangement brought in enough income to make my mother feel secure.

A couple of years after we had moved to Bellerose, Mutti concluded what in retrospect could be considered the worst deal in her life.

Long before 1949, when the new German government was forced by the United States to require German citizens to restore illegitimately acquired Jewish property to its rightful owners, we received a visit from Arnold Marx, a distant cousin who lived in the United States and with whom we had had no real contact. He told us that during a recent visit to Lichtenfels he had met Siegfried Wagner, the current occupant of our former home there. He said that Mr. Wagner, who had made a huge fortune during the war by supplying uniforms to the German army and in particular, to the Nazi S.A. and S.S. organizations, was anxious to legalize his title to our villa, which under postwar laws might be considered illegally acquired Jewish property.

"I know a very reputable lawyer," our distant cousin told my mother; "Dr. Thomas Dehler from Bamberg will handle the legal work without any cost to you." My mother knew Dr. Dehler. He had come from Lichtenfels and had married a Jewish girl who stayed unmolested by his side throughout the war. Apparently Dr. Dehler had all the right connections.

Shortly thereafter my mother received a letter from Dr.Dehler: "Mr. Wagner," he wrote, who had acquired the residence of Otto Bamberger in Lichtenfels in 1939 under the then prevailing laws, wishes to make restitution to the widow of

Otto Bamberger in view of her impecunious state." The letter went on to say that although Mr. Wagner's business was in bad financial straits, he would be willing to reopen negotiations and pay my mother an additional sum of $5,000 for the villa.

Since Dr. Dehler was a candidate to become the first Minister of Justice in postwar Germany, it can be assumed that both Dr. Dehler and Mr. Wagner already knew about the pending restitution laws, though no mention of them was made in the ensuing negotiations. In view of my mother's relative poor financial situation and ignorance about the forthcoming restitution legislation, this seemed to us a very laudable, honorable and charitable proposal.

We still had mortgage payments on our home in Queens, and though the $5000 Mr. Wagner offered seemed ridiculously low, considering that we had paid $12,000 for a little house that would be like a servant's cottage in the garden of the Lichtenfels estate, it still represented a lot of money to us. My mother replied that she would accept nothing less than $6,000, just so Mr. Wagner would not think her a complete dupe. Mr. Wagner accepted with alacrity.



Mutti's house in Bellerose, Queens, 1946

Dr. Dehler drew up the necessary legal documents. The papers were drawn up and signed by Mutti, who did not realize then that, according to the restitution laws already before the German parliament, Mr. Wagner would have been forced to return the villa to her or pay at least the correct amount for the property. Once the restitution law was in place, my mother felt strongly that having made an agreement, even so ill advised, she could not now go back on her word. For many years after this incident, Mr. Wagner, possibly to assuage his bad conscience, sent each year several boxes of Nürnberger Lebkuchen, a regional Christmas cake. When people who heard about this praised Mr. Wagner's generosity, my mother only remarked drily that as payment for a villa it wasn't very much.

Not until two generations later did some doubts as to the ethics of this transaction surface.

For the most part, the members of the first generation — those whose parents were born or were still children during the thirteen years of the Nazi rule — were on the defensive, as were their parents. They rarely acknowledged any wrong doing by the Nazi regime. Peter Sichrovsky treated this subject exhaustively in his book, *Born Guilty,* published in 1988. Surprisingly he

found that only among members of the next generation, born in the 1950's and 1960's did questions begin to arise about their elders' accounts of that period.

I was deeply moved when out of the blue I received a letter, dated October 12, 1994 from Corinne Wagner, granddaughter of Siegfried Wagner, asking me point blank if her family had acquired any of my familiy's assets unethically. "If so" she wrote, "I am prepared to do what I can to rectify the wrong that was done."

Life went on as it does! Far from dating the "right" girls, to the dismay of my mother, I got seriously involved with a beautiful Irish blond named Kathleen McCauley. Mutti insisted repeatedly that I should concentrate on "a nice German Jewish refugee girl," of which there were many in New York, but her remonstrances were to no avail. I preferred an exotic Irish rose.

The relationship between Kathy and me was very stormy from the start. First of all, both families vigorously objected. A match between a budding Jewish businessman and an Irish Catholic girl was not exactly what either family considered ideal. I knew little about Kathleen's family, except that her father died in the middle of the Depression, leaving her mother with four small children dependent on her work as a nurse. One of her brothers was a religious Brother at the time and her sister and other brother went to Catholic schools.

What attracted me to Kathleen was her relative innocence and purity. With my European background and life on my own in the United States, I had been exposed to a whole range of worldly experiences. In Kathleen I saw literally virgin territory and the thrill of introducing her into my own world was irresistible. No doubt my "worldliness" was in turn one of the reasons why she was attracted to me. However, looking back I am no longer sure. She must have had a very low opinion of herself, for, as our courtship proceeded, she always went along with whatever I proposed we do. Her attitude almost said, "Here I am, do with me as you will." But despite this seeming amenability, I don't recall that Kathy ever made an effort with anyone, myself included, to go much out of her way to please or to make a small sacrifice just to show that she cared. She was often hours late for dates and appointments or she did not show up at all. Demanding explanations was useless; she would say that she just forgot. How you could forget to meet someone you loved was something I could never comprehend. But then,



Kathy in our honeymoon shelter, Mt. Katadhin, Maine, 1948.

because these things are never one way, perhaps she was not as enthused with my adventurous outdoor interests as I imagined.

Aware of the problems envisioned by the mature adult world surrounding me, and of grave doubts within myself, I reacted by seeing Kathy as presenting a real challenge. After two years of a truly one way courtship, I thought erroneously that the only way I could get her to feel close and intimate was to marry her. In 1948, on a camping trip in Canada over a long weekend, we went to a justice of the peace and simply got married. Just like that!! This decision came to haunt me later on.

Leaving Mutti in Bellerose, I moved with my new wife to a studio apartment in Geenwich Village. Kathleen was very attractive, a quiet and demure person who made an immediate pleasing impression on anyone she met. She was very bright, had worked her way through Hunter College, and being an avid reader, had a book knowledge about all that was going on in the world. What was not so obvious was a host of personal problems.

Often Kathy retreated into her own shell and was moody and uncommunicative. When we disagreed about something, she frequently expressed anti-Semitic sentiments towards me. Before we married, she had been a very devout Catholic. No matter where we were, on Sunday morning we had to find a church so Kathy could attend Mass. After we married she stopped going to church altogether, apparently feeling that she had committed an unpardonable sin. This did nothing to improve our relationship. More than forty years later, I found out that her father was actually Jewish; his real name was Irving Greenwald. Kathy's Irish mother had met him while working as a registered nurse in a hospital on Governor's Island, where he had applied for a job under the name McCauley. He got the job and adopted the name for good.



For the good times.

This is no place to go into the details of a complicated marriage. Suffice it to say that Kathy and I stayed married, mostly unhappily, sometimes contentedly, for more than fifteen years, during which we had several trial separations. Ultimately I got a divorce, and once again Kathy simply acquiesced without taking any active part in the proceedings.

However, some positive and productive things did come out of this unfortunate union. Credit must be given to Kathy for her wholehearted support when I started my own business, of which she was an integral part for a few years. During our marriage we raised two children, Claudette and Stephan, and we were always supportive of one another in things that mattered. Interspersed among the unhappy periods were relatively happy times during which we worked and traveled together. In sum — to use Kathy's own words — the marriage would have been fine if we didn't have to live together.

Gerald Comes Back From The War

On the business front, my cousin Gerald was about to be discharged from the army in 1946 and would join his father's firm, a moment both of us had eagerly anticipated for years. Gerald's military career had been a big success. During the previous years, he had been in Europe with a victorious army. Because he spoke German, he had become a big wheel in his outfit's intelligence section and was in charge of interrogating both P.O.W.s and civilians to determine their role in the Nazi atrocities.

Having hobnobbed with Joseph Wechsberg, Ernie Pyle, and other famous writers of that time, as well as correspondents for *Newsweek* and the *New York Times*, he wrote to me that he was loath to leave the army for the much less glamorous scrap business. As the idealistic person he had always been, he wanted to continue his army career, to create a better world for future generations.



Gerald and Ulla Bamberger, 1946

Being idealistic myself and not overly fond of the plastic-scrap business, I empathized with Gerald. But when I wrote, I urged him to come home, reminding him that the future was ours. I suggested that by working together we could use some of the money earned to pursue the worthwhile endeavors he had in mind.

Gerald was very family-minded. He always looked for ways to be of help. Shortly after arriving in Europe he started looking for the wife and children of my father's brother Hugo, who had been unable to get out before the Nazi onslaught, and had been forced to go underground. Gerald knew they were some-

where in Belgium, and succeeded in finding his aunt Grete and her daughters Gabriele and Suzanne. They were in surprisingly good shape, although hungry and in need of many things. Whenever Gerald had leave from the army he traveled to Belgium to bring them food, clothes, soap, items available to him at the PX, but obtainable by the European public only on the black market, at astronomical prices.

At one time, Gerald was stationed in Bamberg. Out of curiosity he visited my home town, Lichtenfels, where he and I had spent many happy summers together. While there he heard rumors that there were some cases marked "Bamberger — Jewish Property" in the basement of the town hall. Upon investigating he found part of the vanished art collection of the family. He promptly confiscated these crates and shipped them to my mother, the rightful owner.

Few of us have much say about what life has in store for us. Just as I never fulfilled my dream of earning a living skiing in the Rockies, Gerald never had the career of his dreams. A fiancee was waiting for him at home, and his father was anxious for him to take over the business. My uncle suffered from a severe heart condition, and rightly not trusting my ability to run the company, he was waiting for his son to return from overseas and take charge.

Prior to his induction into the service, Gerald had worked for his father for about three years. At that time the company was small. At first, Gerald was the only employee; later, a secretary and a couple of warehouse workers were added. Now, immediately upon his discharge from the army at the age of twenty six, Gerald was expected to take part in managing an organization which employed more than thirty people.

In the service, there is a hierarchy. A soldier receives his orders follows them without question, and where appropriate, passes them on to his subordinates. But in civilian life the key to success is to give one's associates and subordinates a sense of security, to listen to and try to learn something from them. Above all, one must get their backing and agreement in major decisions. Orders from the "boss" mean little without the support of the staff to execute them.

Gerald, having spent so much of his adult life in the army, did not have the opportunity to make a smooth, gradual transition to the ways of running a civilian business. Within two years of his return, his father's health deteriorated to such an extent that he was forced to gradually relinquish the rule of his firm to Gerald, along with the others running the show at that time.

These consisted, first of all, of my uncle's partners, Bert Preiss and Ben Kretkowski, who were in charge of producing and selling the output of American Molding Powder Corporation, and Bernie Peterson, the chemist in charge of testing and laboratory work. There was also was Ben's brother-in-law, Russ, who was running the warehouse. The firm's employees, both office staff and ware-

house workers, all simply adored my uncle and were distressed by his sickness and subsequent retirement.

Often when a benign potentate hands the reins to his successors, the reaction of the subjects may take an unanticipated turn. This was the case when my uncle retired from the active management of the company.

Almost immediately there was a subtle change in the relationship between the employers and the employed. While my uncle, with his paternal attitude, had a knack for making people feel appreciated and was always accessible to everyone, the new management had other ideas. In accordance with the latest management theory, a hierarchy was established: an employee had access only to his or her immediate superior when it came to business or personal problems. Depending on the nature of the problem, the immediate superior would then discuss the matter with higher management if so inclined. Understandably, this new approach was not very popular with any of us.

This new management had no tolerance for unorthodox approaches or opinions. A Mr. Herbert Goldmark, who had a college degree in marketing, was hired and put in charge of Ampacet sales. Bernie Peterson, who was a whiz at detecting contamination in various plastics and knew how to formulate compounds from scrap, was replaced by a chemist who had a degree from MIT in "polymer technology" but knew nothing about scrap.

In the process, my own relationship with Gerald, supposedly my best friend and future partner, also turned sour. "Don't you remember what we discussed in Camp Hale?" I asked Gerald one day. "We agreed that we would use the business as a vehicle for improving our own lives, and those of others." I was then only twenty-seven years old and still in my *Sturm und Drang* period, wishing the world to be other than it was.

Gerald said that these were the unrealistic pipe dreams of youth. A dedication to our career in business was the only thing that mattered. Gone were the ideals of former years; the conviction that one should make money so that one could live a worthwhile life, rather than living for the sole purpose of making money, was totally alien to him.

Gone were the weekends together spent in the great outdoors. Gone were the hours in which we shared personal thoughts and confidences. Gone was our friendship!

At work, I was constantly criticized. The new management thought I was not serious, incapable of doing anything right, and certainly not ready to devote my entire life to the business. Indeed, there was some truth to that.

What had happened to others who worked for the company now happened to me. The new management hired a fellow named Arthur Metzger to be my "department manager," at a much higher salary than I was getting. I was in-

structed to "report" to him. My uncle had always invited me to come to him with ideas, but now I no longer had access to the people on top. The door had shut. I felt that Arthur, as my boss, received full credit for whatever I accomplished, and whatever went wrong was held against me.

In addition to being enormously costly, changes like these created a great deal of dissatisfaction and insecurity among the employees. Unlike my uncle, the new management had no compunction about doing a lot of firing and hiring. Until my uncle's retirement there had been hardly any turnover among our staff. In the office, the warehouse, and the factory, employees were willing to give their right arm for my uncle. Most of them were faithful oldtimers who had worked for him at least six or seven years.

The turmoil caused by the policies of this new management marked the beginning of the end for a hitherto successful family business.

Following recommendations published in trade magazines about new management and marketing techniques, our management was an easy mark for salespeople who sold all kinds of sophisticated machinery.

By 1948, making molding powder on the old mills was no longer feasible. Instead, machines called extruders were required. These were available in all sizes and price ranges and could compound all kinds of material.

While replacing the rolling mills with extruders was essential, the new Bamberger management was persuaded by a salesman to invest instead in an enormous piece of equipment called a Banbury-extruder combination, which cost more than half a million dollars. The Banbury kneaded and mixed a large amount of plastic material, which when properly masticated was automatically dropped into the extruder to be formed into pellets. An extruder did the same work, but much more slowly. The difference between these two pieces of equipment is comparable to the difference between the giant blender and mixing machine in a big bakery and the kitchen food processor used by a housewife.

This new equipment, which could compound more than 1,000 pounds of scrap per hour — an unheard of quantity at the time — came at a period when a 5,000-pound purchase of scrap was considered big, and a full truckload was 20,000 pounds. Forty-five-foot trucks with a capacity of 45,000 pounds, and hopper freightcars holding over 120,000 pounds, were still far in the future.

Given the economic climate, the cost and capacity of a Banbury-extruder combination was astronomical. Only major producers of prime plastic resins, with unlimited supplies of raw material, utilized this type of machinery. Furthermore, our newly hired chemist needed an expensive new laboratory to make up formulations for this new acquisition.

The fly in the ointment was that apparently no one had thought about where to get the quantities of scrap needed to feed this monster machine. Since the pro-

ducers often discarded their waste in landfills or recycled their better grade of scrap themselves, our company depended on scrap purchased from end-users. Often the quantities needed to efficiently utilize this equipment simply were not available.

Just about this time, around 1948, the prime producers who were selling both natural and colored molding compounds to the end-users, in competition with compounders like our firm, realized that they were in fact competing with themselves by selling crystal clear material at a substantially lower price than their colored compounds. Up to this point, the American Molding Powder Corporation did a nice business by purchasing clear polystyrene pellets from the prime producers, coloring the material into standard colors and selling it to the end-users. The producers now changed their price structure and made sure that there was almost no price difference between a colorless and a colored product. This change in price structure made color compounding for firms like American Molding Powder Corporation unprofitable and unworkable.

Custom compounding for the major producers, so common today, requiring equipment capable of producing a large volume in a short time, was still a thing of the future. The Bamberger Corporation had purchased their Banbury-extruder machine twenty years too soon.

Meanwhile, my job was to travel throughout the United States buying scrap of all kinds from end-users. The assembly plants of the automotive and appliance industries were good sources; so were factories producing textiles, furniture, or inflatable toys, which yielded scrap such as PVC and polyethylene film. With new competitors entering the field almost daily, the best one could count on was a gross profit of 15 percent to 20 percent instead of the markup of 1,000 percent or more that was customary when I sold acrylic offcuts obtained from the Air Force.

Gone were the days when my uncle chided me for "ruining" him when, in the wartime economy, I made a deal with less than 100 percent gross profit. His standing joke was about a Bavarian farmer who was shrewd in business but poor in mathematics. The story goes like this:

Nickel Bauer talks to his neighbor Franzl: "Franzl, how is business?"

"Could be better. The price of potatoes has gone down," says Franzl.

"I agree," Nickel Bauer replies, frowning. "It costs me now ten cents to grow a pound of potatoes. With the market so poor, I can sell them only at twenty cents a pound."

"Terrible!" Franzl exclaims in sympathy.

"It's the times," sighs Nickel Bauer. "What can I do? One just has to get by with a 10 percent markup."

A whole new kind of terrible competition now appeared in our field in the form of textile-rag dealers who bought PVC and polyethylene scrap. Used to

different ethics, they brought with them practices heretofore unknown in the plastics industry. It seemed, from the high prices they quoted to our suppliers, that they didn't make any profit at all. I soon realized that these people who drove their own pickup trucks and paid cash at the door, often stole 30 percent of the material they acquired by bribing the person in charge of loading the scrap. I was a babe in the woods, trying unsuccessfully to meet that kind of competition while doing business in a legitimate way. Since the result was a low markup, my activity apparently created losses, and my self-esteem, already way down, suffered a further setback.

My salvation at the time was the acrylic market, which had always been my pet. Acrylic, hitherto used only in the defense industry, was then coming into its own in the private sector. All over the United States companies which had formerly used glass for neon signs were rapidly switching to vacuum-formed acrylic sheets. Thus, there was a huge expansion in the sign industry to produce signs for gas stations, supermarkets, store fronts, and restaurants to replace the old and fragile neon signs made from glass.

With the increased availability of acrylic scrap, a number of firms had started converting this material into monomer and using this monomer to produce cast pearlescent sheets for the manufacture of buttons and costume jewelry. These firms, known as acrylic cracking plants, became my main customers for all acrylic scrap collected from sign manufacturers and other fabricators.

Between 1947 and 1950, with the petrochemical industries of Germany and Japan still in shambles, I was able to develop an active export market for acrylic scrap. Shipping everything against letters of credit with guaranteed payment was a lot better than selling acrylic scrap to financially shaky domestic monomer converters, whose plants periodically blew up, especially when bankruptcy threatened. But with the new policies now implemented by my employer, it seemed to me that all my successful activity was credited to the business acumen of my boss, Arthur Metzger, with Claude being the whipping boy for the things that went wrong.

The Beginning Of The End

In the past everybody working for my uncle, from the man who swept the floor to the person second in command, always had access to him. Now, a number of people who had worked for my uncle from the beginning had been laid off because they were too old or lacked up-to-date skills. The new management climate created a lot of discontent and insecurity.

It was therefore no wonder that the factory workers, who numbered about thirty, succumbed to the pressures brought upon them by a very militant union.

Although they had rejected the union's efforts in previous years, they now signed up in the hope of protecting their jobs. With the advent of the union, the company had to pay much higher wages and was saddled with the cost of hitherto unknown fringe benefits as well.

Disenchanted with the way things were going and seeing no future in a company where most of the work force was dissatisfied and management itself in constant disarray, I decided that the time had come to leave and start my own company.

In my preparation for leaving, I spoke to a number of suppliers and customers with whom I had done business over the past eight years. All of them assured me that their loyalty would be to me, rather than to the company I represented. In fact, a number of customers who had been very loyal to my uncle, and did not like the company's new methods of doing business, encouraged me to go into my own business and assured me that not only would they continue to work with me, but they would help me to get started by paying in advance, provided I could supply what they needed.

Toward the end of 1950, it was apparent that my uncle would soon die. As the worsening of his illness coincided with my decision to leave the company, I found myself in a moral predicament. Gerald had arranged for me to get the job with his father, my uncle, who had been very kind to me and had taught me all I knew about this business. But now my uncle was dying, while the relationship with my cousin had deteriorated to such an extent that we could hardly talk to each other. In addition, it had been made clear to me in no uncertain terms that I would be tolerated in the firm only as a poor relation, with no prospect of a great future, let alone the wonderful partnership we had envisioned in earlier days.

In December 1950, on one of my business trips, I wrote a long personal letter to my former best friend Gerald, explaining my feelings about the situation and telling him that it might be best if we would part in a friendly manner. I offered to stay on, albeit at an increased salary, until he found a successor. Secretly I hoped that this proposition would not be acceptable.

In preparation for what was to come, I had ordered stationery and calling cards with the name of my future firm, the Claude P. Bamberger Corporation. The very last thing I really wanted was a quick and basically phony reconciliation.

However, Gerald, with his training in psychological warfare, did just the opposite of what would have been prudent under the circumstances. Instead of being conciliatory and offering some inducement to make me stay, or proposing to work together as independent colleagues, as my uncle would have done, he fired me when I returned from my trip. I recall him saying, "An increase in salary is entirely out of the question. In fact you are not even earning

what you make now. The best thing that could happen to our company is that you leave right now. You're fired!"

I believe Gerald made this decision on the spot, without consulting with any of his associates, as my uncle would have done. Maybe he had cleared this with them beforehand. In any event, during the days following my dismissal, I received a number of calls from Herb Goldmark and Bert Preiss, two of the active managers, my boss Arthur Metzger, and other key people in the company, pleading with me to change my mind. I told them that my decision was irreversible.

My uncle died in the last days of 1950, and on January 1, 1951, I found myself sole owner, employee, and president of the new Claude P. Bamberger Corporation, with headquarters in a studio apartment on Carmine Street in Greenwich Village.

Chapter Nine

Claude P. Bamberger Corporation– A New Business Venture

1951 - 1952

How To Start A Small Business Without Money

There is a play called "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying." It's a silly fairy tale which bears no resemblance to the realities of life. All of us know that a price has to be paid for everything.

After reading what follows, some will shake their head and mutter something like "He really did it." Others may think, "He was awfully lucky." Both assumptions are incorrect. Whatever my personal inclinations, I really tried and worked very hard all my life. Luck played a minor part, unless one considers the grasping of an opportunity to be "luck."

Most people do not recognize an opportunity when it presents itself, or they cannot take advantage of it for one reason or another. They may lack entrepreneurial qualities, which include the ability to take risks, or they are fearful of cutting the umbilical cord of the regular paycheck.

When I started my own company in 1951, it never occurred to me to read up on how to start and manage a small business. In fact, I doubt that many people with entrepreneurial inclinations ever do such a thing. Most owners of small businesses just plunge in as I did, either continuing to do what they have learned from previous experience or trying to capitalize on some novel idea for which they believe there is a market.

Of course, had I taken the time to follow the basic ground rules, I could have saved myself a lot of aggravation and problems. Therefore, I will record briefly what I should *have done, quoting or paraphrasing from J. K. Lasser's,* How to Run a Small Business, *and let my readers compare this theoretical knowledge with the actualities which will follow.*

A. Type of Business

The first decision to be made when starting a business concerns its organizational form. Any business with growth potential should be incorporated, since this type of organization limits both the liability and the risk. Incorporation does have some disadvantages taxwise, but when a business is very small — a shoestring operation — the incorporated individual proprietor need not worry about taxes. All his worries are about how to make ends meet.

If your new corporation has substantial capital — with a manufacturing plant and a number of employees, for example — you will need the help of an insurance broker to minimize its liability, an accountant to acquaint you with the best way to structure your business, and, to further complicate your life, a lawyer to advise you on how to stay out of trouble.

B. Financing a New Venture

After incorporation, the cost of which is minimal, the next problem is to find sufficent capital to get the venture off the ground. The basic rule of never using your

own money looks good in the how-to manuals but is hardly practical. No bank, relative or friend will invest money in your new business unless you demonstrate good faith by risking your own resources. Of course, if you have no resources but do have a great invention or a brilliant idea, you can offer that as your contribution and find someone else to finance the venture. But this approach usually has its price: the financier will want to be your partner or to take a large share of the profits. Thus you are bound to lose your independence, becoming accountable for your activities to one or more investors.

The best solution is to prove your enthusiasm by investing some cash, no matter how small the amount, in the hope that others will catch the spirit and help provide the financing or credit needed to get the operation off the ground.

In addition to personal loans from friends or family, a small company will need bank credit. Everyone has some sort of bank account. A commercial bank, whose officers know you, is the most likely to give your new business a limited amount of short-term credit. You may have to use a house or a car or some securities as collateral. It is most important to repay a short-term loan on the day it is due, even if you come back the next day for a new or larger loan. If you do not have sufficent funds to repay the loan, you may ask a relative or friend to lend you the needed money for a short period. Or perhaps a customer with whom you are on very good terms will help by prepaying an invoice which is not yet due. For a cash discount of 2 percent a financially stable customer will come through without question.

An indirect way to raise money for a shoestring operation is to get suppliers you know to give you thirty- or sixty-day payment terms. Then ask your customers to pay you in ten days, in exchange for a 2 percent discount. If your customers like you and if doing business with you is to their advantage they will gladly help out — even without the discount.

There are all kinds of ways to get other people's money, but doing so is invariably very expensive in the long run, and it is often the reason a fledgling operation founders. Stay away from such arrangements unless the new operation is enormously profitable.

C. Real Estate – Buy or Lease?

Next, a new business needs a location. Some shoestring operations can be managed from one's garage, basement, or apartment in the beginning. The owner not only saves rent, but has a distinct tax advantage in that the corporation can be charged a reasonable "rent" for its occupancy. When a small business does need separate facilities it is wise to lease rather than buy them in order to preserve capital. Plan ahead, estimating the minimum space the operation will require for at least a year, preferably longer. Once a firm is established, moving tends to be very costly. More than the actual moving expense is involved; breaking the lease, installing electric power at the new location, and printing new stationery, invoices, and calling cards may be more costly than the move itself.

Location is critical. For a plant utilizing heavy industrial materials, the leased property should have tailgate loading facilities and if possible should adjoin a railroad

siding. Most trucks are not equipped with the automatic tailgate that enables them to pick up or drop materials at street level.

A Greenwich Village Apartment Becomes The Head Office

Despite the persistent problems in our marriage, my wife, Kathy, knowing how unhappy I was working for the A. Bamberger Corporation, wholeheartedly supported my decision to start my own business. In 1951 our living costs were minimal; the monthly rent of $125 for our tiny Greenwich Village apartment at 59 Carmine Street was the only major outlay. Kathy earned a very good salary as a secretary and assured me that it would more than cover our expenses.

When I started my new company, our bohemian type abode in the Village had to serve willy-nilly as "head office" of the new Claude P. Bamberger Corporation. The only proof that I was actually in business was a very impressive letterhead on the stationery and calling cards I had ordered, listing not only the phone number and address, but an as yet nonexistent cable address, picked in anticipation of future global operations. I had no warehouse where I could store scrap purchases, no truckman who could pick up and deliver material, and more important than anything else, no money to speak of. My savings of $3,000 were not enough to start a "global" business even in those days.

Like Kathy, my mother, and other relatives as well as close friends, especially Jack Suhl, who was to become my partner later on, were encouraging and supportive of my plans. Whatever the disadvantages, there was no dearth of moral support. Indeed, no one asked, and possibly it did not occur to anyone to ask, just how I would finance this venture. In fact, I myself never gave that question much thought. All I wanted was to be free of the A. Bamberger Corporation, though the idea of having no starting capital for a business of my own and no fixed income guaranteed by an employer was a bit frightening.

When it was obvious that my savings were insufficient to get my new business off the ground, it was Mutti who once again came to my rescue. Since at that time I was still helping with the monthly mortgage payments for the house in Bellerose, my mother decided that she was getting enough income from her boarders to manage on her own, and relieved me of any worry about her support. Having complete faith in my ability to succeed, she gave me, as an interest-free loan, the $6000 she had gotten some years previously from Mr. Wagner for our villa in Lichtenfels. Next was Uncle Leo, a brother of my mother. He lived in New York and had a thriving textile business. If anything, he had even less confidence in my business ability than my uncle Anton Bamberger. He was married to an opera singer and was a rather flamboyant individual, involved in New York's art world, attending openings of art shows and gala performances of opera and theater. He dined at restaurants charging astronomical prices, and owned a vacation house in Ocean Beach, one of Fire Island's more opulent communities. I was as uncomfortable in his presence as he was in mine, especially since it was obvious that he took a dim

view of my folk dancing and camping activities. Probably thanks to the intercession of my mother, he agreed to give a bank guaranty against which I could draw up to $10,000. To make this arrangement he went through the trouble of going with me to my bank, in Brooklyn, the Manufacturers Trust Company, with which I had had a personal account for almost ten years.

Introducing me to the branch manager, Mr. Krueger, my uncle Leo said "You know my nephew Claude Bamberger, who has been working for his uncle Anton Bamberger?"

"Of course I know Claude," Mr. Krueger answered, "he is a nice boy and works for the A. Bamberger Corporation, which is one of our big accounts. What can I do for you?"

"Well, Claude here has decided to start his own business," my uncle said. "I would like you to extend loan privileges to him up to $10,000. I am willing to guarantee sums up to that amount. However, I would appreciate if you would treat this as a small-business loan, as if it were not guaranteed. I would also like you to keep me posted and let me know if things do not go the way you think they should be going."

Mr. Krueger smiled, first at me, then at my uncle, and said "I am sure that Claude here will do OK." Then, after shuffling some papers he continued, addressing my uncle: "You will have to sign these papers and give us the required bank references. I am sure there will be no problems."

With these maneuverings, which took less than a week, my fledgling company had a total cash position of $19,000, of which $3,000 was my own capital and $16,000 represented loans.

Setting Up Shop

To gain a foothold in the industry, I had to act quickly. First I called all the suppliers whom I had verbally notified of my future plans, reminding them of their pledge to give my new company support.

I told them rashly that I would pay cash and make prompt pickups of any material they had available for sale. In fact, I simply assured them that they would not notice any change from the manner in which I had handled their account in the past. Quite the contrary, since I was willing to pay cash immediately (due to a lack of credit) they would even be a little better off.

Next, I called my former customers, telling them the same story and stating that I would now be in a position to offer materials at a somewhat lower price on account of my reduced overhead, provided they paid me within ten days.

These propositions were attractive to sellers and buyers alike. As the newly minted entrepreneur of a shoestring operation, I naturally hoped that all would go smoothly. This was gross optimism. Everyone knows that nothing ever goes smoothly in business. I trusted in luck and for the time being had no choice but to face and handle difficulties as they arose.

Now that the finances were straightened out, I had to find a suitable warehouse and a trucker. I signed a year's lease for six hundred square feet of space on the third floor of a dilapidated loft building on Wooster Street in Greenwich Village, just a ten-minute walk from my apartment. Looking through the "Positions Wanted" columns in the New York newspapers, I found an individual who had recently quit his job as a truck driver, had purchased a truck, and was setting himself up in the trucking business. This man — his name was Joe Bruno — was just the type of person I was looking for.

Now, after two weeks in business, I had my "office," access to some money, a truck, and a loft. I was ready to wheel and deal. Having kept in close touch with my suppliers I knew which ones would have some scrap ready. Now I called them again, and arranged for Joe Bruno to pick up the materials.

Since it was important that nothing should go wrong in the first few critical weeks, I went along with Joe on the truck, my pockets bulging with greenbacks, which I cheerfully disbursed on each stop.

Delivery was not as easy. The material had to be checked and repacked, and often ground. I had purchased a small grinder from Ball and Jewel on the installment plan, but the delivery and installation of this machine would require at least two weeks. The need to accumulate "inventory," until the material could be processed and shipped, created an unexpected space problem and a potential cash flow problem as well. Even the customers who had more faith in my business acumen than Gerald and had promised to pay as soon as they received my shipments, would not pay before the material arrived. However, for the moment my capital, along with the loan privilege extended by Mr. Krueger, sufficed.

While Joe Bruno and I could temporarily handle the Wooster Street warehouse activity and go out on the road, I needed someone in the apartment on Carmine Street to answer the phone and write form letters, a method of solicitation I had learned from my uncle.



An ad on the bulletin board of the New School for Social Research, where I attended some night classes, brought an application for the job from Mostyn Gilbert, who said that he was an unpublished writer and needed part-time work.

I told him that all I could afford to pay was 50 cents an hour. His job would be to answer calls, if any, and to type letters introducing the Claude P. Bamberger Corporation as a new star on the plastic-scrap horizon. Mostyn readily agreed, and for more than a decade he was part of our staff, helping out on and off as required.

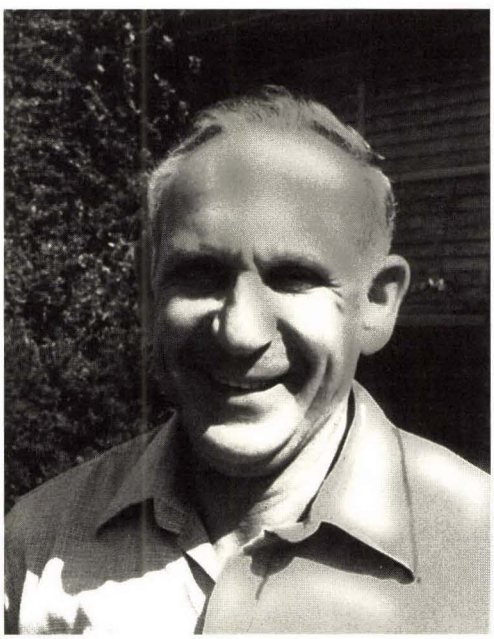
First factory — Wooster St. loft.

The result of the form-letter campaign was amazing. By the time I had been in business three weeks, the grinder (and a telephone) had been installed in the Wooster Street loft. Now I needed someone to act as receiving clerk and stock man, and to grind material.

As luck would have it, during my first weeks in business, my "biggest competitor," the giant A. Bamberger Corporation, was closed on account of a seemingly interminable strike. During this period I received a visit from Claus Becher, whom I had known at A. Bamberger, where he worked as a laboratory assistant. Claus knew how to classify and test plastic materials, and was just the type of person I needed.

I had always liked Claus. He was a gentle, good natured person, who through a sheer miracle had survived four years in a number of Hitler's death camps.

During our first interview he told me: " You know, I really don't like to work for A. Bamberger anymore. Now there is a strike, and I don't know if it will ever get settled. I have a new baby and I cannot afford to be out of work."



Claus Becher, first key employee, 1951-1964

"Claus," I answered, "you are coming at a very good time. I'm just starting my business and you will be my first employee. Because of your knowledge of plastic materials you have a lifetime opportunity here. A. Bamberger Corporation may be much bigger, but I assure you, if you stick with me, you'll be far better off in the long run."

Claus replied, "I will do anything. I'll work hard, and I guarantee to do my best. All I need now is a job to support my wife and my baby."

"Now there is one condition on which I must insist, if I hire you," I replied." I cannot pay $1.00 an hour, which you were getting at A. Bamberger. Once the strike is settled you would probably earn $1.25. All I can pay you to start is 75 cents an hour. Now I want you to promise me, if you accept my proposal, that once the strike is settled at A. Bamberger you will not leave me and go back to work for them at a higher wage. Can you promise that?"

"Anything, anything is all right with me," Claus exclaimed. "I just want to work now to take care of my wife and baby."

I promised Claus that I would try to make up for the low wage by giving him the chance whenever possible to earn extra money by working overtime. Claus agreed and took charge of the Wooster Street loft the following day.

With A. Bamberger on strike and suppliers needing to get rid of their scrap, there was an unanticipated influx of material. Within a matter of weeks our small loft was overflowing. Barely six months after signing a lease, I was in desperate need of more space. The matter came to a head when at six o'clock one morning the doorbell rang at 59 Carmine Street, my apartment and office. At the door stood a burly driver who said, waving a bill of lading at me, "I have a delivery for you." When I peeked out the window, I saw double-parked on our quiet residential street, an enormous flatbed truck, loaded with twenty huge bales of PVC, each weighing one thousand pounds or more. The delivery came from the Ohio Kitchen Upholstery Supply Corporation in Dayton. I had given them a quotation for their scrap some weeks before, but had not heard from them since.

Either they had confused me with the A. Bamberger Corporation or they had assumed that my quotation was actually an order. In any event this was not the time to worry over details. I quickly changed from pajamas to slacks, asked Kathy to get out of bed, and invited the driver in for a cup of coffee. Having driven all night, he gratefully accepted, and while he had his coffee I quickly arranged by phone for a public warehouse to accept this load. In those days, small companies did not have their own fork lifts. Claus could never have handled this load even if we had had sufficent space in our loft.

Each day Claus started working at 6:00 a.m. and finished at 6:00 p.m. Then I took over, often working until midnight at the grinder to reduce the bulky scrap material to a more manageable size and a more salable condition. Within the first month I ran out of both space and money. I needed another warehouse for short-term storage and found cheap space in an old, unheated brick building on the waterfront in Brooklyn. The owner, a processor of kosher pickles, occupied the ground floor.

It was winter, and much of the floor of the unheated pickle house was covered with frozen brine. The pickles swimming obscurely in dozens of open barrels didn't look nearly as appetizing there as they looked in the glassed-in showcases of New York's Jewish delis, particularly since numerous rats brazenly scurried about. They seemed to thrive on whatever pickles they could steal, and sometimes drowned in the brine barrels because of their greed. To this day I shudder when I see pickles for sale and invariably stay away from them.

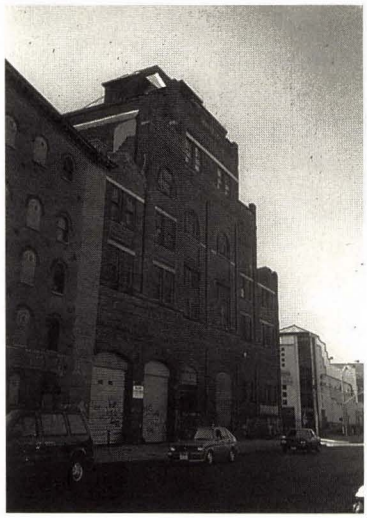
Claude Hits The Jackpot

Meanwhile, replies to some of the form letters Mostyn had mailed to potential customers and suppliers, here and abroad, continued to trickle in. Each day I waited anxiously for the mailman with an excitement hard to describe; there was no telling what the mail would bring. Like a gambler I always hoped that sooner or later I would hit the winning number.

And indeed it came, not from a distant land but in form of a letter from a company in Lima, Ohio — Neon Products, the largest producer of neon signs in

the United States. "We are now ready to dispose of approximately one million pounds of acrylic scrap," was the essence of that letter, signed by Bud Neuhaus, purchasing agent.

For some time Neon Products had been in the process of switching their production from the conventional glass signs to huge vacuum-formed acrylic signs. These signs eventually appeared nationwide, first on gasoline stations, then on supermarkets, and after that everywhere else.



Kosher Pickle Warehouse, 1951

Changing to a new product is a complicated process, and over the past several years, whenever I had tried to persuade Neon Products to sell their scrap to the A. Bamberger Corporation, they had said they had no time to worry about that. Bud Neuhaus had told me on several occasions: "We have too many problems right now. Call me later."

Now the payoff had come! At a time when 20,000 pounds of scrap constituted a very large quantity, a million pounds would be comparable to 10 million pounds today. But what could I do with such a quantity? How would I pay for it? There was a customer in Metuchen, New Jersey, who had said he would buy "any quantity," but a million pounds? And the guy's credit was no good! I didn't know what to do.

A day later I was sitting on our studio bed in Carmine Street, still brooding about how to reply to this letter, when the telephone rang.

"Hello, is this Claude Bamberger?", an unfamiliar voice said. "This is Bud Neuhaus of Neon Products, Lima, speaking."

"I am Claude Bamberger, Mr. Neuhaus," I said. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, Claude," Bud replied, "did you get my letter? We are finally ready to do something about our scrap."

"Yes, Mr. Neuhaus," I answered with a slight tremor, "I... I... was somewhat busy, but I was just about to reply to your letter."

"You can call me Bud," Mr. Neuhaus said. "I don't really know exactly how much scrap we have, maybe as much as a million pounds; it's all lying in a shed in the back of our plant and we really don't know how to handle a shipment of this type."

My mind was racing! I had to stall for time.

"Hello, hello," I heard Bud say, "can you hear me?"

"Yes, yes," I replied quickly. "What quantity did you say there was?"

Bud said, "I really don't know, but it would be best if you would come out to take a look at the material and discuss how we could handle our scrap in the future. I guess we accumulate about 10,000 pounds a week."

This was getting worse by the minute. "Ah,... hm... well, when would it be convenient to pay you a visit?" I stammered.

Bud said, "Claude, I know that you are a very busy person, but since this matter is rather pressing I prefer it to be sooner rather than later."

I was still stalling, hot under the collar, breathing heavily.

Noticing my hesitancy, Bud continued: "I know how busy you are, but you could do the whole trip in a day. There is an American Airlines morning flight out of La Guardia to Dayton, where our company plane could pick you up and bring you to Lima. We have our own airstrip behind the plant. We'd fly you back to Dayton in time to catch the afternoon plane to New York."

My head was swimming! Flying to Dayton, private plane, my God what should I do? The apartment was spinning.

"Bud," I finally said, realizing that I had to do something. "I am really rather tied up the balance of this week, but possibly I could manage to come out next Wednesday, provided I can make the round trip in a day."

"No problem," Bud said, "Call me after you have booked your flight, and our company plane, a small Cessna, will be waiting for you on the tarmac in Dayton. After our meeting, we'll fly you back in time for your return flight."

I promised Bud I would call him as soon as I had made my travel arrangements.

After I had sufficiently recovered from the shock of this conversation, I dialed Sam Brass, owner of the U.S. Plastic Products and Chemical Company, who had recently opened an acrylic-cracking plant in Metuchen, New Jersey.

"Sam," I said, "I must come out and see you tomorrow. Something very important has come up."

"Sure, come out anytime in the morning," Sam said. "I'll be glad to see you."

So I drove out to Metuchen the next day. After hearing my story Sam said, "I have no problem taking in any quantity of scrap. We have twenty acres of open space and can just dump it next to our railroad siding." Obviously, there were no EPA regulations in those freewheeling days.

"But what about the payment, Sam?" I said. "I can't extend a lot of credit and wait for payment. I've really got to have cash."

I knew from my previous dealings that Sam, to hear him tell it, never had any problems, but then he never had any money either. In reply to my question he answered, "Bill Horley of the First Bank and Trust Company in Perth Amboy is a close friend of mine; he will give me any amount of cash I need. I'll pay you each time you make a delivery." "Frankly, Sam," I said, "I'm a little worried, as you don't seem to be able to pay for the small shipments I have made to you during the last three weeks. Can't you call your friend at the bank now and see if at least your current bills can be paid?"

"I don't have to do that," Sam said. "If you want, I'll give you a check right now."

I indicated that a check right now would be welcome.

Sam called his bookkeeper and said, "Joe, I understand that there are some open bills from Claude Bamberger. Please get them all together and pay him in full."

While the check was being cut, Sam and I discussed the Neon Products deal, agreeing on price and details of delivery. "Don't worry about payment," Sam reassured me; "as soon as the material is received I will call Bill at the bank and send you a check. You see, Bill Horley gives me unlimited credit."

Joe returned with a check, whispering something into Sam's ear. When Sam handed me the signed check he remarked, "By the way, don't put this check in the bank for another three days, since I have to make arrangements with Bill to cover the amount."

Driving back from Metuchen I felt far from certain that everything would go as smoothly as Sam had promised; yet here was an opportunity to make a lot of money. Such quantities of acrylic scrap simply did not exist on the United States market at the time. Indeed, Sam was willing to pay a premium price for this lot. On the other hand, for Neon Products, this accumulation seemed to be more of a headache than anything else. Obviously they did not care about the price and just wanted to get rid of the material as quickly as possible.

I booked a flight to Dayton for the following Wednesday, called to confirm this with Bud, and once more insisted that I had to fly back to New York the same day. I wanted to leave him with the impression that I had made special arrangements in my "busy schedule" to accommodate him and his company.

The following week I was met at the Dayton airport by Johnny Spivak, the private pilot of Milton Kamin, then president of Neon Products. The flight from Dayton to Lima took less than an hour.

When I announced my presence to the receptionist, Bud Neuhaus didn't let me wait very long. He rushed into the lobby smiling, and shook my hand, saying, "Claude, I realize what a very busy man you are, but I assure you this visit will not be a waste of your time."

We went to his glass-enclosed, carpeted office; he then offered me coffee and called his secretary on the intercom and said, "Irma, I want Bill Graham, Bob Surkamp from shipping, and Joe Brinkley of production to come to the conference room immediately. Also, please hold all phone calls, as I will be busy with Mr. Bamberger for the next few hours." He nodded to me, saying, "I have asked my entire staff to be at your disposal, as we need your expert help in determining how best to handle our scrap." We then went to an adjacent conference room, where the staff had assembled.

"We have two distinct problems here at the moment," said Bud, starting the meeting, "first, how to handle the huge pile of scrap in our shed in back of the plant, so it can be shipped to Bamberger, and second, how to handle our future accumulations of scrap. Mr. Bamberger has taken some of his very valuable time to pay us a visit and help us solve these problems."

Everybody looked expectantly at me. "I don't know how much help I can be," I said, "but I have helped many plants with their scrap problems, so perhaps I can be of assistance to you as well. I would suggest that rather than sit here," I continued, "we first look at the scrap in your shed, and then go to the plant to see just

how the scrap is accumulated. This will give me an idea of how we can solve your problem."

This logical statement was received as if I were Jesus dispensing wisdom in the temple. Everybody listened intently to the great man from New York. Now we all filed out of the conference room to look at the scrap.

The pile in back of the plant was staggering. The material was stored helter-skelter in a half-collapsed wooden shed, obviously the accumulation of many years. The question was, how could it best be handled?

First, Bill Graham the plant manager, suggested that he hook up a crusher in an open field, crush the material and put it all in boxes.

The shipping man said that this was not feasible because of uncertain weather conditions: rain or snow would ruin the machinery unless it was housed in a waterproof shed. He would also need a staging area, to protect the boxes from the weather. Then there were questions of safety, and the problem of how to load the boxes into a truck without a proper loading ramp.

While listening to this discussion, I was remembering how we had dumped loose Air Force scrap into an open-top trailer at my uncle's warehouse in Brooklyn. Now I said, "While we do not especially like bulk shipments, as they are very difficult to unload, I will make an exception in your case and take this particular lot in bulk.

Everybody seemed to agree. "But we don't want to inconvenience you, Claude," Bud said. "If the handling at your end is a problem, can we do anything to minimize your cost?"

Figuring that the more work they had in preparing the shipment, the costlier the material would be for me, I answered, "yes, the handling is costly, but it is only a few hundred thousand pounds of scrap, and we'll manage somehow. I think it's more important that we now talk about how you should accumulate your scrap in the future."

Now the management group moved from the yard to the plant. Acrylic scrap was lying all over the place, filling every nook and cranny. It was quite obvious that the best way to accumulate the scrap was to put the large pieces on skids and the small ones into boxes right at the cutting table. Next, the scrap could be moved to a staging area, for storage until enough had been accumulated to fill a truck. Then the material could be moved out at once to make room for another load. These were more or less my suggestions.

Everybody was impressed, while to me it was incomprehensible that the management of a big firm like this had been unable to arrive at such a logical decision without help.

The big meeting was over now. We proceeded to the company cafeteria for lunch; then Bud and I returned to his palatial office. "That was extremely helpful," Bud said. "When do you want us to start shipping this material?"

"Oh, right away," I said, "but first we have to agree on a price, so I can give you a purchase order."

"That's just a formality," Bud declared. "I know you will be fair, and you can send the purchase order anytime."

"No no!" I exclaimed, alarmed. "I brought the purchase order with me, and perhaps your secretary can type it up. Then you can sign the confirmation part right away, and it's done. I also brought you a certified check for $3,000 as an initial deposit."

"That will not at all be necessary," Bud said, "my credit department has already checked out your credit, and we will extend the usual net thirty days."

The moment of truth had arrived!

"But there is a misunderstanding," I now exclaimed. "My company was only formed early this year and I have no credit standing at all! Didn't you get my letter in which I told you that I was no longer associated with the A. Bamberger Corporation?"

There was a moment of silence. Then Bud said, "Oh, never mind. It is you I have been talking with over the past two years and it is you we want to deal with. We really don't know this A. Bamberger Corporation."

Poor Bud was in an impossible position. How could he tell Milton Kamin, the president of his company that he had made a mistake and sent a plane to pick up the wrong guy? Willy-nilly, he had to take his chance that he had made a good decision for his firm. Besides, there was really no gracious way to back out of the deal at this point.

Shortly afterward, Johnny Spivak flew me back to the Dayton airport, where I caught my plane home to New York. The next day I called my friend Sam and told him the deal was in the bag and the material would be shipped promptly. This was in the week after Labor Day, 1951. Here is a good example how the plans "of mice and men" often go awry.

Months went by, and no notice came from Neon Products that a shipment was on the way. Initially, the company had trouble renting a backhoe during harvest time. Then the Christmas holidays interfered, and in January, a huge snowfall prevented them from even going near the shed where the scrap was stored.

Meanwhile, Sam kept asking for his material, and, as it appeared that the Korean War was about to end, the economy took a nose dive. All prices, including those of plastic materials, tumbled. Bud kept assuring me that the deal was still in place, but nothing was forthcoming. While Neon Products couldn't get themselves together to make the promised shipments, their scrap pile kept on growing, and simultaneously prices for scrap kept falling.

Finally, in April, the weather broke, and within one week six truckloads of scrap arrived at Sam's plant in Metuchen.

Originally, I had hoped that shipments would be spread over a period of time, so that I could collect the money from Sam for one truckload before I released the next. But now, after the drought I was overwhelmed by the deluge. Suddenly I was forced to extend credit to Sam far beyond what I was prepared to

give him even in my wildest dreams. One cannot warehouse bulk shipments, trucks need to be unloaded, and I was just lucky that Sam had all this open acreage where the material could be dumped.

Embezzlement Is Tantamount To Stealing Other People's Money

The moment I realized that Sam owed me more money than my company's net worth and all the loans combined, I called him, heart in mouth.

"Sam," I said, trying to sound nonchalant, "the six truckloads I shipped you last week, do you think I can come out and pick up a check?"

"Let me call Bill Horley at the bank," Sam replied. "I don't think it's a problem. I'll call you back."

Contrary to my expectations Sam called back and said I could come out the next day and pick up my check.

I had the habit of glancing at the headlines of the *New York Times* each morning during breakfast. The day following my conversation with Sam, I had the shock of my life. Taking up a good part of the front page in bold black type, the headline seemed to scream: "Embezzlement of $400,000 laid to Perth Amboy Banker."



The New York Times.

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NEW YORK, TUESDAY, MAY

Embezzlement of $400,000 Laid to Perth Amboy Banker

Special to The New York Times

PERTH AMBOY, N. J., May 5— The vice president of the First Bank and Trust Company, a man prominent in civic affairs and highly trusted by his employers, was arrested here tonight on a charge of embezzling $400,000 of the bank's funds.

The bank official, William C. Horley, who is married and has three children, was believed to have used the money to gamble in the stock market and to have made loans to poor security risks.

Horley, a mild-mannered man known in the community for his pleasing personality, appeared confused and said that he was too dazed for the time being to answer specific questions about the missing money.

The 50-year-old vice president has long been prominent in community affairs here. He is a warden and Sunday school teacher at St. Peter's Protestant Episcopal Church and is chairman of the church's trust fund committee. He is local director of the American Red Cross and headed the finance committee of the Boy Scout fund-raising campaign. The bank official was chairman of the Community Chest fund.

Informed of the arrest, Mayor James Flynn of Perth Amboy commented: "I'm amazed and stunned. Horley always struck me as a fine, clean-cut man, a wonderful person."

Associated Press

William C. Horley

The Rev. George Boyd, pastor of St. Peter's Church, said: "The news is breath-taking. It knocked the legs out from under me. I can't believe it."

The bank's board of directors

Continued on Page 40, Column 2

The story which followed disclosed that a banker named Bill Horley, of the First Amboy Bank and Trust Company, had played a kind of Robin Hood to small companies in his area, helping them out with generous loans despite their poor credit standing. He would "borrow" the money from the well-funded Gulf Oil account at the beginning of the month, then reverse the entries at the end of the month, so that the Gulf Oil account appeared balanced in the monthly statement. A day later he would take the money back, liberally extending loans to a number of high-risk small companies which had no credit standing at all.

The following quote in particular gave me the chills: "One of the main beneficiaries of this dubious practice is the U.S. Plastic Products and Chemical Company, a Metuchen-based manufacturer of acrylic monomer and sheets."

I grabbed the phone. "Sam," I yelled, "did you see this morning's New York Times?"

Sam replied, "Yes, I am as surprised as you are. I didn't do anything wrong. I told you, whenever I needed money I'd just ask Bill and he'd give me a loan. I don't know any more than what's in the paper."

"I'm coming out," I said. I hung up, jumped into my car and drove to Metuchen.

I didn't get any money that morning because Bill Horley was incommunicado and Sam was broke. The six truckloads of my scrap were standing in Sam's yard, being unloaded. Sam tried to calm me in his usual overconfident way , reiterating constantly that "there was no problem."

Bill Horley was tried and found guilty of embezzlement. But since he proved that he had derived no personal benefit from his philanthropic enterprise of helping small companies to survive, he got a suspended sentence. Sam's well had run dry.

Too Much Business Could Mean a Cashflow Problem

Over the next six months, Sam periodically coughed up some money, and I kept him going by supplying a minimum of additional material. I also found some other monomer converters to buy the acrylic scrap. All of them had credit as bad as Sam's, but at least the risk was spread out.

In the ten years that followed, Neon Products became one of my biggest and best suppliers of acrylic scrap. I became a good friend of Milton Kamin, the president of the corporation, and we had a good laugh when I told him years later how my company had started doing business with him. After the initial huge shipments, the material came regularly a truckload at a time, neatly packed on skids and in boxes, as I had recommended. Everybody was happy.

Business was booming. Indeed, we were doing more business than our limited capital structure could justify: we always had more money due suppliers than cash balances in the bank.

Today people carry several credit cards and shift from one to another as their credit limit approaches. I did something similar with bank accounts. We opened accounts with several small, privately owned neighborhood banks, ingratiated ourselves with the management, and were able to wrangle several thousand dollars worth of unsecured loan privileges here and there. Even the Bellerose-bank where I kept a relatively minute amount of personal savings gave us loan privileges, using my savings passbook as collateral. All this was in addition to the $10,000 guaranteed loan privilege with the Manufacturers Trust Company in Brooklyn.

Our business was so successful that only a few months after I had started, my wife quit her secretarial job and became the full-time bookkeeper of our company. She was mostly kept busy making sure that we had sufficient cash in each bank account to cover our checks by the time they cleared.

In dire emergencies, when we simply didn't have enough money in the bank to pay invoices when they fell due, Kathy called the various suppliers, told them of our "temporary" cash problem and obtained their OK to send only half the amount due, getting a credit extension for the rest. We found that this procedure actually *increased* our credibility, since we always meticulously kept our word. We never promised payments we knew we couldn't make.

How pleased and flattered we were, some years later, after we had moved to New Jersey, when we received regular visits from Clarence Vian, vice president of the Irving Trust Company, a giant international bank in New York, anxious to obtain our account. We were very reluctant to change, as by then we had been able to get a good credit line from Tom Stanton, the young manager of a local branch of the First Jersey National Bank. Stanton, who later on became his bank's president, and eventually merged it with the British National Westminster Bank, has been a friend of mine ever since those early days.

Clarence Vian was rewarded for his patience and perseverance some years later, when he obtained the account of Claude Bamberger International Corporation, a new subsidiary which handled our growing export business. It goes without saying that to get our account, the bank willingly granted us substantial loan accommodations. However, all this was far in the future. For the moment, we were still a very young business, and our cash-flow problems persisted. In addition, we had an acute space problem with our six-hundred-square-foot loft almost from the start, and after six months we were in dire need of larger warehouse and office space.

For me in my Carmine Street "office," the highlight of each day was the arrival of the mail. Who knew what fortunate news it might contain! Alas, not all the news was joyous. One morning there was a letter from Waterford, Breslin and Jackson, which, it turned out later, was a most prestigious law firm specializing in the litigation of trademark and copyright violations. The letter — actually a summons — declared that the A. Bamberger Corporation had instituted legal proceedings against Claude P. Bamberger, president of the Claude P. Bamberger Corporation, for trading in plastic scrap under false pretenses.

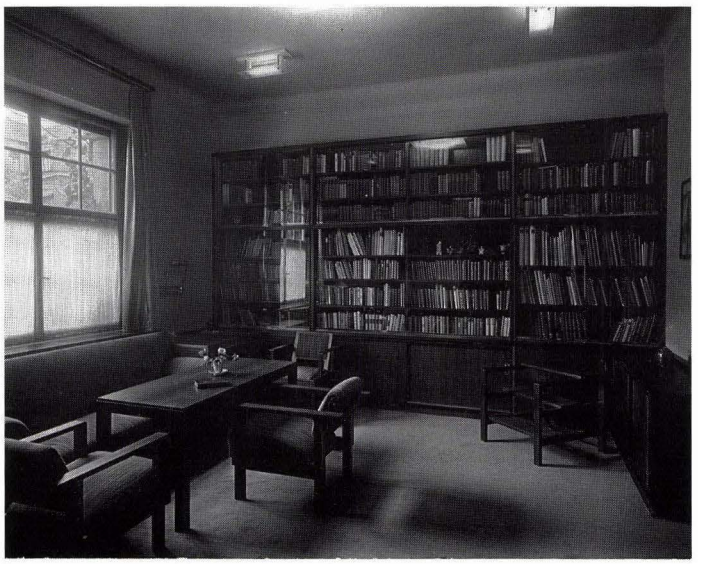
Chapter Ten

Trials and Tribulations

1951 - 1955



The Bamberger Villa, Lichtenfels, with its Bauhaus design library (1930) and spacious garden





My parents, Otto Bamberger, ca. 1928; Jetta Bamberger, ca. 1930





At right, Phillip Bamberger, my grandfather, in front of the family business, ca. 1920



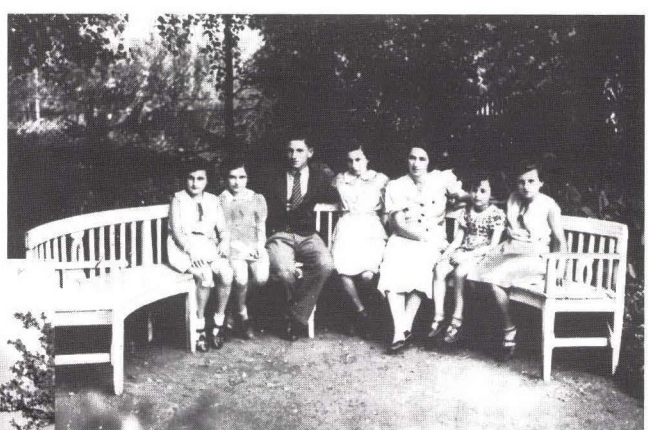
Below, his sons Ludwig, Otto, Hugo and Anton

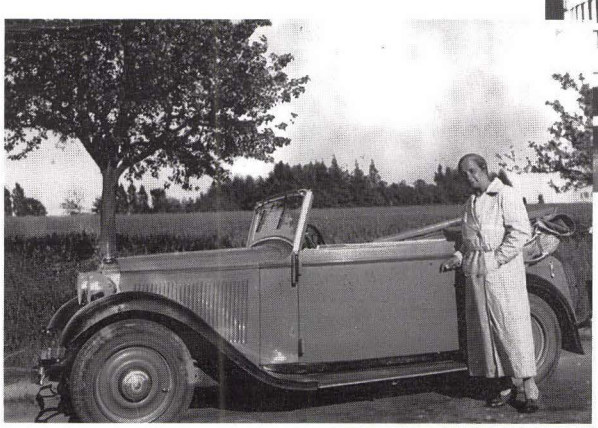




Bamboo and willow reeds on the way to the depot, 1935.

At right, cousins in the Villa garden, 1937 — an annual meeting soon to be discontinued.





Modern times — my mother with her pride, a Mercedes convertible, 1935

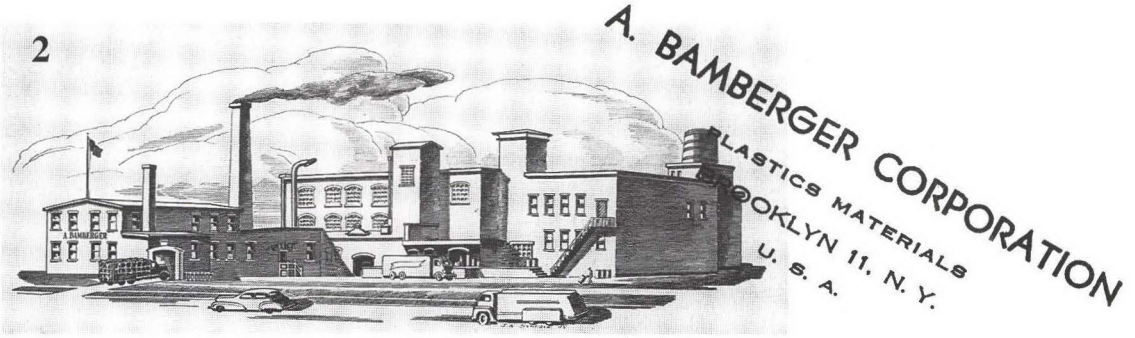
ANTON BAMBERGER'S RAPID EXPANSION IN BROOKLYN

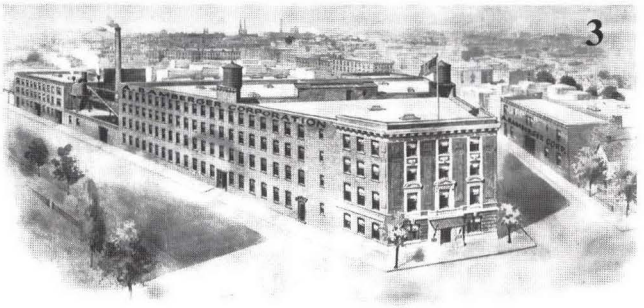
1. The Gretsch Building, 1939-1944

2. Hewes St. factory and office, 1944-1946

3. 703 Bedford Ave., 1947-1956







His *Ampacet* logo would lead to a world-wide mega-corporation with headquarters in White Plains, N.Y.



CLAUDE STARTS OUT . . .

CLAUDE P. BAMBERGER, INC.
PLASTIC MATERIALS
59 CARMINE STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y.
U. S. A.

51Carmine St., (*right*) Greenwich Village, 1951





600 sq. ft. at 28 Wooster St., Soho, (*above*) Feb.-Oct. 1951, before graffiti — and before Soho

3000 sq. ft. at 152 Centre St. Brooklyn, (*below*) Oct. 1951 to Sept. 1955



6000 sq. ft., 1 Mt. Vernon St., (*below*) Ridgefield Park, N.J., 1955-1960



CLAUDE P. BAMBERGER, Inc.

PROCESSORS OF PLASTICS MATERIALS
NOT CONNECTED WITH ANY OTHER FIRM OF SIMILAR NAME

152 CENTRE STREET
BROOKLYN 31, NEW YORK
Tel.: MAIN 5-5558—5-5554
CABLE ADDRESS: BAMBERKO

THE CLAUDE BAMBERGER MOLDING COMPOUNDS CORPORATION, CARLSTADT, N.J., 1960 TO TODAY

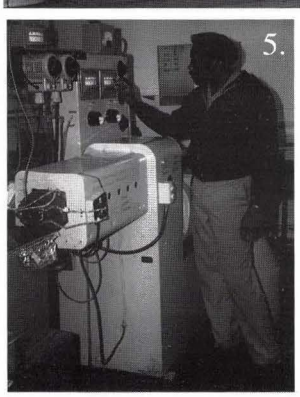


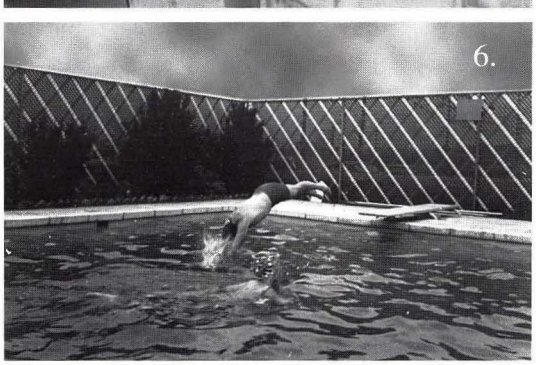












1. President's office

2. Front office

3. Factory

4. Loading platform

5. Laboratory

6. Pool

SUPPORTING STAFF



Blanche (*above*), 1956-1981

Pearl (*right*), 1959-1980





Micki, 1965-1982

CORPORATE MANAGEMENT



Mary, 1980-present



Jack, 1953-1975



Mo-li, 1979-present

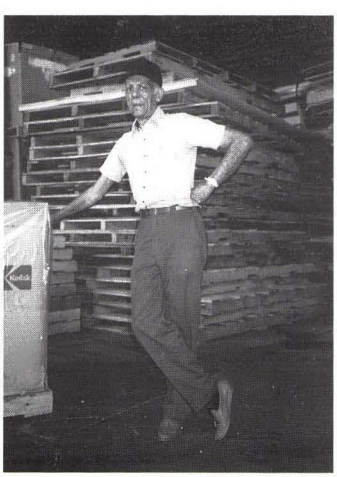
FACTORY MANAGEMENT



Jerry, 1953-present



Claus, 1951-1963



Del, 1955-1990







ALL WORK AND NO PLAY . . .

Pool party at the Carlstadt plant (*above left*);
Pearl relaxes with an assistant at the pool (*above*);
a staff spring picnic (*left*);
a Christmas party (*below*);
a birthday party with Simon, Jerry, Claude, Blanche and Claus in attendance (*below left*).

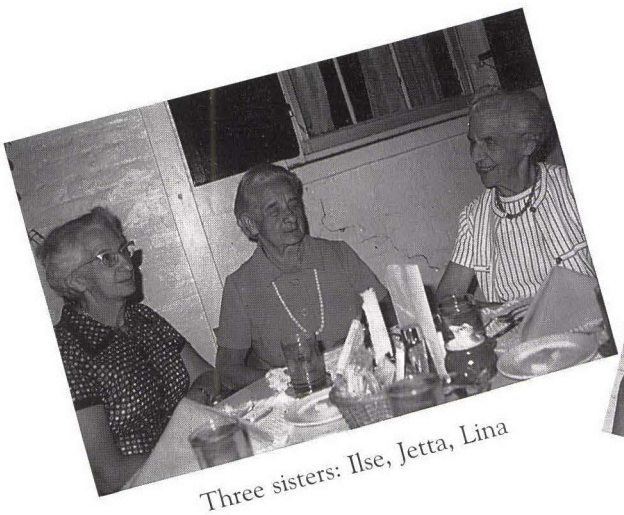




A COUNTRY WEDDING



"I do ... "



Three sisters: Ilse, Jetta, Lina

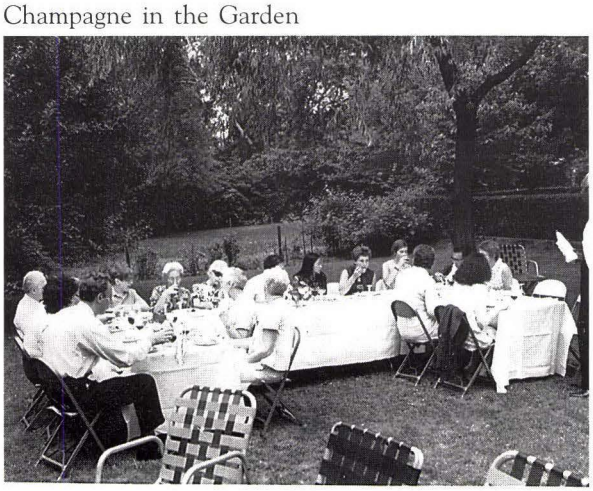


Bride and groom with Mutti and Ruth

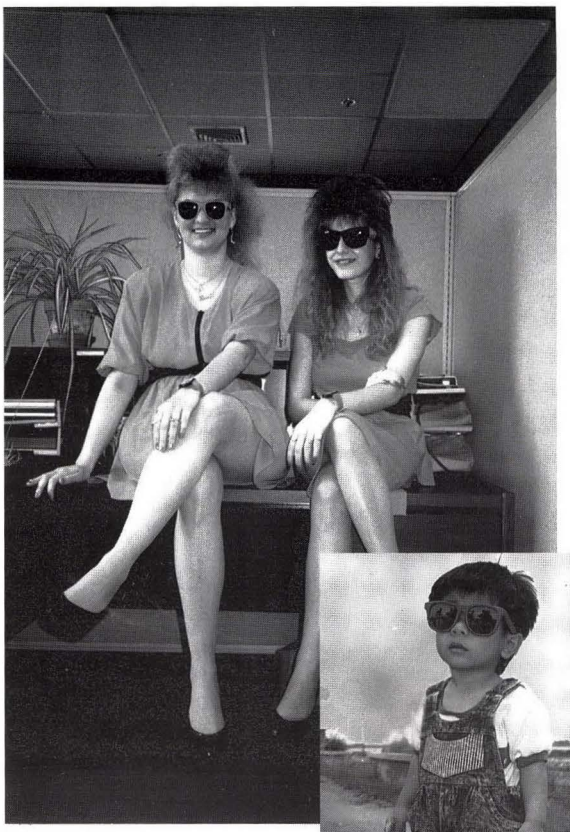
The Wedding Party



Champagne in the Garden



RUBBER SUNGLASSES, ANYONE?





Everyone a model!



Claude and Mo-li with the product



Taiwanese sunglass factory



Mr. Chang, genius behind the rubber sunglasses

TRAVELS WITH MO-LI



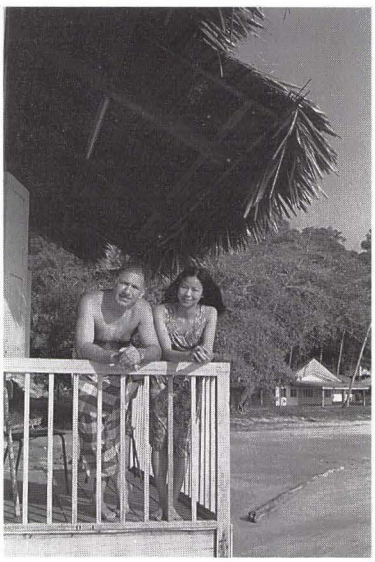
House caravan trip, Connemara, Ireland, 1975



St. Mark's square, Venice, 1976



The gargoyles of Notre Dame, Paris, 1972



Time out in Malaysia, 1975



The world's largest camel fair, Pushkar, India, 1987

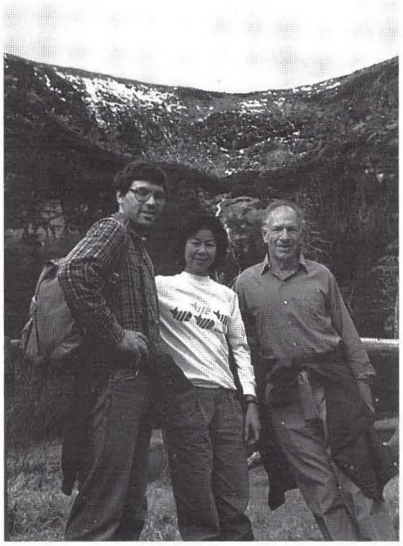
AN OUTDOOR LIFE STYLE



Fun in Cleveland, 1938



Hitchhiking in Vermont with Vera Hirtz and Jan Müller, 1945



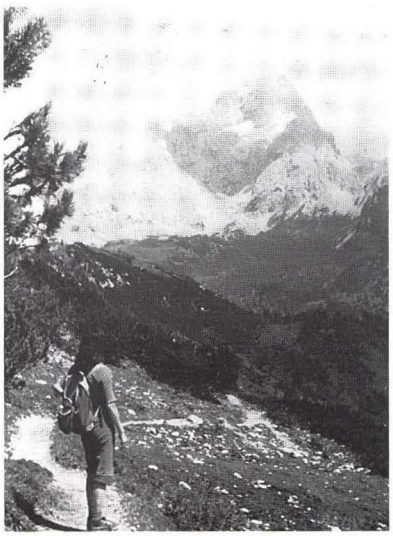
Stephan, Mo-Li and Claude in Tuckerman's ravine, 1990



Down the Delaware, 1989



Above, Ray and Bettina Sons in the Rockies, 1995



Right, Alpine trails

HOMES AND FAMILY





Spring (1979) and winter (1993) in Tenafly, N.J.





Nantucket, Massachussets, home by the seashore; sunset on Madaket beach

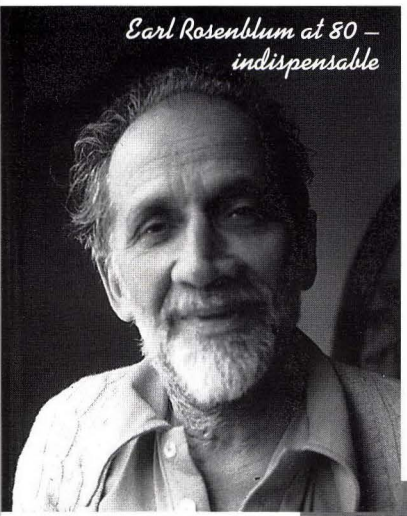


Claudette's graduation, Smith College, 1980

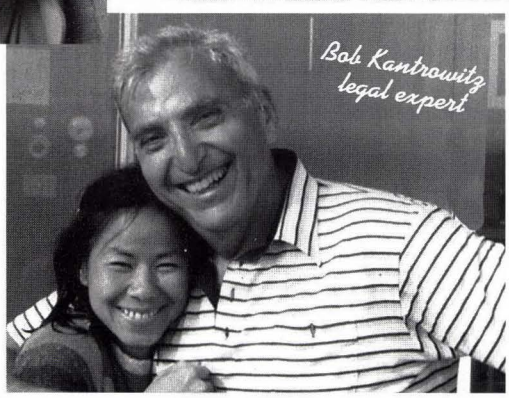


Stephan graduates from Columbia Presbyterian Medical School, 1988

IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN MY LIFE . . .

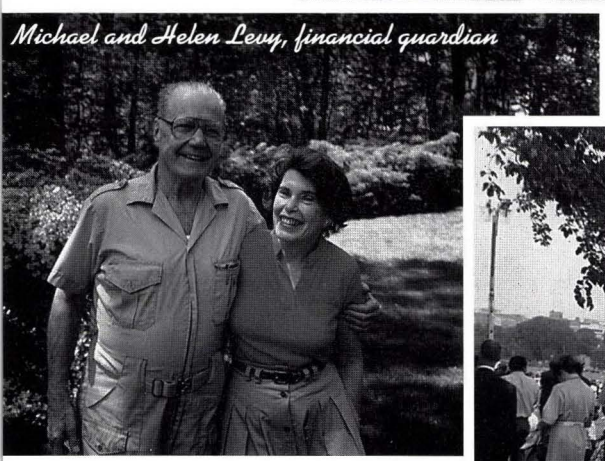

Earl Rosenblum at 80 – indispensable

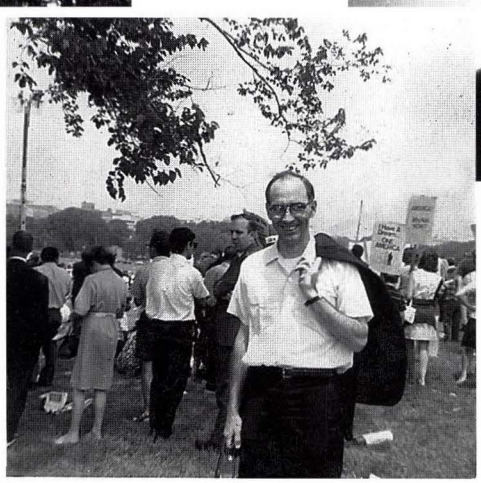

Lou and Mary Mandel of Tenafly Medical Authority


Bob Kantrowitz legal expert

(I) The Americans


Simon Schochet, author of Feldafing (1983)


Michael and Helen Levy, financial guardian


George McCauley, S.J. march on Washington, 1968

(II) The Europeans



Hermann and
Lisa Schulze,
Lichtenfels,
Germany



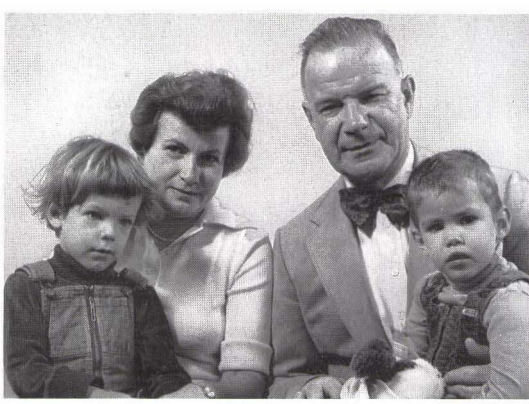
Actress Maria Becker,
Zürich, Switzerland



Right, Jack and
Lenore Suhl,
Portimao, Portugal



Piera and Roberto
Pietrocola, Grimaldi, Italy



Brigitte and Meinhard Meisenbach,
Bamberg, Germany

(III) Relatives and Such

1. *Hans and Carlotta Wolff, Sao Paulo, Brazil*
2. *Ernest and Suzanne Loebl with children Judy and David*
3. *Vera Hirtz with grandchildren Kiley and Nicholas in Los Angeles*
4. *My sister, Ruth*
5. *Luciano and Christina Wolff in Bonn, Germany–last of the Wolffs*











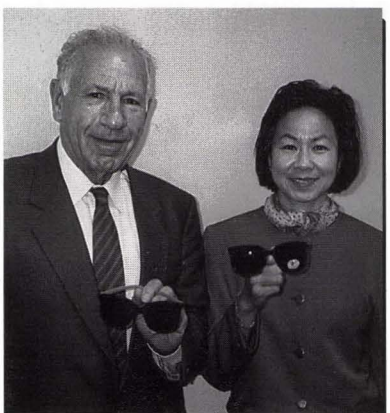
LOOKING BACK . . . An interview with Claude and Mo-li Bamberger by the editor of *Modern Plastic International*, May, 1996.

PEOPLE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

A CONVERSATION WITH CLAUDE BAMBERGER

The alchemist who turns scrap to gold



Claude P. Bamberger and his wife, Mo-Li, with high-fashion sunglasses whose frames were molded of off-spec polyester elastomer. Other products molded of scrap Bamberger supplied include Rubric's Cube and hula hoops.

Brokering off-spec resin is a fast-paced business with a dynamic all its own. In few other ventures can one set a price and create demand half-way around the world for a product with zero value on the original producer's balance sheet. Moreover, there is no guarantee of supply, rivals are everywhere and demand shifts rapidly.

The business is not for everyone, but its challenges and opportunities suit Claude P. Bamberger, owner of Claude P. Bamberger Intl., Carlstadt, NJ, USA, a leading broker. Bamberger, 76, has been in the business 53 years, long enough to be one of its major figures and part of its history.

Bamberger's success as a broker stems in part from his ability to surmount challenges, something he's done since 1938, when he came to America as a penniless 18-year-old from Germany. Since then, he's grown and prospered as a businessman (his first job was as an $8/week delivery boy), and been part of the evolution of the plastics industry. As such, he has a unique view of the industry, one that might make an interesting book – or several interesting books, which, in fact, he's written. More on that later.

Off-spec resin finds diverse uses. Products Bamberger supplied grades for include sunglasses with flexible frames and colored temples that were a fashion rage. For this part, molded in Taiwan, Bamberger sold 2275 tonnes of a polyester elastomer a producer had on inventory for years. It was no overnight deal, though – it took three years to close the sale, and four months of work with the molder to find suitable additives.

Bamberger says demand for off-spec resin is a way to gage the expertise of a country's plastics industry. Taiwan, for example, has savvy processors who experiment with off-spec as an alternative to prime. Southeast Asia is, in fact, a strong market for off-spec, a sign, Bamberger notes, of the region's processing sophistication.

Getting off-spec resin isn't easy. Producers may be reluctant to sell, for fear grades will end up competing with virgin materials.

Then there is the growing number of corrupt deals Bamberger sees. He blames this in part on the number of brokers in business. When he started in 1943 at his uncle's company, Anton Bamberger, two firms brokered scrap in the U.S. Now, there may be thousands, most one-man operations. Many producers also have inexperienced people selling off-spec, and see it as waste rather than revenue.

Bamberger urges safeguards. One idea is an agreement whereby he acts as an exclusive broker for a producer's off-spec resin, selling it at a set price to select markets. Such a deal won't stifle competition. "The industry is too large. If the idea takes hold, others will make similar deals."

Bamberger, who began his firm in 1951, is semi-retired. Daily operations are run by his wife, Mo-Li, a former resident of Malaysia with a Ph.D in political science.

Other interests include writing. He has authored three books: "Art" is about his father's collection; "History of a Family" traces his roots in Bamberg, Germany, where the Bambergers were upper-class merchants; and "Breaking the Mold" looks at his experiences since 1938 and includes a history of the plastics industry.

The books are history with a focus on people. Bamberger is among the last of his generation who joined the industry at the dawn of its modern era, and saw it become the ubiquitous and enabling factor in the development of products for the consumer society. His third book tells readers what the industry was like as well as how it developed.

When he writes about his life, Bamberger doesn't note its high or low points. Rather, he sees it as a series of progressions. "Each phase in one's life has its own poignancy," he observes. "When you view your life in segments, you see that some points are higher. But no one point overshadows the others. It's all part of one life. And I wouldn't want to not have any of the experiences I've had."

–Patrick A. Toensmeier

How To Find A Lawyer

In general, companies need a business attorney for routine matters and a specialist, such as a trial lawyer for specific cases.

It takes some searching, but investing time in managing your legal risks is an important part of running a business. And it pays dividends.

Most of the following material in this section is from Kenneth A. Ehrman's article,"Finding a Lawyer For Your Business," in Nation's Business, April l994, which specifies the qualifications you should seek in your business lawyer. Ehrman says the person should have experience with matters relevant to your business. He or she should be able not only to answer questions as they arise but also to practice preventive law; that means anticipating problems and giving advice on new laws and regulations that can affect your business. A reputation as a practical problem-solver helps, as does an awareness of your broad business needs and the ability to reconcile demands of the law with commercial necessities.

A good way to begin your search for a lawyer is to check with other small-business owners in your community. Other leads may come from your accountant, your bank, or a trade association.

If your sources recommend a law firm without naming an individual attorney, ask the group's managing partner which member would best fit your needs. Guard against the possibility that once a large firm has you as a client, your matters might be assigned to someone unacceptable to you. If you have selected a large law firm to help you with legal problems your individual account lawyer may ask several other lawyers of his firm who are "specialists in various aspects of law," such as estate planning, liquidation, bankruptcy, pension and profit sharing plans, to "sit-in" on a meeting. You have to watch out, as each of these specialists has an hourly rate which can be astronomical. Thus an hour-long meeting including coffee and an exchange of pleasantries could result in a bill in excess of $1,200.

Find out how recently the lawyer you interview has handled a legal matter related to your field. Once a decision has been made, check the prospects personal references as well as that of his company.

Require a written agreement on fees and billing methods for day-to-day legal questions as they arise. For "special projects" such as implementing a pension and profit-sharing plan, a partnership contract or paper work in connection with purchase of real estate, leases, and the like, get an estimate of the time needed and any charges not included in the fee.

In case you agree on a fixed annual retainer for routine legal matters, determine in writing what is included in such an arrangement. No one should be exposed to the surprise of a husky legal bill without prior agreement. Make sure that your lawyer is aware that you are looking for a practical business solution, not a legal victory.

If your instructions are ignored and you are subjected to unreturned phone calls or unreasonable delays in resolving a problem, and failure to inform you of the conse-

quences prior to taking a decisive action, it is best to terminate your arrangement and seek other legal counsel. This may involve an additional expense but is probably more economical for your company in the long run.

If You Can't Afford A Lawyer, Hire A Law Student

This advice on how to find proper legal representation may be helpful in theory, but a new, small business normally does not have the funds to keep a law firm on a retainer. In my case, lacking both knowledge and foresight and unable to afford the luxury of careful advance planning, I teetered from one crisis to the next.

But it was my good fortune to have Bob Kantrowitz, of Alpine Ski Club fame, as a friend. I relied on him for sound legal advice during his student days, and retained him as my company lawyer from the time he graduated from law school until he died in the mid eighties.

In the beginning of 1951, when I started my business, Bob did the legal work needed to set up the corporation, checked the lease on the loft I rented on Wooster Street, and attended to a lot of other routine legal matters.

When I received the summons from the A. Bamberger Corporation, I rushed to Bob sick with apprehension. He said that it would take some time to research the validity of the claim being made. Meanwhile, since Bob had not yet passed his bar exam, we had to find an inexpensive lawyer to act as a figurehead, and "officially" represent me.

In any event, the summons had to be answered immediately, but aside from that, Bob told me, a bill of particulars, a legal document in which the plaintiff states specific details outlining his case, should be requested. "That will stall things for about three months and give me a chance to do the proper research," he said.

A Lease Is A Lease

While definitely concerned about this lawsuit I had more immediate worries. After barely eight months in business, the space situation in our loft on Wooster Street was absolutely impossible. Not only did we spill over into the hallway of the loft and partially down the stairs to the landing on the next floor, but the sidewalk several floors below was constantly cluttered with boxes, crates, barrels, and bales of scrap, waiting either to be picked up or to be taken upstairs by the incredibly slow public elevator.

Both the policemen on the beat and the elevator man in his little box needed all kinds of financial "persuasion" to tolerate this impossible situation. It was imperative to find larger quarters.

The quarters finally found took the form of a small, rectangular building at 52 Centre Street, in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn. Centre Street is near the

famous Gowanas Canal, known as Mafia territory, from which one or two bodies were recovered more or less every week. My insurance broker said that the location was not exactly choice. In fact, just after we had signed the lease, we found to our dismay that the building was uninsurable. "You are almost guaranteed a break-in within the first year," my insurance broker told me reassuringly. That's when I learned that one must check with the insurance company *before* one signs a lease.

The building, measuring all of 20 by 150 feet, seemed immense. In addition to the drive-in ground floor, it had a second story with three offices, one of them equipped with a kitchenette.

I signed the new lease without worrying about my old lease, for the loft on Wooster Street, since months before, the landlord had claimed to have done me an "enormous favor" in agreeing to a two-year lease, saying that he could get five tenants for every one who applied. Now, when I approached him about breaking my lease, he played a different tune.

"How do you expect me to find a tenant so quickly?" he said when I informed him that I had to move. "Conditions are very bad right now, and the place may be empty for a year before I can rent it again."

"Mr. Jacobs," I said with agitation, "only half a year ago you told me that tenants were breaking down your door to rent this space. Now you claim it is virtually impossible to find a tenant. What do you want me to do?"

"Conditions have changed," Mr. Jacobs replied; "the market is dead. You are responsible. You signed a two-year lease."

I realized that this conversation wasn't going anyplace, so I changed my tack. "Mr. Jacobs," I said pleadingly, "I have just started in business; I am having a hard time. Can't you give me a break somehow?"

Mr. Jacobs seemed to reflect a little, then answered, "Just because I like you, young man, and I feel sorry for you, I will take six months' rent in cash." Then, with emphasis: "I want cash, no checks and remember, this is a big favor. Be sure to be out by the thirtieth."

The truth is, I had no choice. I was desperate! When I had signed the new lease for the Brooklyn warehouse on the twentieth of the month, I had casually asked my new landlord if we could move in gradually over the next ten days, prior to the actual start of the lease. Mr. Robitaille, the landlord, was quite agreeable and handed me the keys. The space was empty anyway.

Now I splurged on a taxi, hurried to Wooster Street, where a truck from Ohio, loaded with boxes of acrylic scrap which could not be unloaded for lack of space, stood in the street. I gave the driver the new Brooklyn address, handed Claus the keys, and sent him by subway to open up the new warehouse. "Borrow a hand truck from a neighbor and unload the stuff somehow," I instructed him. Much later, my new landlord remarked wryly that he didn't consider this a "gradual" move. The thirty boxes of acrylic scrap filled about a third of the little warehouse.

Now we had ten days left to dismantle the grinder and move our inventory from Wooster Street to Brooklyn. Some days later, when the loft we were vacating was still half full, a truck loaded with boxes and textile machinery appeared. The driver introduced himself as the new tenant and asked whether I would mind if he started putting these things into the loft. He said that he had leased the loft as of the first of the month.

The move to Brooklyn was very expensive. The rent of the new place was four times that of the one on Wooster Street. Then I had to pay the extra six months' rent to get a release, and finally the cost of moving materials and machinery was considerable. Once again I was totally broke.

However, the three offices upstairs provided much more space than the premises Kathleen and I occupied on Carmine Street. Looking things over, we decided to give up our Greenwich Village apartment and move in with the scrap. One of the three rooms would be our living room, doubling as main office during the day; of the two remaining rooms, one would serve as our bedroom, the other as my private office.

An added bonus was the hundred-foot tarred roof of the warehouse, accessible from the back door of the apartment. We covered part of this space with duckboard, fenced it in with planters, and thus created an outdoor patio and "garden," where we grew all kinds of herbs, vegetables, and flowers. Thus we carved out a paradisiacal oasis in this notorious slum neighborhood.

The Big Lawsuit

The wheels of "justice" grind slowly. With one delay after another, some of them engineered by my friend Bob, the actual proceeding of the lawsuit *Bamberger vs. Bamberger* was delayed until the first months of 1952.

Samuel Waterford, the attorney hired by the A. Bamberger Corporation was well known. He was mentioned frequently in the *New York Times* as representing one or another of the Fortune 500 corporations in lawsuits claiming patent violations, monopoly infringements, and the like. It was obvious that the Bamberger management, was not sparing any expense to squash my newly founded competitive enterprise. The suit brought against me claimed that customers were confused as to the identity of the firm they were dealing with, and that I was obtaining business by giving them the impression that I was representing the A. Bamberger Corporation. The charge requested specifically that the court immediately issue a restraining order, preventing me from using the name Claude Bamberger when doing business in plastics.

Though we had hired Leonard Goodman, a lawyer friend of Bob Kantrowitz, to represent us officially, it was agreed that Bob would prepare all the legal papers and do the required research. Bob welcomed the idea. Not every law student has

an opportunity to oppose so prominent a firm as Waterford, Breslin and Jackson. Leonard Goodman, who was just an ordinary trial lawyer, was overawed.

Bob was a very enthusiastic individual. He could be tenacious, as he had already demonstrated as my partner in the Alpine Ski Club. Once involved, he would give unstintingly of his time, without ever thinking of remuneration.

The youngest of three brothers, Bob was the son of a doctor who had made a fortune in New York real estate ventures. The two elder brothers had gone into science and medicine. Years later, the eldest was the first to do a heart transplant in the United States, and the other, a physicist, was the first to develop a plastic heart valve, so common today in heart surgery. Even back then, having two brilliant brothers had given my friend Bob, a mere law student, a permanent inferiority complex.



Law student Bob Kantrowitz, ca. 1947

In my eyes, Bob could do no wrong. Following in his father's footsteps he first managed some of his father's apartment buildings and later made his own ventures into this field. Basically, he bought old, decrepit apartment buildings for little or no cash by assuming existing mortgages held by the banks. Then, some years later when prices had steeply risen, he sold them at a great profit. But law was his real passion. We never made a legal move without consulting Bob, who saved us from numerous pitfalls. He was exasperatingly thorough to an extent that drove opposing lawyers and even judges up the wall. Being hard of hearing he used this disability to good advantage buying time by turning off his hearing aid while studying a legal brief, and from time to time fending off those impatient for his response by politely saying, "I am so sorry, I have a handicap, I am a little hard of hearing. Would you please repeat that again?"

When confronted with a legal difficulty, most individuals are impatient, yearning for quick action and an end to sleepless nights. But Bob always took his time and never succumbed to pressure by either his clients or opponents to " get on with it." During the six months, after I first received the summons from the A. Bamberger Corporation, numerous hours were spent in drafting documents and making legal depositions.

The complaints against me were many. I was accused of doing business under false pretenses by leading customers to believe that I represented A. Bamberger, while I was actually operating as another company with a similar name. The suit also cited theft of records, violation of confidence and a host of other accusations, which both of my lawyers felt had been simply thrown in for good measure.

Although my official lawyer, Leonard Goodman, frequently lost heart during the negotiations with Mr. Waterford, who was very pompous, Bob was adamant that the A. Bamberger Corporation had no case at all, insisting that we should prepare for trial rather then discuss settlement.

As is so often the case with very important people, Mr. Waterford did not pay much attention to this particular relatively unimportant case. He had delegated the research work to some clerk in his office, who fortunately for us, did not do a very good job.

It is one thing to accuse someone of all kinds of misdeeds, but it is another to document and prove the case in court. In this particular instance, the plaintiff needed witnesses who were willing to testify that they had been unaware that they were doing business with the Claude P. Bamberger Corporation, being under the impression that Claude was actually representing the A. Bamberger Corporation. Besides, the witness would have to produce some evidence to support this testimony.

When Mr. Waterford had requested from his client a list of potential witnesses, he was given half a dozen names. Maybe the lawyer had neglected to specify just what was needed, or perhaps there was a misunderstanding; in any event all those named on the list were people who had knowingly switched their business to me.Immediately I paid each person a visit and found out, to my amazement and theirs, that no one had ever contacted them or asked them anything about this matter. Their names had been taken simply from a list of accounts which A. Bamberger had lost to me. Since I had been doing business with these firms for more than a year by that time, there was no question that they were positively aware of the difference between the two companies.

Nothing gets people more riled up than seeing a David pitted against a Goliath. These suppliers and customers of mine were outraged that my cousin's firm, the giant A. Bamberger Corporation, would go to such lengths to deprive me of the little business I was doing. These prospective witnesses for the prosecution, who over the years had become good business friends of mine, promised without exception to come to court and testify voluntarily on my behalf.

The basis for settling a lawsuit is always the precedent set by previous similar cases. Naturally, the prosecution cites examples in which a court decided in their favor, while the defense tries to find cases where the decision was the reverse. Since no two cases are exactly alike, the court then has to decide which of those cited are sufficiently similar to the case in question to be applicable.

Mr. Waterford's research team came up with some bizarre cases which really bore no relation to the *Bamberger vs. Bamberger* situation. One was the case of a Mr. Parker, who manufactured cheap pens in the basement of his home and marketed them under the name "Parker" pens. Another case was that of a Mr. Baccardi, who produced rum which he sold under his name.

After studying these cases closely, my friend Bob concluded that they were totally irrelevant to the matter pending before the court. In Bob's opinion, Parker and Baccardi were cashing in on the reputations of giant companies with names that happened to be the same as theirs. The general public would not know, for example, that one "Parker" pen was different from the other.

In the pretrial hearings it soon became evident that both Claude P. Bamberger and A. Bamberger were selling scrap materials to a highly specialized educated group. There is no quality product identifiable by brand name, in the scrap business. In the words of the judge who presided over the case: "In fact there is no such thing as a 'Bamberger scrap quality'. While one shipment could be excellent, the next shipment could be poor. The name of the seller is of secondary importance."

Thus, the famous Mr. Waterford was confronted with the prospect of defeat by a law student. To save face, he accepted the judge's proposal to settle the matter "amicably" out of court. After consulting with his client, Mr. Waterford declared that they would be satisfied if I would put the following legend on my letterhead: "Not connected with any firm of similar name." Not knowing what unexpected obstacles might arise if the case actually went to trial, Bob advised me to accept this proposal.

In all honesty, my small firm did indeed benefit in the beginning from having a name well known in the industry, but I was always careful to clear up any sort of confusion, as I did for example in the Neon Products deal.

On leaving the meeting in which the settlement agreement was signed, Bob remarked wryly, "Your Mr. Waterford is not the greatest in small details. He neglected to specify the size of the wording to be used on your letterhead."

Then, on the advice of Bob, we printed new stationery, with the mandatory statement "Not connected with any firm of similar name" so small that it could hardly be read with the naked eye. In fact, anyone looking casually at the letterhead would simply think that the name Claude P. Bamberger was underlined with a fat black line. Over the years that followed, the little Claude P. Bamberger Corporation, a mouse as opposed to the giant cat A. Bamberger, developed quite nicely. Some years later, the reputation of the original company began to sag, and Claude Bamberger, not wishing to be confused in any way with an ailing business, thought it best to make the declaration "Not connected with any firm of similar name" gradually larger and more readable. In the end, to be certain that no one could miss that announcement, we had it underlined and printed in bold type.

Once A Crook, Always A Crook

Even if the principals of the business are not litigious, sooner or later they are inadvertently drawn into situations requiring the service of an attorney. This happened to us in the mid-fifties, when one of the more troublesome characters ever to cross our path was a crook named Al Fortunato.

He appeared one day in our office with a handful of clear cellulose acetate scrap and said, "I know youse buy this stuff from Franklin Container in Trenton. They is my neighbors and I can truck it for you." My own trucker, Joe Bruno, had advised us that it would be a good idea to use "gypsy" truckers to bring in scrap from outlying areas, instead of the ICC-registered trucking companies, which were very expensive.

So I hired Fortunato for occasional trucking jobs from the vicinity of Trenton, New Jersey. In the fifties the public was more trusting and a whole lot less litigious than today. We never worried about insurance, legal actions, and liability. Who in his right mind today would authorize a guy walking in off the street to pick up goods worth several thousand dollars and actually believe that he would deliver them? But this is how we operated then.

After Fortunato had made a couple of pickups and deliveries for us, I was lucky enough to purchase an entire trailerload of bulky, blow-molded bottle rejects from the giant Wheaton Glass Company in Glassboro, New Jersey. Upon completion of the deal I told the seller that I had arranged with "my trucker," Al Fortunato, to make the pickup.

Ten days went by, but no material arrived. On the eleventh day we received from Wheaton Glass an invoice and signed bill of lading showing that eighteen thousand pounds of scrap had been picked up a week before. Where was our material? Where was Al Fortunato?

I called the telephone number he had given me and a female voice answered: "Mr. Fortunato? Yes — I haven't seen him. He is out trucking."

"Am I speaking to Mrs. Fortunato?" I asked.

There was a pause, then a strange giggle: "Ah... eh... yes, I guess you can call me that."

Puzzled, I said, "When can I reach him? When is he coming home?"

Pause again: "I really can't say" — more female giggles in the background. "Maybe if you call after midnight."

All this was not exactly confidence inspiring. Nothing sounded right. A great deal of money was involved here, so I decided to drive down to Trenton and confront his wife in person.

I reached Trenton a little bit after eight that evening. The address, which I had scribbled on a sheet of paper, was in a terribly dilapidated neighborhood. Ancient wooden duplex houses with rickety porches and half-rotten wooden staircases leading to the upper floors lined the street.

It was already dark, but as I neared my destination I saw one house with a reddish light bulb out front. There seemed to be some other characters who, like me, were gravitating toward that point. Indeed, the house number I had scribbled on a piece of paper matched the one on the building with the red light. I felt a little out of place; this just didn't seem a "proper dwelling," even for an Italian truck driver.

From upstairs came raucous music, voices, laughter. This was by no means a normal family setting. When I rang the bell, made visible by its own interior light, the door opened a crack. All I could see was a female face with enormous eyes, further enlarged with mascara and blue eye shadow. After the woman had looked me over, she opened the door fully. She wore a flimsy, see-through outfit and gold shoes with stiletto heels. She introduced herself as Chanel. "What's your name?" she asked, as she led me into a parlor filled with chintz-covered, overstuffed furniture and occupied by half a dozen girls, all provocatively dressed. "Girls, this is Claude," Chanel announced loudly enough to be heard over the jazz music blaring from a radio in the corner. She motioned to me to sit down in one of the armchairs. All the girls stared at me. Chanel now announced what to me was obvious: "Girls, you have a visitor."

A Spanish-looking girl, hips swaying, dressed in a tightly clinging satin gown which left little to the imagination, approached, stopped in front of me and introduced herself as Coco. Before she could go on, I interrupted her: "I'm sorry. I must have the wrong address. I am looking for a Mr. Fortunato."

Chanel then said, "Oh, Al. We haven't seen him in a few days, but why don't you make yourself comfortable? He might be coming after midnight."

I was anything but comfortable and not inclined to hang around until midnight. I thanked her very much, mumbled something about being pressed for time and retreated in haste.

My next stop was the nearest police precinct.

It wasn't very busy. A number of cops were reading newspapers; some played cards in a corner. I showed the desk sergeant the address I had on a piece of paper, and told him that I was looking for a Mr. Fortunato, who had mistakenly given me the wrong address. I mentioned that I had hired him to do some trucking for me.

The sergeant scratched his head, then went to a file and pulled out a mug shot of Mr. Fortunato, asking, "Is that the guy you are looking for?" Aghast, I answered in the affirmative. "This guy is a thief," the sergeant now said "We are looking for him ourselves. You can forget about your truckload; he probably sold the stuff in Chicago a week ago."

I felt queasy. Once a warrant for Fortunato's arrest had been sworn out, there was nothing more to be done. Driving back toward Brooklyn that night I mulled over the events of the previous few hours, never seeing an ounce of humor in this highly shocking situation. I was too worried about the invoice from Wheaton Glass.

Thinking things through, I concluded that in all likelihood Fortunato had sold the shipment to some of the small dealers in the New York - New Jersey area. The material would be easy to identify, since most of the scrap pieces had the name "Wheaton Glass" printed on them. Mentally, I made a list of scrap dealers in the metropolitan area who were likely to pay cash and buy goods off a truck. These would be, I thought, the smaller, less reputable firms, and among them the best candidates were the dealers specializing in PVC and polyethylene textile waste. By the time I reached home, I had come up with the names of seven dealers — two in Brooklyn, two in the Bronx, and three in Manhattan — as possible suspects.

I called Bob, my lawyer, at two in the morning and told him what had transpired and what I was planning to do. He warned me to be careful not to show my hand: these dealers I proposed to investigate were likely to be hostile, since a company found in possession of stolen goods was subject to criminal prosecution, and at the very least would be forced to return the goods to their rightful owner. To prove just who was the rightful owner would be another legal problem.

The next morning, after a sleepless night, I called Wheaton Glass and was told that my driver, Mr. Fortunato, had picked up four small loads over the last couple of weeks. I told them what had happened and requested that they call the police and have him arrested, should he show up for another load.

Next I held an emergency staff meeting in which I presented my plan of action. Kathy would stand by the phone, in the office as liaison officer. Claus and Joe would "raid" the dealers in the Bronx and Manhattan. I myself would handle the Brooklyn guys.

"You go to their warehouse," I told my crew, "walk in through the back door and look around for signs of the Wheaton Glass material." I showed samples of the material. "Should someone question what you are doing, play dumb and ask how to get to the office and the boss. Once there, pretend you came to buy some scrap and need to see samples. "Whatever you do, don't let on what you are after. The dealer knows that if he is caught with stolen goods he will have to return them to the rightful owner without compensation. Also, rather than expose himself to criminal prosecution, he is likely to make sure that the material quickly disappears."

Each of us left on his mission, and miraculously, by noon of that day we had found what we were looking for. Part of the material was with a Bronx dealer, the rest turned up in the loft of a small scrap dealer only ten blocks from us, in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn.

If locating the goods was easy, retrieving them was more difficult. When I called my local precinct and reported the situation, the police there were far from enthusiastic about getting involved. It meant work, after all, and that is *not* what people like.

First, they said they could not book this complaint since the theft had been reported in Trenton, which should handle the matter. Then they said they could not get involved in interstate cases, and I should call the FBI. Also the Bronx was altogether out of their jurisdiction, and the case should be handled by a Bronx precinct. It was exasperating.

In the end, the Trenton police seemed most interested. They called the FBI, and as a result, after I had spent another sleepless night, two well-dressed FBI agents appeared at my doorstep.

Having listened to my story, they asked me to go with them to Nostrand Avenue, where one of the dealers was located. There we stopped in front of a seemingly abandoned storefront shop with a hand painted plywood board nailed to the wall. "M & L Plastic Scrap Company" was the legend scrawled in irregular letters.

When I had been there the day before, the door had been open and inside were ten black women around a huge table, sorting scrap into barrels. The Wheaton Glass material was stacked in the corner in plain view, stored in drums and cardboard boxes prominently marked with the Wheaton Glass logo and name. I spoke to one of the women who said she was the "floor lady." When I asked for her boss I was told that he was out on the truck picking up scrap. She didn't know when he would be back. I had left no message but said I would return, a promise I kept the next day, in the company of the FBI agents.

This time the place seemed deserted. The dented rusty iron door was padlocked. We knocked loudly, but nothing budged. One of the agents said he would observe the place from a greasy coffee shop across the street, and would call me as soon as he was able to make a contact. Meanwhile, I proceeded with the other agent to the Bronx to visit "Katz Associates, Dealers in Plastic Scrap," where Claus had spotted some of our material.

Mr. Katz was nonplussed when we confronted him. He remonstrated that he was an honest businessman who had made "regular purchases" from Mr. Fortunato, and actually produced some hand-scrawled bills, showing what he had paid for the scrap. Then he asked for permission to call his lawyer, who advised him not to agree to anything and not to release any of the material.

Meanwhile, when I called in to find out what was going on, Kathy told me that the FBI man in Brooklyn had made contact and was holding Moishe Murmelstein and Lenny Rabinowitz at our local police precinct, waiting for me to sign a warrant for their arrest.

On our way to Brooklyn the FBI agent said that in all likelihood the M and L company was a fence for stolen goods. I disagreed; to me it looked like an ordinary small scrap place of the sort that are a dime a dozen. The waspish FBI views life through different-colored glasses than a fellow scrap dealer, albeit one a notch above Moishe and Lenny.

Thoroughly frightened, Moishe and Lenny said that they had started their scrap business only four months ago, and that it was rough. "Dealing with Fortunato was no picnic," both declared. Apparently, he had shown them samples of the Wheaton stuff, promising a regular supply. They had agreed on a price, but when he made a delivery a day later they found that the material was contaminated, consisting of a mixture of different plastics. "When I told him that he had misrepresented the material, Mr. F. got real mad," Moishe related, "and he yelled, 'What's the matter with you guys? Are you crooks?' He then proceeded to reload the scrap onto his truck. Only after Lenny pleaded with him did he reconsider, reduce the price somewhat, and let them keep the stuff." After telling us this story, Moishe added, "I wish he had taken it with him and disappeared forever."

The police and the FBI agents had listened to this account with total disinterest. Then one of them asked: "Mr. Bamberger, do you want to sign a complaint?" I hesitated, knowing that Moishe and Lenny were just caught in a net of circumstances and were definitely not thieves.

"What is the procedure? Can I get my material back *without* signing a complaint?" I asked.

"That's up to you," the agent said "We have noted the incident on the police blotter, but these two guys here won't be in the official record unless you sign a warrant."

"What do you want me to do?" I now asked Moishe. "How can we straighten the matter out?"

"We want no trouble," Moishe said. "If the material belongs to you, we'll return it. It's a big loss."

I felt sorry for the guys but had no way to help them since Wheaton Glass no doubt expected payment from me on time. "How much did you buy from this Fortunato?" I asked, and then remarked to the police sergeant who was taking notes, "This information should be put into the record."

Moishe said, "He delivered three truckloads. That's about 15,000 pounds, I don't know the exact weight. Whatever we got you can pick up. Maybe you can make up our loss by buying something from us."

So we shook hands and arranged for pickup of the material, which was about two-thirds of the quantity for which Wheaton had billed us. Mr. Katz, in the Bronx, had the other third. His lawyer gave us a hard time, requiring proof that we were the rightful owners and asking a host of questions. Mr. Katz, a more sophisticated buyer than Moishe and Lenny, had paid a lot less for the material than we had agreed to pay Wheaton Glass. He too pointed out that it was contaminated. We finally agreed to pay him what he had paid Fortunato, and thus we were at least in control of goods which were legally ours and for which the supplier expected payment.

As the material had turned out to be contaminated and not the quality we had contracted for, Wheaton Glass readily agreed to give us a substantial adjustment. In the end, we didn't make a lot of money on that deal, but then we didn't lose a lot either.

Six months after these events the Trenton police paid us a visit, asking whether we would withdraw our warrant for the arrest of Mr. Fortunato. They said such open cases didn't look good on their blotter. We refused to do this. A few days later an officer from our precinct in Brooklyn came to see me. "Claude," he said jovially, you remember that Fortunato case?" I did remember. "Well..." the officer hemmed and hawed, "the Trenton police have Mr. Fortunato in custody. Would it be worth a couple of bucks to you to dismiss the warrant for his arrest?"

"What do you mean 'a couple of bucks'?" I said, my ears pricking up. "This guy stole six thousand dollars' worth of material, sold it and collected for it, and now he wants to 'share' his profit with us? What kind of proposal is that?" Then I continued, "He gave me a lot of expense and trouble. If Mr. Fortunato is sorry and can pay me ten thousand, I will consider withdrawing my warrant."

The officer was obviously embarrassed. "I'll let you know," he mumbled sheepishly, and that was the last we saw of him.

A month later I heard that Mr. Fortunato had been convicted for this and possibly many other thefts and received a prison sentence. No doubt by now he has been released and is once again happily plying his trade — not in plastic scrap, I think, as *that* was one of his less profitable ventures.

An Expansion Which Backfires

As time went on, we became so busy that we had to hire a few women to sort scrap and three men to do the heavy work. Claus Becher was promoted to foreman.

In the 1950s the plastics industry really came into its own. All the materials that had been reserved strictly for military applications during the war years were now freely available for public consumption. No standard industry guidelines for the appropriate use of various plastic molding compounds had been established. Because of the rapid expansion of the plastics industry, the consumer market was suddenly swamped with all kinds of inexpensive plastic products, many made of unsuitable materials. Consumers quickly became disillusioned with toys that didn't last an hour, plastic telephones that split open when dropped, glasses that melted in the dishwasher, and innumerable other unsatisfactory products. Plastic, first perceived as a miracle material, soon came to be regarded as cheap and unacceptable. "Give me solid steel, wood, metal," was the refrain heard everywhere.

All this was a boon to the scrap business, because mountains of scrap in the form of rejects and obsolete, unsalable products came onto the market. Like

mushrooms after a rain, smaller, new competitors grew up around us almost overnight. Many of them approached us to buy their scrap.

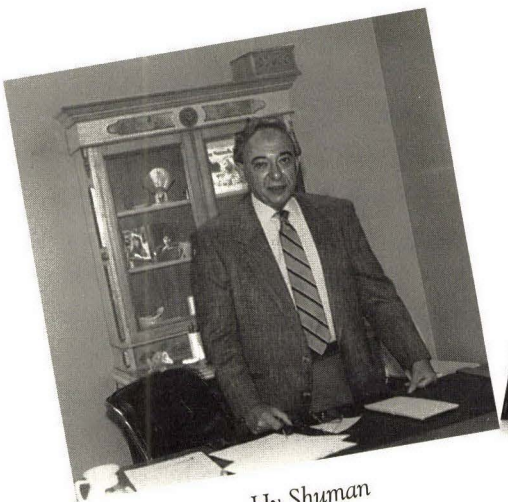
Among them were two brothers, Charlie and Hy Shuman, who appeared one day in our office. Hy, the elder, was the main spokesman. After introducing himself and his brother as fellow "scrap dealers," Hy said, "We are just out of school and our father has been in the wastepaper and scrap-metal business for many years. Lately a lot of companies we do business with have been asking us to take their plastic scrap as well."

"The problem is," Charlie interjected, "that we don't know anything about plastics. Our suppliers referred us to you as the best possible outlet for their scrap."

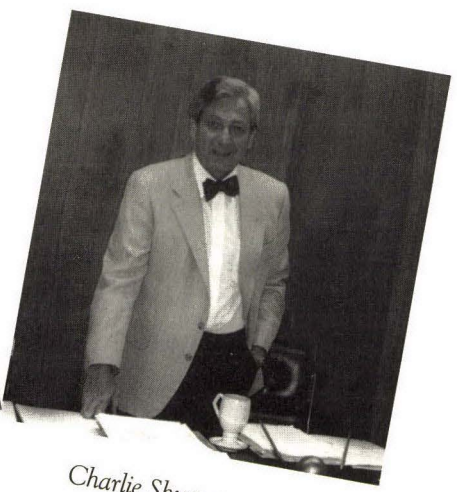
All this really made sense. In return for our teaching them how to recognize and test the various types of plastics, which look alike, the Shuman boys promised to purchase for us materials accumulated in upstate New York, consolidate them into truckload quantities, and sell them exclusively to us. In those days a handshake and a promise were better than any written contract, and indeed the Shumans not only kept their word but became very good friends of ours.

The agreed-upon arrangement worked well for a couple of years, but then there was suddenly a dip in the economy and the supply of scrap exceeded the demand. We kept on reducing the price. Each time, the Shumans not only agreed to the price reduction, but simultaneously increased the quantities they shipped. We soon reached the saturation point and had to tell them that until further notice we simply could no longer accept materials.

Charlie reasonably proposed, "If we can't ship to you, we hope you don't mind our looking for other customers. After all, we are in the business and have to give service to our suppliers." What could we do but reluctantly agree, hoping that the business climate would reverse soon?



Hy Shuman



Charlie Shuman

By the time that came to pass eight months later and we wanted the Shumans to resume scrap shipments, they had found end-user customers who offered a better price. They now suggested that we buy materials from them at basically the same prices that we were getting ourselves. "Of course you always have preference with us," Hy said, but this was little consolation. Inadvertently, we had created what with time became a serious competitor.

Still, we remained friends, but soon it was obvious that our business philosophies differed greatly. While Hy preferred a more conservative growth — as we did — Charlie was very ambitious and wanted them to become one of the largest reprocessing firms in the country.

We kept doing more or less the same thing we had always done, sticking strictly with trading and not buying any costly labor-intensive processing machinery, but the Shumans did just the opposite. As Charlie had predicted, they grew by leaps and bounds; first they had one compounding line, then several, then offices in different parts of the world. In time they indeed became one of the largest scrap-processing operations in the United States, and thus were no longer much of a competitor of ours. We had stayed more or less the same. The only change we made, as we went along, was to stop dealing in "commodity" materials such as polyolefins, styrenes and PVC, materials produced and used in a huge volume. We found dealing in these "commodity" materials too competitive and very often unprofitable. Ultimately we specialized in the more complicated and sensitive engineering materials for which the secondary market was very difficult but financially more rewarding.

As had happened with my uncle's firm thirty-five years earlier, in 1990 the Shumans' mammoth enterprise, saddled with very expensive high-tech processing equipment and a complicated computer system, also proved to be their undoing. They had to reorganize the company by closing down their compounding operation, selling their very expensive high-tech processing equipment. Staff had to be cut and real estate holdings leased just to survive. This demonstrates once again that except for publicly held companies with substantial capital and the capacity to hold enormous inventories of materials, trying to compete with the prime producers is bound to end in failure.

Chapter Eleven

Rapid Growth in Volume and Troubles

1953 - 1960

Is A Union Necessary?

Once again, here is a question better answered by the "how-to" experts. By now the reader is aware that the "theory" introduced at the beginning of these chapters often does not correspond to what really happens. However, the suggestions given are nevertheless valid, and a would-be entrepreneur would be wise to follow them. Accordingly, the following material is a combination of what Gardiner Greene wrote in How to Start and Manage Your Own Business *in 1975 and my own advice, which is based on hindsight — after I did everything wrong.*

For generations, most businessmen, large or small, have been fearful of unions and of their detrimental effect on their business.

There have been all kinds of unions in our history, and some have been pretty bad. Perhaps some still are, or at least some of the leaders are. However there is no question that unions have done some good — not so much good for the businessman, but a great deal for the workers. If you have to face a union situation, here are a couple of ideas that might help.

Most union leaders today are well-educated, intelligent people. They are dedicated to their cause. The old ruffian, gangster, hoodlum type is the exception now. Do not look down on these people. We may not agree with them but we have to live with them.

When a union representative calls on you, treat him with dignity. Show him your place of business, introduce him to some of your employees, and invite him for lunch. I am not suggesting a phony approach. You should be sincere and treat him as well as you might treat an important customer. Communicating with him is most important. Try to understand him and his objectives, and help him see your side. At lunch, have a drink or two.

If union men start passing out literature on the street in front of your business, invite them into your lobby, where it is warm. You will not gain anything by trying to make their job more difficult. You have nothing to hide and you should act accordingly, so that your employees will have more respect for you.

Treat the union organizer civilly, as you would any other unpopular guy who might pay you a visit some day — an IRS man, for example. The IRS man probably will not let you pay for a drink, or lunch. (He is not about to buy yours either.) But a first-name relationship makes future negotiations easier.

You may want legal advice if the union shows up, but do not let your lawyer be present during negotiations. The presence of a lawyer hired to fight the union indicates weakness in top management. The union organizer will be much easier to deal with if you keep your lawyer out of it. A union official appreciates dealing with the head of the firm and you can usually make a better deal.

The humble attitude is best. "I have had no experience with unions," you say, for example, "Please tell me how you operate?" "What would you do if you were in my

position?" is another good approach. If you get pinned down, ask if you could take the matter up with one of your directors — but do not mention your lawyer.

If you bring your lawyer into the fray, they will bring in theirs. Your lawyer may not have the ability or experience to negotiate with a highly specialized labor lawyer. Be humble and let the union fellow help you. It plays on his ego and gets what you want by making him look good.

If your business does become unionized, all is not lost. You should maintain good rapport with the local union head. An occasional lunch or dinner will help. Treat him as if you understand why he is there (even if you don't). Actually, he can help you run your business.

Most small businessmen are spread too thin. We cannot be everything to everyone. If you are unionized, make the best of it. The union can really assist you if you will let it. How? For one thing, it will help you with internal management problems. You no longer have to worry about "good old Jones" who has been with you so long. The company has outgrown him and you are probably paying him more than he is worth now. Should he have a raise? You cannot afford it, but now you can tell him to take the matter up with the union steward.

If the majority of your employees voted for a union, perhaps it is your fault anyway. In any event, the union is there. Face it! Perhaps a union can even help you to raise production. It might help you to weed out nonproductive workers, keep the place clean and more efficient. In other words, a union can actually help your firm to make money, if you will let them. Let them help you in managing the labor portion of your business, which for most managers is a real headache. This should free you to spend more of your valuable time in sales or developing new products.

Strike

With the A. Bamberger lawsuit settled and the space problem at least temporarily solved, an uninitiated person might think that running the business would be as easy as pie. That is what we thought at the time. Now, more than forty years later, I am wise enough to know that as long as you own a business, you never have any peace. That comes only when you are six feet under.

Everyone running a business knows that, while purchasing raw materials, manufacturing a product and selling it make up the backbone of the operation, these activities do not by any means take all of the entrepreneur's attention. Environmental problems, insurance, labor laws, maintenance, and a host of other concerns tend to make the running of even a small business a gargantuan task.

In 1953, our office staff consisted of Kathy and myself. In the warehouse Claus, our working foreman, was assisted by a few women who sorted vinyl scrap, Bruno the trucker, and three husky black workers named George, Leroy, and

Harold, who loaded, unloaded and stacked materials by hand. The boxes and drums weighed anywhere from 200 to 800 pounds and it often took four men to stack them five or six on top of one another. In those days small companies like ours did not know what a fork lift looked like, let alone consider buying one for the astronomical price of two thousand dollars.

Watching the crew struggle with these cumbersome containers, I was reminded of my history lessons on how the Egyptians built the pyramids. Unlike the pyramids, our piled-up scrap was not stable; it always seemed to teeter on the verge of collapse. All this was long before the days of OSHA and government safety regulations.

It was perhaps a year and a half after we set up in business that one morning, peeping out of an upstairs window, Kathy saw some characters parading up and down the sidewalk in front of our building bearing signs with the following legend:

S T R I K E

THE EMPLOYEES OF C. BAMBERGER ARE
UNFAIR TO ORGANIZED LABOR FOR NOT
JOINING THE UNION.

Consultation with my employees revealed that they knew nothing about a union and in fact wanted no part of it. Like Claus, some of the women had come from the A. Bamberger Corporation, where in the past they had lost a lot of time out on strike while the union discussed contract settlement with the management.

I suspected that the union action had been instigated by my cousin's firm, as it seemed too much of a coincidence that the large Amalgamated Plastics and Button Workers union, which now had a contract with my alma mater, would be interested in picketing a shop with just five or six reluctant workers.

The pickets did little to disrupt our business. Few truckers were concerned after reading the signs borne by the non-English-speaking young men, fresh off the boat from Puerto Rico, who had been hired by the union for a couple of dollars a day. Unbelievably, these poor guys actually supplemented their meager wages by helping us load and unload materials whenever their boss, who from time to time drove up in a huge air-conditioned Cadillac, was not around.

The pickets came daily for several weeks; then suddenly they were gone. However, they were back a year later — alas, with more success that time. George, who had been one of my first employees, had become more and more insecure as the business expanded and we hired additional people. Worried about his job security, he finally succumbed to the union's tempting promises and in turn succeeded in either coercing or inducing the majority of our workers into signing up.

Hence, one morning Luciano, the arrogant union boss, stormed into my office unannounced, plunked down a contract on my desk and sneeringly said, "Bamberger, we got you by the balls. Either you sign this contract or you're dead."

I told Luciano that I wasn't going to sign anything before I had a chance to speak to my lawyer, Bob Kantrowitz.

"Too bad for you," Luciano retorted. Pounding down the stairs into the factory he shouted, "Everybody out — we're on strike."

Reluctantly, my crew filed out, all except Claus, who came into the office to ask what he should do. I told him that he would not lose any pay but should stay at home for the time being, until I had consulted the lawyers.

For some time, Bob and I had been friends with Lawrence Porter, a former customer of the Alpine Ski Club who was a lawyer and an expert in labor relations.

But Lawrence could be of little help. He suggested that I not sign anything and if possible, just close and wait out the storm. By coincidence all this happened in the middle of July, during the summer doldrums. Half the businesses I dealt with closed entirely for two weeks of vacation at that time, and after reopening, they would not need scrap pickups or deliveries for another two weeks. Indeed, I had just been discussing this slow period with Kathy, who was still my right-hand adviser as well as bookkeeper and secretary of the corporation.

"What should we do with all these people?" I remember asking her just before the strike. "I don't want to lay them off. They need their earnings, and besides, we will need them again in a couple of weeks"

"Why don't you give everyone a two-week vacation with pay?" my wife suggested. "By the end of that time you may have enough work for them."

It was at that providential moment, while I was thinking about implementing my wife's proposal, that Luciano stormed into my office with his ultimatum. The result was the immediate closing of both the plant and the office. We gave Bruno a two-week paid vacation, and Kathy and I went on a week-long canoe trip in Maine's wilderness, braving the treacherous rapids of the West Branch of the Penobscot River. There we enjoyed an uninterrupted rest. In those telex-less and fax-less days, a vacation was really a vacation. Claus was to answer all calls while we were away and assure suppliers and customers that we would take care of their needs when the plant reopened after vacation.

Upon our return the pickets were still there. Not knowing how long the strike would last, we decided that we would simply move our business to a one-car garage behind my mother's house in Bellerose. On a Sunday, while the pickets had a vacation of their own, Bruno and Claus moved all the essential files plus a couple of desks into the garage, and the telephone company installed a phone there.

In the days that followed, Claus and Bruno, manning the truck, acted as our roving crew, calling in periodically for instructions on where to pick up ma-

terials and what deliveries to make. It was during that crisis that we learned to coordinate operations so that materials could be picked up and delivered the same day, often saving costly handling expenses. That was when we became aware that drop shipment — trading in materials without actually handling them — could mean additional profit. In fact, over the next forty years this became the major and most profitable part of our business.

Whatever could not be delivered immediately was stored, checked, and reground by my friend Nathan Dunham, of Dunham's Waste Material. He had a small scrap business located in a former butcher shop in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Although he was a competitor in a way, he offered to help out. I trusted Nathan, and as a result we worked together on a number of joint ventures during the many years that followed.

What with my learning about drop shipments and joint ventures, this strike proved to be more help for the expansion of our business than anything else. Given the business climate at that time, we actually made out better financially during the strike, since we were not saddled with a high weekly payroll.

Neighbors in Red Hook who lived in a tenement building across the street from our plant gave us daily reports on what the pickets were doing. We ourselves never went near our building during the first month of the walkout.

After about four weeks, Claus and Bruno cautiously started to work in our factory at night, doing some grinding and sorting. As time went by we gradually got more aggressive, with Claus and Bruno working on the grinder behind closed doors all day, and loading and unloading Bruno's truck at night or in the wee hours of the morning. Next, Kathy and I moved out of the Bellerose garage and back into our own office/apartment.

Eight weeks after the start of the strike, all the striking employees had disappeared from the picket line. Since they could neither collect unemployment benefits nor get paid by the union, they were forced to seek employment elsewhere. The union continued to maintain a token picket line manned by the low-paid Puerto Ricans, who disconsolately marched back and forth five or six hours a day in front of a closed building on an almost deserted street. Finally they too disappeared. Possibly the union thought the strike had put us out of business.

With the pickets gone, Claus hired three new employees. Two of them, ironically, were the Puerto Rican pickets, who were fed up with the union and in desperate need of steady work. The other one was Jerry Simmons, who after four decades with us became official foreman in 1994.

In the beginning of 1955, with the help of the labor lawyer, Lawrence Porter, an independent union was organized for our employees. It is still with us in 1995, after forty years.

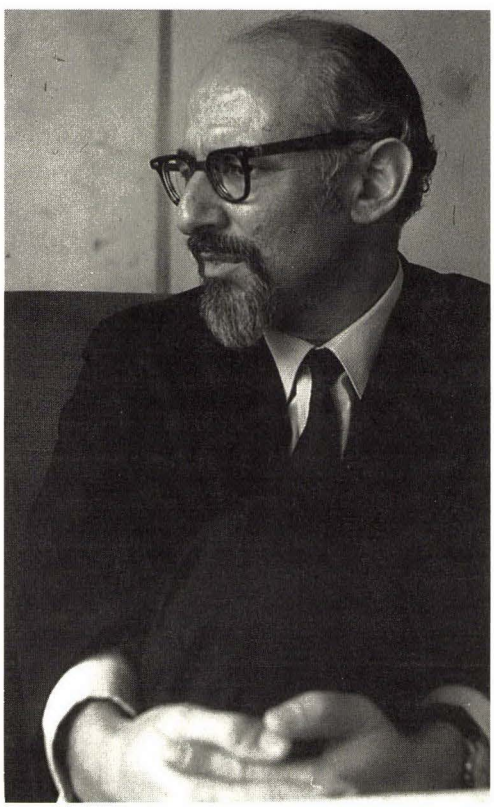
A Partner Joins The Firm

During my first two years in business, I was the sole owner and stock holder of the Claude P. Bamberger Corporation, dealing mainly in cellulosics, acrylic and PVC sheet material.

By 1953 it became evident that if I was ever to have a long vacation, or just take time off to relax, I would require a partner who could look after the business in my absence. At that time, Jack Suhl perhaps my closest friend, with whom I spent most every weekend folk-dancing, camping and hiking, was somewhat at loose ends.

An idealist and a socialist, he was politically active, as an editor of an underground periodical called *Contemporay Issues*, which published mostly articles purporting to expose crimes secretly committed by our government in Washington.

Jack in fact had more or less the same ideas that Gerald and I had had "eons" of years ago. Our view was that we needed to work to create a life for ourselves and to pursue our ideals. Neither of us wanted to live in order to work.



Jack Suhl, ca. 1960

Toward the end of 1952 Jack had "escaped" from a very disagreeable partnership in a small tool-and-die business and went back to school to study accounting. His problem was that while the business yielded a fair living, Jack was treated like a junior partner — much the way Gerald had treated me some years before. A fight ensued when he balked, and after a bitter struggle Jack forced his partner to purchase his share.

Just as I had fled the structured environment of the A.Bamberger Corporation, my previous employer, so Jack resolved that he would never go into a business again, unless he was a full partner in fact as well as in name.

When I first approached him about becoming a partner, he was totally uninterested, fearing another fiasco. It took almost a year of the persuasivess that is my specialty, to get him to agree to give it a try. What finally changed Jack's mind about joining forces with me was a clause in our stockholders' agreement to the effect that the new company must be structured so that only one partner had to be present at any time. Although

both of us realized that a great deal more money would be made if both partners were working full time, we decided that the business should be able to function with only one partner if necessary. Each partner would be entitled, conditions permitting, to take off as much as six months a year.

The advantage of such an unorthodox agreement was that Jack could more or less make his own hours as long as I was holding the fort, while I, remaining sole stockholder of the parent company had someone to look after my interests when I was absent from the office. The way I saw it, we had beaten the "system," both having our cake and eating it.

Even though Jack was a few years younger than I, maybe thirty years old, he was already talking about retirement before he started work. He said he would quit as soon as he had enough money to live on the interest of his accumulated capital. This goal amused me, coming from an arch socialist. It seemed pretty far off just then. At the moment Jack had no capital and had to earn a living from a newly formed company with zero assets and no visible income. Years of very hard work lay ahead.

Thus in 1953 Jack and I formed a new company, the Claude Bamberger Molding Compounds Corporation, which was to deal exclusively in thermoplastic molding compounds. As head of the parent company, I would continue to buy and sell sheet materials, while Jack, with advice from me, would develop the purchase and sale of the thermoplastic molding materials. Simultaneously we founded another company, the Claude P. Bamberger Manufacturing Corporation, which was needed to keep track of the processing costs of the materials of each company. This new subsidiary made it possible to separate the labor force paid by the hour from the salaried office employees of the other two companies, each having a different set of fringe benefits.

Jack quickly learned the routine of the business, and with my experienced guidance and the well-known name Bamberger, our fledgling corporations did very well from the start.

The Collapse Of A Venerable Enterprise

One reason for our success was that the A. Bamberger Corporation and American Molding Powder Corporation, now our largest competitors, had a lot of problems. Beside labor troubles, there was an increasing discontent among their executive employees.

The first to leave American Molding were Bert Preiss, Ben Kretkowski, and Bernie Peterson, the group which had originally joined my uncle when Mr. Hoffman of the old American Molding Compounds Corporation died. In 1954 they started a new company named Plastic Molded Industries (PMI), which produced virgin cellulose acetate and polystyrene in competition with their alma mater.

This caused more turmoil at American Molding Compounds Corporation and created so many disagreements that within a short time my former boss, Arthur Metzger, and an executive named Matty Stazak left to start their own company which they called AMCO Plastic Corporation. Located on Smith Street in Brooklyn, only a few blocks from the A. Bamberger Corporation. This new company concentrated on dealing in scrap materials, competing directly with A. Bamberger, and somewhat indirectly with us. Like us a year earlier, they were almost immediately forced to fend off an illegal strike by the militant union which represented the A. Bamberger employees.

In the four years after his death, the mismanagement of my uncle's corporations had spawned three new direct competitors. No closely held corporation can withstand such a drain of executive personnel, particularly in a relatively small field. My aunt Else, Anton's widow, was the controlling stockholder of A. Bamberger and American Molding Powder Corporation. In 1954, heeding the advice of her bankers and attorneys, she asked her retired brother-in-law, a Mr. Epstein who lived in Los Angeles, to come to New York and either sell or liquidate her deceased husband's business.

The only salable component was not the original A. Bamberger Corporation, which dealt strictly in plastic scrap, but the American Molding Powder Company, owners of the Ampacet trademark.

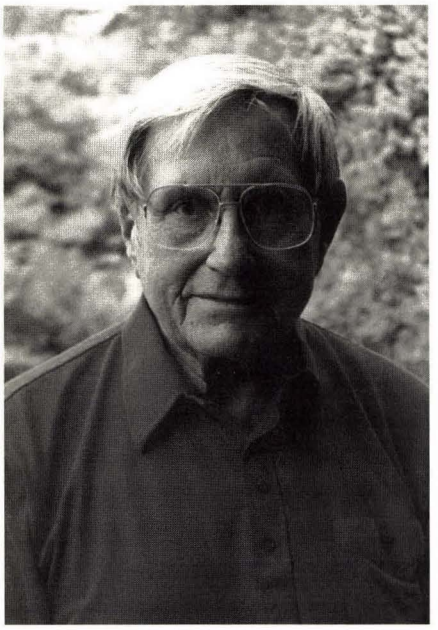
Mr. Epstein soon found an interested buyer, a Mr. Alexander, president of Ansbacher Siegl, a color and pigment firm located in Cincinnati, Ohio, which supplied American Molding Compounds with pigments for its molding compounds. The day of color concentrates was just dawning, and my uncle's firm had the equipment to produce such concentrates. Hence it was a logical step for Mr. Alexander to aquire that company.

Today, Ampacet is the largest producer of color concentrates in the the world, with many modern manufacturing facilities and distribution centers in both the United States and Europe.

Gerald's sister Vera and her husband Walter Hirtz left shortly after the new management took over. They settled in Los Angeles, where Walter started his own company dealing in plastic scrap.

Gerald himself left sometime in 1955 and later hired Pete Triano, an executive at American Molding Powder, to join him in his own trading company, Interplast, in New York City. Pete Triano stayed with Interplast about a year, and then left to start a compounding plant,Federal Plastics.

In 1961, Interplast merged with the George Woloch Company, which had formerly dealt in rubber scrap, but now achieved a certain amount of prominence in the rapidly expanding plastic industry. When Mr. Woloch died in 1964, the general manager, Harding Miller, was appointed to run the company. He apparently didn't get on with Gerald, who left to join Cities Service Corporation, an offshoot of Bert Preiss' PMI. Finally, in 1967, Gerald and some other Cities



Walter Hirtz

Service executives started Bamberger Polymers. Gerald retired in 1984, selling his interest to his partners.

The last of those from the old A. Bamberger Corporation to start their own business in 1956 were Herb Goldmark, Ken Gross, and George Weir. George was the young man who had been hired as my replacement when I left my uncle's business in 1951. These three founded a trading company, Goldmark Plastic Compounds, with facilities in New Hyde Park, N.Y.

The plastics industry was expanding by leaps and bounds, and all these new enterprises prospered. Apparently there was room for everyone. Still, it is a credit to my uncle Anton Bamberger, a pioneer in the plastic-scrap field, that all these offshoots of his original enterprise did exceedingly well. Most of the aforementioned companies are still active today, managed by the founders' children and grandchildren.

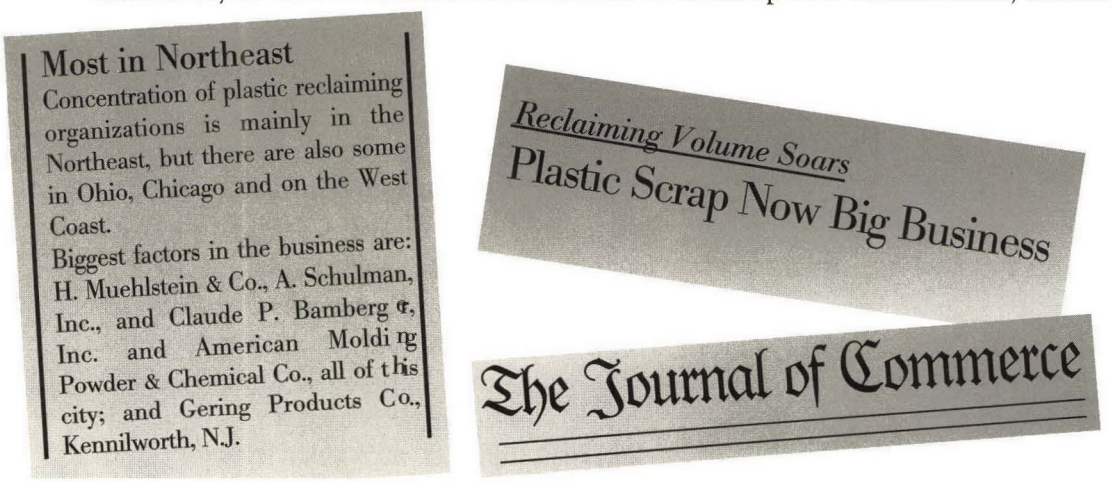
Growth In Real Estate And Ambiance

By 1954, the time when my uncle's business was sold, our three companies were well established and enjoyed an excellent reputation. Expansion was inevitable. Indeed, by 1955 the building on Centre Street in Brooklyn, which had seemed enormous compared to the 600 square feet we had rented in Manhattan, was definitely too small. The floor area of 3,000 square feet available for storage and manufacturing was totally inadequate. The eight-foot-wide aisle which provided access took up almost half of our badly needed storage space. We had no choice but to fill it up with goods every evening and then empty it onto the broad sidewalk each morning to make room for people to enter the building. On rainy and snowy days we had to cover the material with a heavy canvas. Tired of having to use the sidewalk as our "warehouse," we looked for space in Bergen County, New Jersey, an easy commute for both management and employees.

We found a rather attractive 6,000-square-foot space in a cinder-block warehouse with a 6,000-square-foot yard and a loading dock, in Ridgefield Park, New Jersey. By comparison to Center Street the place was heaven. It even came with a regular glass-enclosed office. However, by the end of 1958, only three years later, even that space was much too small. Besides, the property had changed hands and the new landlord was making noises about our paying a "realistic"

rent. Obviously, lease or no lease, it was only a matter of time before we would have to move once again.

Moving a warehouse and office is enormously costly. It involves paying double rent, and production must be suspended while highly paid riggers transfer the machinery to its new location. Electricians to hook up new transformers, circuit



Most in Northeast

Concentration of plastic reclaiming organizations is mainly in the Northeast, but there are also some in Ohio, Chicago and on the West Coast.

Biggest factors in the business are: H. Muehlstein & Co., A. Schulman, Inc., and Claude P. Bamberger, Inc. and American Molding Powder & Chemical Co., all of this city; and Gering Products Co., Kennilworth, N.J.

Reclaiming Volume Soars

Plastic Scrap Now Big Business

The Journal of Commerce

breakers, and switchboards are also not exactly cheap. Having already moved twice in eight years, we decided it was time to buy a building and rid ourselves of the landlord problem once and for all.

In early 1959 I found what I thought was the right place — a modern 30,000-square-foot cinder-block building in Carlstadt, New Jersey, built about 1950. It was located on Paterson Plank Road, originally a dirt track covered with heavy wooden planks crossing the swamplands then known as the "New Jersey Flats." The road fronting the building was now a two-lane macadam highway.

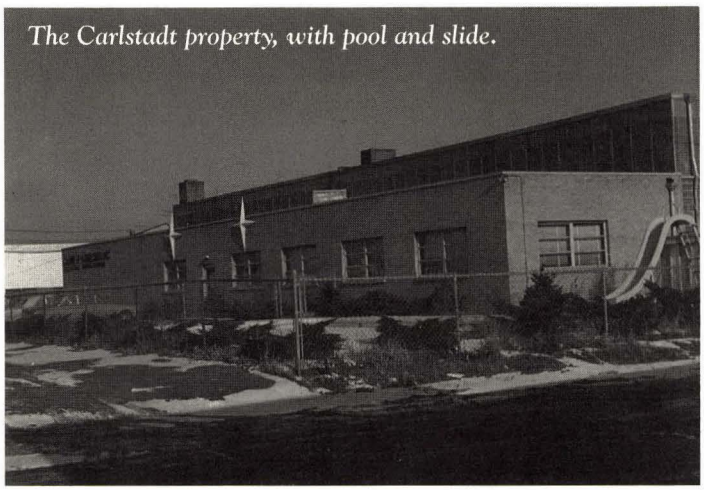
The property was owned by a Mr. A. Henry. He was a speculator. Like Max Stern of Finnish-ant-eggs fame, he had invested some money in hundreds of acres of meadowland swamp some fifteen or twenty years earlier, before the technology came along that enabled developers to turn swamps and bogs economically into residential and industrial sites.

Like all speculators Mr. Henry was a big spender and had a flair for grandiose living. Unlike Mr. Stern, he was always strapped for cash and was forced to sell this real estate before it reached today's peak.

Normally, the features to consider in buying a warehouse would be the availability of ample electricity, office space, convenient loading docks, column-free storage space, and the like. In my usual happy-go-lucky way, I didn't pay too much attention to these. What attracted me most in the Carlstadt property was a huge swimming pool, occupying what under ordinary circumstances would have been an employee parking lot. I found out that the owner of the building was also president of a swimming pool company, the current tenant. However, his asking price was too high for even a burgeoning company like ours.

Explaining our financial situation to the real-estate broker, I offered exactly half the asking price. Mr. Henry literally threw me out the door. "Customers like you we don't need," rang in my ears. Staunchly, I kept on searching for the right location. The months went by, but nothing that was offered was suitable. Besides, none of the other properties had a swimming pool — a vision which kept haunting me.

At the end of 1959 — it must have been in the middle of November — I had a call from a real-estate agent I had never heard of. "Mr. Bamberger," he said, "do you remember a building on Paterson Plank Road? The one with the swimming pool?"



The Carlstadt property, with pool and slide.

Of course I remembered.

It turned out that the swimming pool company was bankrupt and Mr. Henry needed money. "I just came from Mr. Henry," the broker said. "If your offer is still good, he is ready to accept it now, provided the closing is before Christmas." It seems Mr. Henry wanted to take his family skiing in St. Moritz over the holidays and needed the money to finance this trip.

Buying a building of that size, even at a greatly reduced price entailed a substantial cash investment for us as well as a fifteen-year mortgage. My partner Jack was petrified. "Do you really think this is the right thing to do?" he muttered, full of trepidation. But he finally agreed to go along, saying, "If you think so. I myself wouldn't have the nerve!".

I told the agent to draw up an agreement — we were willing to proceed.

We now had barely four weeks to complete the title search, raise the mortgage money, and take care of all the other details attendant on the purchase of real estate. By hook and by crook we managed it, and the closing date was set for December 24, Christmas Eve.

Representatives of the banks and numerous attorneys for the owners and buyers, met at the office of Mr. Henry's attorney at 11 a.m. for a "routine" closing, which should not take more than an hour. At least, that's what we all thought. Everyone's mind was on last-minute Christmas preparations, not on real-estate matters. Besides, Mr. Henry and his family had to catch a plane to Switzerland.

Everything started smoothly enough, and the signing of papers and exchange of checks would indeed have sailed through within the hour, but for one ob-

stacle. To the annoyance of all present, my friend Bob Kantrowitz, whom I had requested to monitor the New Jersey lawyer who represented me (Bob had no license to practice in New Jersey), asked all kinds of technical questions which seemed totally irrevelant.

"May I see the deed?" he would ask, for example.

"Mr. Bamberger's attorney has already examined and approved all the papers," said Mr. Henry's lawyer.

"Let me just have a glance," Bob would say with a smile, taking the sheaf of papers which was literally thrown at him.

The meeting dragged on. It was now past 1 p.m. on Christmas Eve. No one had had lunch, everyone was itching to get this thing over with — *except* Bob. While examining the numerous papers, Bob turned off his hearing aid. When someone shouted at him to get on with it because we all wanted to go home, he would look up innocently and say disarmingly, "I am so sorry, I am hard of hearing. Would you repeat that once again?"

By 1:30 p.m. there was a general protest by all concerned. Mr. Henry said he had to catch his plane and if we wouldn't sign that minute, he wanted to forget about the deal. At this point Bob said very politely, "Oh, I am just done, please be patient. There is just one more thing: there is nothing in these papers stating that the premises can be occupied by Mr. Bamberger and that there is no existing lease."

This caused almost an explosion. Mr. Henry stood up, snapped shut his briefcase, and said, "I have had enough. The deal is off."

I said to Bob, "Come on, Bob — the building has been empty for the past six months. Obviously there is no one there."

Bob, ignoring me, said to Mr. Henry's attorney, " Well, it's only a formality, but can we have it in writing that presently there is no one holding a lease on the building?"

Attorney: "I have to look into this; can I have a minute to speak to Mr. Henry?" The two disappeared into an adjoining room.

After five minutes they reappeared and presented us with a hastily drawn-up paper, signed by Mr. Henry, stating that the Meadowlands Realty Corporation, of which he was president, agreed to cancel the five-year lease they held on the building as of December 24, 1959.

By 2 p.m. all the papers were signed, and thus our latest venture, the C and J Realty Company (for "Claude and Jack") saw the the light of day.

Whew!! Had it not been for Bob, we would have ended up owning a building on which a real-estate company held a lease at a rate 50 percent below current market. It would have been impossible for us to move in unless we "sublet" our building from the leaseholders, at God knows what exorbitant rate.

This is another example of the lifelong debt I owe to my friend Bob Kantrowitz.

Inadvertently, A Fire Comes To Our Rescue

Our business continued to expand, but what with the lawsuit, the strike, and the several costly moves, our cash-flow situation kept on being precarious. We were able to keep afloat with ever larger bank credits; however, federal law requires that for one month a year a company must operate with its own capital and without commercial bank loans, and that fact caused sleepless nights at the approach of the anniversary date.

All this changed with what is known in the annals of our company history as the "ethyl cellulose deal." I will never forget this episode, as it solved our cash-flow problem once and for all.

In the early 1950s one of the more expensive engineering materials on the market was ethyl cellulose. It had the same basic properties as other cellulosics but was flame-retardant, and was used in high-tech applications where heat stability and weather resistance were of prime importance. Until the end of the war it had been reserved for armament production. In the postwar years ethyl cellulose became very scarce, as better, cheaper and even less flammable materials were produced by major chemical companies which did not manufacture cellulosics. By the end of the fifties, hardly any ethyl cellulose scrap was available.

In 1960, we still had one very good customer who had not yet converted his production to the new plastic compounds. This customer, Mr. Fisch of Anchor Plastics, had been a good friend and, appropriately, a fishing companion of my uncle Anton. Very supportive of me from the start, he purchased every pound of ethyl cellulose we could locate. In fact, Anchor Plastics was so desperate for this material that Mr. Fisch offered to prepay and finance any venture involving a large quantity of it.

One day, a small scrap dealer delivering some vinyl cuttings dropped a plastic sample on my desk with this message: "Claude — maybe this is something for you — it's too big for me." Attached to the sample was another, almost illegible note, scrawled on a piece of brown packing paper: "I can get you 125,000 lbs. of plastic, please call Joe at Atoka 3378." The sample turned out to be ethyl cellulose. Scrutinizing the map of the United States, we found Atoka to be a small community in the southeastern corner of Oklahoma. When I phoned the given number, a woman answered, saying that Joe was out on the ranch but would be back at supper-time. Children were crying in the background, and a dog was barking. I promised to call back, having little faith that the lead was worth the call. When I reached Joe that evening I could hardly understand his drawl, but gathered that there was "some plastic" for sale at the nearby U.S. Army arsenal. I wasn't going to drop everything to inspect a pile of scrap in Oklahoma, but told Joe I would get back to him in a couple of days.

A day later I received a call from a scrap-metal dealer in Dallas, Texas, of whom I had never heard. His name was Israel Rosenfield, and he was president

of a company called the Dallas Scrap Iron and Metal Company. Israel said that some "plastic inhibitor strips" were being offered in Oklahoma — would we know what to do with this? He thought there might be as much as 125,000 pounds. In those days we called a quantity like that "telephone numbers." Twenty or thirty thousand pounds was a very large quantity; an offer of anything more was usually a gross exaggeration.

I knew that inhibitor strips were usually made of ethyl cellulose, which served as a detonations retardant in ammunition. From the description I concluded that Israel was talking about the same lot of ethyl cellulose detonator strips as Joe from Atoka.

Feeling more comfortable with Israel Rosenfield, a *Landsmann*, than with Joe the rancher, I told Isreal about Joe's offer. Knowing that southerners automatically distrust anyone coming from New York, we decided that Israel should handle the deal.

"Call Joe and tell him we are partners," I told Israel, "and that I may go to Atoka to inspect the lot."

Israel agreed and promised to investigate. He called back a few days later and told me that Joe had the "right connection" with someone at the arsenal and would be the only serious bidder. Neither Joe nor Israel had any idea of the value of the material or of what to do with it. Both were happy to have found a potential buyer.

Next, I went to see my friend Mr. Fisch. He was most anxious to get this very large lot, which I tentatively offered at the going market price of $0.35 per pound subject to the acceptance of our bid. Since financing such a deal was impossible for us, Mr. Fisch made good on his previous promise, offering to pay for the material in advance once he knew we were the successful bidders.

Remembering the disastrous deal my uncle made with the gas-mask parts at the Picatinny Arsenal some years ealier, I decided to go to Atoka to make sure that the offered material matched the small sample on my desk and that the quantity was actually there.

The trip was a true Wild West adventure. I flew to Oklahoma City, and then drove almost two hundred miles through open prairie to reach Joe's chicken ranch and the nearby arsenal, located in the middle of a barren desert covered with sagebrush. It was a thousand miles from nowhere! I had a lot of trouble finding Joe's ranch, which was actually quite a distance from Atoka. It was a mess, with chickens all over the place, along with rusting automobiles, old bathtubs, mountains of tires, some farm machinery and a mob of kids ranging in age from three to fourteen.

Joe, a burly guy in blue denim overalls, big boots and a ten-gallon hat, had been expecting me. I left my rented car and we drove in his half-ton pickup truck to the Atoka arsenal, some thirty-three miles away. Joe seemed to have all sorts of buddies there, and introduced me to Supply Sergeant McGuire, who was in charge.

Upon inspection, the material proved a little different from what I had pictured. The inhibitor strips were packed in cardboard boxes, each containing several hundred packets of strips held together with an adhesive tape. Removing some tape I found that a glue residue, a possible source of contamination, remained at the top and bottom of each strip. Moreover, some of the strips were not made of ethyl cellulose, but of cellulose acetate, a much cheaper material. The entire lot would need a good deal of handling, sorting, and grinding.

Joe told me that no one had come to inspect the material and that in fact no one knew anything about this offering. He said that he and a "friend" (another chicken farmer) were the only bidders.

When I discussed all this with Israel in Dallas, he said he thought he might get the stuff for $0.02 per pound, truck it to his scrap yard in Dallas, and ship it to us at $0.05 per pound. The government sells all material "as is, where is," so a buyer has no recourse. However, I had cautiously concluded, on the basis of what I had seen during my inspection, that we couldn't lose. Taking freight and processing costs into consideration, as well as a possible material loss of about 10 percent, I calculated that we would still have the unheard-of markup of 100 percent. Remembering my uncle's Nickel Bauer story, I thought we would be OK.

The next phase of the deal went smoothly. Joe was awarded the material for $0.01 per pound and sold it to Israel at $0.02 — a 100 percent markup, requiring an investment by Israel of $2,250. This was quite a sum in those days.

As soon as Israel had picked up the material in Atoka, I went to Mr. Fisch, who promptly gave me a check for $35,000 for 100,000 pounds of ethyl cellulose. We had never seen so much money in our lives.

A couple of weeks later, when I was away on another business trip, Jack received a call from a distressed Israel about two in the morning. "Jack," he said breathlessly, "I am calling from my office. All the plastic we bought is on fire. Are you insured?" Were we insured? What about Israel — was he insured? He said he didn't think so as he normally handled scrap iron, with no fire hazard.

Needless to say, Jack slept very little the rest of the night, and first thing in the morning called our insurance broker. It turned out that the material was indeed covered, by our "in transit" insurance. Since the material had been sold at $0.35 per pound, we were entitled to that amount, less processing costs and freight charges. "You will also be reimbursed for the cost of removing the sludge," Howard Shulman, my broker, assured Jack.

Jack waited for me to return to break the bad news to Mr. Fisch. Since we had already spent part of the $35,000 he had paid us, I put off telling him of the disaster right away. It would be better to wait until we had the insurance money, I thought.

Shortly after our insurance adjuster had inspected the pile of sludge and approved Israel's price for the cost of dumping the material, we signed a release and received payment in full. I called Israel, and assured him that we had cover-

age and that he would recover his $2,250 investment. I also told him that we would pay for removing the mountain of fused, burnt sludge which the insurance company had released to us.

I was just about to go and see Mr. Fisch, when a few days later I received a call from Israel, "Claude you won't believe this." he exclaimed. "I hired a bulldozer to dump the burnt trash when we discovered that underneath the crust of congealed plastic we found a lot of undamaged material. What looked to the adjuster and me like a gigantic, plastic lump was really only a burnt, thin layer of melted plastic — you know," he chuckled, "like the crust of Mom's apple pie." The flame-retardent ethyl cellulose crust had protected the bulk of the material from the heat. "I think we can salvage about 85 to 90 percent of the goods," Israel added gleefully. And so it turned out. The actual fire loss was negligible, and most of the material could be salvaged. In addition to covering his original investment, we now agreed to pay Israel $0.05 per pound for whatever he had left.

Perversely, after he had made several shipments of this product, which for safety reasons we stored in our yard outside the plant, it caught fire once again (*below*), creating another pile of sludge with a salvageable interior.

Our customer, Mr. Fisch never was aware of our incendiary problems. Over a period of time we made regular shipments to his company, replacing the missing quantity with ethyl cellulose we bought from other sources.

Since we had been paid more or less three times for the same material, twice by the insurance company and again by Mr. Fisch, this landmark deal ended our financial troubles. From that day on our company has been on a solid financial footing, with a credit rating never lower than A.



Chapter Twelve

Mismanagement and Exotic Employees

1960 - 1970

Management Par Excellence

There are numerous handbooks on how to manage a company. Most of these tell the reader what he must do or not do to have a successful small business. Invariably, there is a chapter on how to hire, evaluate, and motivate employees. In a small business with a product of its own, whether manufacturing parts or consumer items, the employees — though important — are only secondary to the success of the enterprise. Technology, financing, liability, distribution and proper market research are all more important than employees, who merely fulfill specific tasks. One way or another these tasks will be done — some better, some worse, depending on the skills of the employees, but in any event without jeopardizing the overall functioning of the corporation.

Management guidebooks are full of good theoretical ideas about employee relations, but these ideas may become inoperative if greed, company politics, and personal insecurities take over. At that point, all structural guidelines set up by management fall by the wayside; the specific department or employee begins to function as a separate entity with the sole purpose of "looking good," even if that means actually being counterproductive to the overall profitabilty of the corporation.

The larger the business, the more complex the management of the separate departments becomes. In large corporations, top management is usually too far removed to realize what is happening in individual departments, and in effect — unless there is a scandal resulting in a big shakeup — the inefficiency of a given department is reflected only in a somewhat smaller net profit for the corporation.

By contrast, in a trading company which has no product of its own, success depends entirely on the efficiency of the key employees, and hence a different set of rules applies in personnel management.

In a trading corporation one must be extremely careful when hiring someone who will have enough authority to either benefit the company or do it great harm. The problem is that the potential employer of a "trader," a person authorized to buy and sell materials in the firm's name, cannot evaluate the applicant just from an interview or references. All applicants present themselves as capable, dynamic, and possessed of talents hitherto untapped in a promising career.

An Unusual Partnership

In the infancy of my own business in the early fifties, "business management" was as yet a relatively unknown science, certainly as far as a small entrepreneurial trading company, like ours, was concerned. An acquaintance of mine, David Emery, was a pioneer in the development of modern management theory. For many years he worked for the famous Kepner-Tregoe management consulting service, and he designed a number of courses for use by the

pioneer in this field, the American Management Association. During the time he was working with these organizations, we had many informal meetings in which I detailed to him the endless difficulties we encountered in managing our employees. He was intrigued by the bizarre problems which plagued our company, and in many of his seminars he used my stories as examples of precisely what not to do.

Later, in 1970, when he published a book on personnel management entitled *The Compleat Manager*, he handed me a copy inscribed "To a truly humanistic manager." In retrospect, this seems perhaps not exactly a compliment. In effect, most of the "don'ts" in the book described exactly what we had done. It never even occurred to us to carry out any of the recommended "do's," primarily because we hadn't known that management guidebooks existed.

By the time his book came out, I had been in business for almost twenty years. I will never know whether the recommended strategic planning would have made my company more successful and whether our monumental, costly mistakes could have been largely avoided.

Aside from the strike, which was a maneuver by outside forces and really had nothing to do with our employees per se, we did not have any employee problems in the first years of operation. We paid our people well, but more importantly, we treated them well, always on the assumption that if you treat someone well, the person will be grateful and acknowledge your trust by doing the right thing.

Over the next decades, however, we found that often just the opposite was true. We learned that the more management tries to grant unreasonable or unwarranted requests by an individual, the more the individual takes advantage, seeing the concessions as a sign of weakness. Inevitably a point of no return is reached and the individual loses a good job and the company a good employee. But this realization came slowly. Only after many years, and after Mo-Li, my second wife, took over the reins of management, did we fully recognize that trying to cater to everyone's individual needs is possibly the worst way to run a business.

Jack and Claude socialize in Paris



In 1953, when Jack Suhl somewhat reluctantly joined forces with me and we

formed the Claude Bamberger Molding Compounds Corporation, we all worked ten to twelve hours a day, just to make ends meet. The original idea of our partnership was to make enough money as quickly as possible, so that we could quit the rat-race and spend the rest of our lives on what we considered more "worthwhile" endeavors.

Indeed, Jack really didn't like running a business and had never wanted to be a businessman. Being more or less involved in politics and intellectual matters, he looked at our business as a vehicle for earning money so that he could pursue more lofty ideals. Right at the beginning he said more than once, "As soon as I have $55,000, I will retire."

Thanks to the expansion of the plastics industry and a surge in profits due to the Korean War, Jack reached his goal within three years! He was then only thirty-three years old. But with living costs rising he now had second thoughts. He was no longer certain that he could raise a family and live comfortably for the rest of his life on the interest that $55,000 would yield. So he stayed on.

Despite all problems, by the mid-sixties the new firm was well established and well known throughout the industry.

While unquestionably Jack did his share, working as diligently as I did to further his aim for an early retirement, he did so in his own good time. The fact was that his priorities lay elsewhere.

An unusual and interesting person, Jack didn't take very long to form close ties with a number of major suppliers and customers who liked to socialize and work with him.

Perhaps one of our biggest accounts was Hammond Plastics in Worcester, Massachussets, owned by the very wealthy Gordon family. The president, Everett Gordon, had left Gehring Brothers in Kenilworth right after the war, becoming one of the first competitors of that company as well as that of my uncle. When I visited Everett Gordon in late 1952, he gave me a warm welcome, in contrast to Larry Gehring, who literally threw me out.

Soon after Jack joined my firm he became very friendly with Everett, a conservative, intelligent and open-minded guy. The two couldn't have been more different from each other. Intrigued, Everett could not quite reconcile Jack's socialistic tendencies with his unusual business capability.

Jack and his wife Claire, already saving for their early retirement, were loath to spend $125 for a regular one bedroom apartment. They opted to live on East 12th Street in a cold-water walk-up flat without heat, but with a rent of $12.00 per month.

Everett spent a few evenings a year visiting Jack, obviously enjoying the change of scene from his "country-club" environment in bourgeois Worcester. Mostly they played chess and discussed politics. Since Everett had trouble parking his enormous Cadillac in Jack's neighborhood, and also worried about theft,

he left his car at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, where he usually stayed, and then proceeded by taxi to East 12th Street. This friendship, which also incidentally translated into good business, lasted for more than two decades until Everett succumbed prematurely to cancer and died.

Since Jack retired in 1975, it is now hard to locate people who could readily testify to his competence and magnetic personality. Frank Sawyer, a retired DuPont man, could still be located and wrote as follows:

> "My contact with Claude Bamberger was in the person of Jack Suhl. We seemed to hit if off pretty well and Jack was actually of great assistance to teach me how to market off-spec and obsolete products, something totally new to me.
>
> Naturally purchase of the product was Jack's primary interest, but he was very forthcoming in suggestions and advice for the novice with whom he was dealing. In short he was invaluable.
>
> As the sale of this type of material was one of my minor responsibilities, I wanted to simplify my end of this business as much as possible. That meant winnowing the prospective purchasers down to the level of a few trustworthy concerns with whom I could do business with a minimum of hassle. On the sale of off-spec materials the quality does not always correspond with the description given by the plant and adjustments have to be worked out.
>
> Jack certainly filled the bill. With a little give-and-take both parties were always satisfied. We always could easily negotiate any difference. Working with Jack and knowing him was a pleasure.
>
> I was amazed and not a little concerned, as well as a bit envious, when Jack suddenly went off to Portugal to grow oranges. My contact with Claude had been very slight. Calls in Jack's absence and jocular greetings for the most part were the norm.
>
> However our relationship with the corporation continued for many happy years and was only strengthened when Mo-Li arrived at the scene. Despite my retirement fifteen years ago our friendship persists and is an accomplishment of my working years.

Once Jack's end of the business was fairly well established and we had some key employees who were able to handle the day-to-day affairs, he told me one day that he needed the morning hours to read the classics "while my mind is fresh." He usually started work only at 10 or ll a.m. Most people devote the time when the mind is "fresh" to their career, but Jack was different. He was a scholar and only worked at odd times as necessary. As per our original agreement he made his own hours — thirty years before flextime became a popular concept.

But he was not the only one to take our partnership agreement literally. I too had my foibles in pursuing what was important to me. During the first year of our partnership, when Jack knew hardly anything about the business, I informed him that I was off to Europe on a four week ski-vacation to Europe. Sure, I also was going to try and develop more business; but it was the skiing which was important.

To me "running the business" was simple. Before departing, I gave Jack a list of important suppliers of cellulose acetate and acrylic sheet scrap and told him that under no circumstances was he to lose these accounts. "Be sure and make regular pickups," I instructed him. Conversely, I also gave him a list of the customers for these materials, with instructions to make regular deliveries.

In the middle of my vacation while blissfully soaring down alpine slopes, I received a cable from Jack: "XYZ customers will not buy scrap, inventory mounting, no more warehouse space, please return immediately." I was loathe to cut my vacation; however, Jack, being relatively inexperienced, was not so familiar with my end of the business. Partnership agreement or not, I really had no choice but to go home and straighten things out.

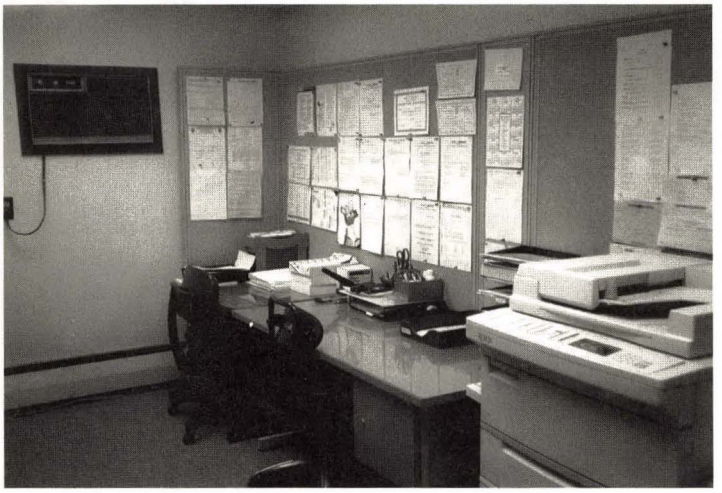
It took a number of years until we got to a point when we could fully activate the clause in our stockholders' agreement that only one of us needed to be present to run the business. I never would take full advantage of this arrangement, partly because I was busy running the sheet-scrap business, in which Jack had no share, and in addition helping Jack to run Claude Bamberger Molding Compounds. Jack, on the other hand, took long periods off whenever he felt that the business could function adequately without him, often coming back from Provincetown on Cape Cod or even Portugal when emergencies arose and his presence became obviously necessary.

Indeed, our company was notorious for the fact that one of the principals always seemed to be on vacation. Throughout the plastics industry, people were talking about the peculiar arrangement the Bamberger partners enjoyed. Often, a business colleague would exclaim, "Boy! Do I wish I had your job! I admire you guys! I wish I could take off as much time as you do. What a life you must have." Invariably our reply was: "That's easy, you can do it too. Just make less money!" The truth is that by the time most entrepreneurs have enough money

or are old enough to consider retirement, their business has become so much part of their life that all complaints about having to work hard and wanting a different life-style are just talk. Most of these people actually do exactly what they like to do best: to continue working, possibly at a somewhat reduced scale, and earn money regardless of whether they need it or not.

I was not so different from the rest. Much too involved in the operation of our companies — that they earned money was a secondary, if not an altogether unpleasant consideration — I used my "time off" to travel on business to the far corners of the earth. Thanks to Jack, I was able to travel months at a time to visit Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, India, Egypt, Afghanistan and other pretty wild places where the plastics industry was still in its infancy. In most of the countries I visited during that time, hardly anyone knew how to use prime plastic materials, let alone plastic scrap. I soon learned that it takes a technologically advanced industry to enable individuals to start recycling and reusing scrap. Hence the contacts I made in those remote parts of the world were somewhat premature and actually paid off only years later.

However, my involvement with plastics was the key to meeting local people. I had an opportunity to learn about their lives and concerns to an extent unavailable to a tourist visiting a country.



Our 'international communications center' for six small companies.

Often the right connections in those third-world places meant a lot. Once I was stranded in La Paz, Bolivia. Our flight had been canceled and the first available booking was seven days later. Claiming heart problems due to the altitude, begging the American consulate for assistance, trying fair means and foul, all were to no avail. In desperation I called a plastics company listed in the yellow pages of the local telephone directory and asked the owner for help. He not only got me a seat on the first plane out, but graciously invited me for dinner as well. He happened to be of German origin, and we had a grand evening exchanging information, even though it was obvious from the start that, for the moment at least, there were no business possibilities.

Since our goal was to make only sufficient money to serve our present and future needs, it is not surprising that this attitude was transmitted to our staff. They too wanted to make a good living while doing a minimum of work. However, being of a new generation, they were unwilling to invest some years in the initial effort as we had done. The inevitable result of our idiosyncratic policies was a staff of oddball employees, people who could not be considered run of the mill by any stretch of the imagination.

There always seems to be a dearth of people with sufficent skill to do the jobs for which they are needed. In our case this situation was doubly critical; because of our bizarre stockholders' agreement we had to have self-starters, motivated personnel who required little training and supervision. As the business kept growing, almost despite ourselves, we encountered all kinds of tax problems. On the advice of our accountant, we eventually had no less than six small companies, including two dealing strictly in international transactions. This was too much for one partner to handle by himself.

Not until Mo-Li took over the management in the mid seventies, did we come to the conclusion that employees are contented and work best when they are given a set of ground rules which spell out precisely what is expected, and they know that everyone is subject to the same rules. Of prime importance is the example set by the management. The inclination of employees to follow this example, whether good our bad, is inevitable.

A Dauntless Truck Driver

The first serious employee problem involved Joe Bruno, the trucker who had been with us from the very start in 1951. Although Joe owned his own truck and was not on our payroll, he worked exclusively for us.

Each year our contract with him was renewed at a higher price, and very often in the course of the year he expressed dissatisfaction with his compensation. As time passed his truck grew old and eventually it needed constant repairs, for which he was responsible.

At one point he had to install a lift gate on his truck, since it was necessary for the sidewalk pickup and delivery that some of our customers required. Although we were willing to increase our rate to compensate for the upgrade of the equipment, Joe insisted that in addition our company pay for the cost and installation. It never occurred to him that we could just call another trucker, one who already had the proper equipment, and get our trucking done cheaper without the need to invest in anything.

Joe frequently gave us "market information," telling us the names of competitors whose trucks he had seen at the loading docks of our suppliers and customers. Sometimes he found out what they picked up or delivered. Since he was more helpful than an ordinary trucker, we did not mind paying him a premium. However, there was a limit to what a company could pay for such work.

As is so often the case with long-term employees, Joe had greatly inflated ideas about his worth to the company, and in time became what was probably the most expensive trucker in all of New York. When his contract came up for renewal at the beginning of 1966, we were forced to tell Joe that he had reached his limit: the trucking charges we paid him were almost double what we would pay elsewhere for similar service, and we were unable to go any higher. Enough was enough!

We explained that our trucking costs had to be more or less in line with those in the industry as a whole, and that the only way he could make more money was to buy more trucks. As our trucking needs increased, so would his business. We had already reached the point where we could use either a larger truck or a second truck working half the week. For the other half he would have to find other customers until our trucking needs increased further.

His answer to our well meant suggestion was: "Trucks cost a lot of money. Drivers are unreliable and a lot of trouble. I can't make any money that way." Clearly, he thought that because he had been trucking for us since the inception of our business, and had witnessed its growth, he was now entitled to a share of the profit. We could do nothing to convince him otherwise, and he became increasingly discontented.

As time progressed we began to notice that here and there a few drums of material were missing. At first we thought that we imagined this. In the scrap business, inventory control is not all that precise. A few drums could easily have been misplaced, or they might have been found contaminated and dumped without anyone making the appropriate adjustment in our records. Claus, a very faithful foreman with unquestionable loyalty, was absolutely sure that material was disappearing. He always prided himself on knowing where everything was.

So we started to watch out. Sure enough, a pattern became apparent; we could almost predict which material would disappear next. The prime suspect was Joe the trucker. Since our last confrontation he had become moody, flew into a rage at the slightest provocation and was in a constant state of sour dissatisfaction.

To confirm our suspicions, we baited a trap, placing two drums of desirable material in an isolated area in our warehouse. Sure enough, they disappeared within a short time.

Claus checked each night before closing and in the morning upon opening, so we knew the exact day of the theft. The drums were stolen on a morning

when Joe, who had a key to the plant and often loaded his truck by himself, had left early, ostensibly to beat the rush-hour traffic.

That evening I waited for Joe to return from his pickups and deliveries, in order to confront him. "Joe, would you come into my office for a minute?" I said. "Perhaps you can help me solve a mystery."

"What's up?" Joe replied brusquely. "It's late, and I have to hurry and get home."

I said, "Claus came to me this morning and said that two drums of Delrin which were standing near the fire door last night had disappeared. Would you know where they went?"

"Why ask me?" Joe said, "I'm just a trucker and I pick up and deliver what I'm told. How should I know where the Delrin went?" Then he added, "Claus keeps things in such a mess he doesn't know his ass from his forehead".

"This may be so," I answered, "but we are certain that the two drums were there last night, and this morning after you loaded up your truck they had disappeared."

Silence! "Well, Joe," I said, "we can't have this sort of thing going on. I think it is better that you look for another job. You will no longer be needed". Then I asked him to give me the warehouse keys, and with a scowl on his face he left.

Soon afterward we had a new competitor — Bruno's Plastic Scrap Corporation, which claimed to be an experienced buyer and seller of plastic scrap paying top prices. The company was operated by Joe, his wife, and a grown son.

I thought: "Experienced," yes, but sellers beware! Joe was the type who would make a private arrangement with the foreman of a small plant to understate the weight of material to be picked up. Thus the firm's owners would be duped into believing that they were getting a better price for their scrap than was actually the case. Sometime earlier, Joe had suggested that we do this, but given our standing in the industry and our relationship with loyal suppliers, we saw it as unthinkable.

Unfortunately, however, this sort of practice is quite common, the result being that "scrap dealers" are often looked down upon by "honest businessmen," and frequently quite honest scrap firms are lumped together with the bad ones and given a bad reputation.

Joe's new venture didn't last very long. Within a couple of years, he disappeared along with his truck and an eighteen-year-old "chick," leaving behind his family, saddled with Bruno's Plastic Scrap Corporation. With enormous debts and no assets, the company was soon forced into bankruptcy. Mrs. Bruno called me at the time and proposed that we take over the business, but understandably that was the last thing we were prepared to do.

The Illegal Night Shift

The next employee problem involved Liber, an Indian student from Trinidad. He was in the United States on a student visa and worked illegally to make ends meet. We had hired him for the night shift. His job was to remove contaminants from plastic by means of flotation in salt solution. It was a very messy affair, requiring the worker to wear thick rubber gloves and boots, both of which were gradually eaten up by the potent salt mixture. It was hoped that the laborer's hands and feet were not eaten up as well.

Liber was intellectual and charming. We loved him, even though Claus told us repeatedly that Liber's output was not satisfactory. He always produced exactly the minimum that Claus had specified, never an ounce more. Suspicious, Claus once made an unannounced visit to the plant in the middle of the night and found Liber fast asleep. It turned out that Liber would meet the required minimum by working hard for three hours and sleep the rest of the time, until his shift was up.

Having been caught taking advantage of us, Liber proudly proclaimed, "Now that I see that you do not trust me any longer, I have no choice but to resign." In the end we were spared taking any punitive action; shortly after this incident, Liber called to say that the immigration department had nabbed him and asked us if we could come and visit him. He gave us an address on Mercer Street, in lower Manhattan. There we found him in a sort of jail where illegal immigrants were held. We brought some food, along with advice, but despite our sympathy and timid efforts to help, Liber was deported and never heard from again.

While we had more or less constant problems with our warehouse employees, our relationships with the office employees tended to be even more complex. Since office personnel deal with suppliers and customers, who rightly demand service and quality and are not concerned with the internal problems of a business, their activities tend to be more important; they are a window to the outside world.

Barbara — A Miss Arkansas Contestant

Very beautiful women may be attractive ornaments in the reception areas of large corporations, but for the small, individually owned company, it is wise to stay clear of them. I believe that if we behaved today as we did back in the sixties, every male working in our company, myself included, would be found guilty of sexual harassment.

We once hired Dolores Hawkins, crowned Miss Ridgefield Park in a local beauty contest. While she was an agreeable diversion, sitting prettily at the re-

ception window, none of our male employees could concentrate on the work at hand as she sat there in a miniskirt, smoking a cigarette or typing an occasional letter riddled with errors. Dolores didn't last very long and soon was replaced by Barbara.

Barbara O'Sullivan, of Irish descent, had been an unsuccessful contestant for the title of Miss Arkansas. She had recently married and moved to New Jersey. Five feet eight inches tall, she had a stunning figure, a face like a Botticelli Madonna, and the most wonderful, lustrous red curls falling down to her shoulders. What was unusual about Barbara was her innocent appearance. She had the sweetest imaginable smile for everyone who came into her field of vision.

Barbara was not only pleasant, sweet, and accommodating, but also quite capable, and quickly became the assistant of Blanche Aronowitz, our unmarried bookkeeper, whom we had hired when my wife Kathleen had quit some years earlier in order to take care of Claudette and Stephan, my two growing children.

Blanche adored Barbara from the very start. Men adored Barbara possibly for other reasons; in fact, no male could resist her. Yet Barbara appeared to be virginally inaccessible, rebutting all advances with a beatific smile and friendliness. She made it quite clear that she belonged to her newly acquired husband, and whatever favors she chose to bestow on an admirer were strictly of a platonic nature.

One day, soon after Barbara started working for us, Blanche stormed into my office, obviously very upset. A devoted, loyal, and completely trustworthy person, she was forever concerned to do the "right thing" for the company.

She closed my door, indicating that the ensuing discussion was to be of a very private nature. Then, in a state of great excitement she said, "Claude, I must talk to you about something!" Pause. "We must do something about Barbara and Juan!" Juan was our new truck driver driver, hired to take Joe Bruno's place.

"Barbara and Juan?" I said, puzzled. "What have Juan and Barbara in common?"

"Barbara is sleeping with Juan in the truck during their lunch hour," Blanche said, upset. "You've got to put a stop to it; this is a disgrace to our company."

I thought about this information for a moment, then asked, "What do you expect me to do? How often does it happen?"

"Not every lunch hour," Blanche said, "sometimes also in the evening after work, before they go home."

"We are not a morality police," I told Blanche. "I cannot control what people do after work or during their time off. Why don't you take it up with Barbara if you feel that would be in her best interest?"

It turned out that Barbara had an affinity for black guys, who were quick to accept what was offered. What's more, she did not reserve her sexual favors for Juan

only, as we found out shortly afterward. When Juan was out trucking and unavailable, another black fellow, Jerry, a real charmer who claimed to have six wives, fifteen children and twelve grandchildren, stepped into the breach. Obviously, he was not averse to adding an Irish redhead to his stable of acquiescent women.

I believe no one ever had the nerve to talk to Barbara about this. During the few years she worked for us it was pure pleasure to have the beauty and fragrance of this rare Arkansas flower in our midst. She was pleasant and unapproachable to one and all, except for black truck drivers. We all mourned when she developed an acute case of leukemia and had to leave. She fought a brave battle for a number of years, during which she managed to give birth to two children, but finally succumbed to the disease at the age of thirty-two.

Over the years we built a staff of five or six very dedicated, loyal women who worked as secretaries and bookkeepers and served as a support group for those, like Jack and myself, engaged in buying and selling scrap. What we essentially lacked were people with initiative to go out and create new business.

Don Juan From St. John

After the Joe Bruno fiasco, we purchased a truck of our own, lift gate and all, and engaged Juan Rodrigues, a man from the Virgin Islands, to operate and maintain it. Juan seemed to be highly qualified for the job. He told us that his parents owned a trucking company in St. John and he knew how to take care of trucks and do minor repairs. Well spoken and always dressed very neatly, he seemed perfect as a representative of our company. Juan was a handsome fellow, light-colored in skin tone, and obviously a great ladies' man. In addition, like his predecessor Joe Bruno, he showed a certain amount of business acumen. While making pickups or deliveries with our truck, he would stop at a plastics company which he passed en route and inquire whether they needed materials or had any scrap for sale. Once in a while business actually resulted from this information.

Always short of sales help, Jack and I thought that possibly Juan could become one of our salespeople. We decided that to explore the possibility of bringing Juan into the office. As an initial step we agreed to have a social evening with him, to see how he conducted himself outside a business environment. We already knew that Juan "blended" very well with Barbara, but wanted to see if he would blend equally well in another environment.

So we invited Juan to dinner in Jack's Greenwich Village apartment. In the course of the evening we asked him how he would feel about becoming our salesman. Juan was flattered and expressed an interest. He said that he would

gladly forgo the truck-driver position in favor of becoming a salaried employee, even though his salary would be somewhat lower at the start. We explained to Juan that this was somewhat of a risk. If the sales position didn't work out, he would have reached a point of no return, and would have to leave us altogether. There could be no possibility of stepping back into the truck-driver job. Juan said he would gladly take the risk.

At this point, out of the blue sky, Jack blurted out: "Well then it's all settled, we are glad you accept. As of Monday morning, Benny can drive our truck and you will start in the office."

I was flabbergasted! The idea of the evening had been to explore this possibility, then have further discussions with Juan and agree on a program before finalizing the arrangement. After Juan had left, I told Jack about my apprehensions. But the deed was done! Without creating a very awkward situation, there was no way out. We had acquired a new salesman — with dire consequences as will be seen later.

Warehouse Foreman Turned Salesman

Claus, who had been with the company almost from the start and did an excellent job as foreman, was itching for a position as a salesman, which he thought would give him a better future. He finally asked Jack and me if he could become a salesman. He thought that his right-hand man, Del May, could easily manage the warehouse.

Because of the shortage of capable sales personnel, we agreed. In the next few years, Claus attempted to succeed in sales, but he barely managed to earn his keep. Jack, who was the "accountant," kept track of what everyone produced, and Claus was not exactly his star. They were constantly at loggerheads because Jack felt that the profit margin of Claus's deals was too small and that his accounts posed a constant credit risk.

At one time, when I was away on one of my long trips, Claus and Jack had such a falling-out that Claus gave Jack an ultimatum: "Unless Claude comes back immediately, I will quit."

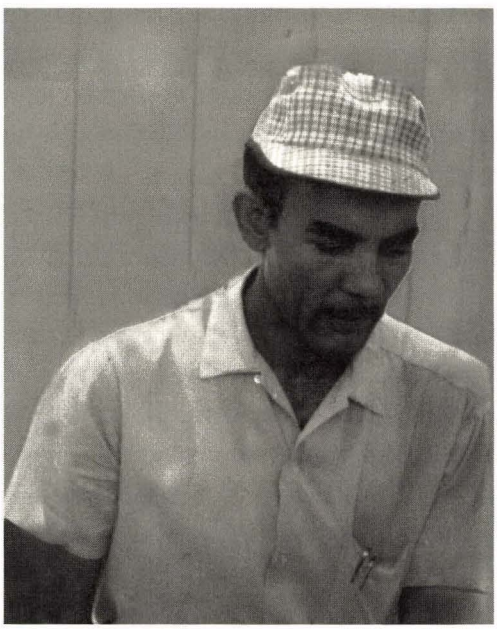
When the news reached me, I did not feel like dropping everything to fly home and mediate the situation. I really agreed with Jack that what Claus did was marginal, even though he was working to the best of his ability. Besides, I knew from experience that when someone has reached a point of no return and is itching to leave a job and go into his own business, nothing will really stop him. Appeasement is a stop-gap measure and only temporarily effective.

By the time I reached home some weeks later, Claus had started his own scrap company, specializing in cellulosic material which to this day is his forte.

Following the principle I had learned from my uncle, I invited Claus for dinner, wished him good luck in his new venture, and suggested that we work together whenever possible. My uncle's motto, "If you can't fight them, join them," stood me in good stead. Like our friends Hy and Charlie Shuman, Claus ran into financial troubles when he began a compounding operation, and ultimately had to reorganize his company. However, no matter what his financial problems, Claus, whom I always considered a good friend, saw to it that our company never lost a cent as a result of doing business with him.

Enter Del — Best Warehouse Manager Yet

After Claus moved to the office as a salesman, Delious May, a black laborer from Brooklyn whom Claus had hired a decade or so earlier, took over the warehouse managment. He was very quiet, rarely uttering a word. We knew next to nothing about his private life. Del managed the warehouse so well that it was rarely necessary for any of us to check on his work, except when he himself requested that we look at some questionable material. Claus had taught him how to test plastic materials, and in the end he developed his own testing methods and was far better than anyone else we knew in our field. Ironically even Claus recognized that Del was better than he was, and after he had left us and started his own business, he occasionally sent us samples, requesting that Del test them.



Del the computer genius

At the dawn of the computer age, Del quietly developed in his own home a computerized inventory system and it was only years later that we realized this is what enabled him to know exactly what we had in inventory, and — more important — how to find it.

During the thirty-five years Del worked for us, he helped us to computerize and streamline our entire bookkeeping and record-keeping system, creating software just for us. He never uttered a word and smoked innumerable cigarettes while working on a problem. Invariably he came up with the right answers. Yet Del was an uneducated man. One can just imagine how far he could have gone in life had he had the opportunity of a formal education.

When Del retired in 1990, he was earning upward of $60,000 a year. He had accumulated enough in his pension and profit sharing accounts to purchase his own home in Queens, and looked forward to a comfortable retirement. For a short while after he retired, Del worked for us off and on as a consultant. Unfortunately, he developed lung cancer as a result of years of smoking and died at the age of sixty-six in August 1992, only a year and a half after his retirement.

Three Odd Birds

A business can continue to function even if some of its employees within the separate departments are less efficient than they should be. By contrast, however, the functioning of certain key employees may be very critical to the day to day operation, as well as the future, of a small business. These employees are important as potential successors of the existing management, and who should be groomed to eventually become partners or even owners of the company.

The first such key employee that we hired was *Jason Loebel.* As the twenty-four-year-old son of the best friend of our bookkeeper, and a recent graduate of a local college, he came highly recommended. He was looking for a career opportunity. Why we thought that the son of our bookkeeper's friend would automatically be suitable for grooming as a future partner or owner of our company is anyone's guess.

From the start Jason proved to be moderately capable, but his activities were neither a gain nor loss for us during his first year. Taking someone on as an apprentice must be considered an investment, so we were satisfied. We hoped that with time he might make some money for the company.

Jason had a very high opinion of himself. Indeed, he believed that he was much better than anybody else. He had a constant chip on his shoulder and always felt undercompensated. Nevertheless, Jason stayed on.Over the years, no matter what we did for him by way of fringe benefits and salary, we never were able to sastify him. In fact, the more we catered to his expectations, the more he wanted. Any psychologist can affirm that this is the norm.

The next of the key employees was *Marek Polski.* When we hired him, we already knew him well, and we had a lot of faith in his ability to manage people and projects independently, without the need of supervision. We congratulated ourselves on having found a gold mine in him. Marek was certainly different from anybody else we had encountered up to this point. He had the bearing of a conservative English gentleman; no one in his right mind would think that this person could possibly be associated with a scrap business.

This assessment, as time proved, was quite correct. While his integrity and loyalty were unimpeachable, his approach was so unusual, not to say bi-

zarre, that one might say that he fitted into the scrap business like a round peg fits in a square hole.

At the time I met Marek in 1958, we lived on the ground floor apartment of a brownstone house on the waterfront in Brooklyn Heights. Kathy had given birth to our first child, our daughter Claudette. Marek and his wife, Dolores, occupied the apartment above us. Dolores was in the habit of putting paper bags full of garbage on the polished mahogany table we had in our foyer. Apparently she was under the impression that we provided some sort of janitorial service and that our foyer was part of the basement, open to all the tenants.

It took us a while to track down the donor of the garbage bags. We then left a polite note on Dolores's door, asking her to take the bags to the real basement, a flight below our foyer. Dolores responded by apologizing profusely, and in the course of this first conversation, we learned that her husband, Marek, liked to play chess. It is thus that we became acquainted.

This newly minted friendship deepened during a crisis, when our cat had a fish bone stuck in her throat. Kathy rushed upstairs and knocked frantically on Dolores's door, asking for her help. Dolores declined politely, saying that she was allergic to cats and very much afraid of animals in general. However, in this emergency, Kathy talked Dolores into lending a helping hand.

"Oh, it's nothing," Kathy said. " Vinyl — that is the name of our cat — is very gentle. All you have to do is hold her in your arms and stroke her."

Kathy then thrust the petrified animal into Dolores's arms and succeeded in extracting the fish bone from Vinyl's throat. The frantic cat squirmed around, lashed out with her paw, and made a long, deep scratch on Dolores's cheek, before disappearing hell-for-leather into the basement.

Another incident which endeared us to our upstairs neighbors happened on Yom Kippur, the highest and most solemn holiday of the year for those of the Jewish faith.

Outside our back door was a weed-covered area the size of a handkerchief which we called the garden. I had read in a gardening book that the best time to put in a new lawn is in the fall and I thought this Yom Kippur holiday was ideal for doing this. As the ground was hard as a rock, I rented a rotary tiller from a nearby hardware store to loosen the earth. The first thing in the morning, on this holiest of holy days, I cranked up the machine and started to plow the weed patch. I was almost done with this project when the pale figure of Marek, dressed immaculately in a blue serge suit, appeared on the balcony above our apartment. His attire indicated that he was on the way to the temple. He made unmistakable signs for me to stop my activity. I cut the motor, so that I could hear him.

"Claude," he said, "maybe you do not realize that this is a very important holiday. A day for meditation and contemplation. Would you be kind enough to stop this noisy machine?"

I responded, "I am so sorry. I didn't realize that this would disturb you. In any event, I am just finished." Marek was about to retreat when I called him back, saying, "By the way, could you do me a favor in turn?" We had a huge climbing rose in the garden, part of which snaked along the trellis of Marek's balcony. Some of the rose shoots had fallen down, and raising one of them on the end of a rake till it was in front of Marek, I asked him to be so kind as to wind it around the balcony railing. Marek listened with a pained expression — it was obvious that he was not into gardening — and then said after a long pause, "I am sorry, I can't help you, as I am not allowed to work on this holy day."

We got better acquainted during numerous chess games played on long winter evenings, and in the ensuing months I gathered that Marek was working in a dead-end job and would like a change of position. I introduced Marek to Jack, who identified him as a fellow intellectual and liked him at once. We decided that Marek should join our company. Immaculately dressed, as always, in a Brooks Brothers suit and highly polished expensive shoes, Marek came to our office for an official interview. After an agreement had been reached on salary, he told us that he could not commute from Brooklyn to New Jersey during the rush hour and would have to have the option of coming in late and leaving early. We innocently assumed that he was referring to what is known today as flextime and that he planned to put in the normal number of working hours even though not following a conventional schedule. Instead, we discovered later, Marek was spelling out the hours he actually intended to work.

"I will not drive a Ford or a Chevrolet," he next said to us, his amazed audience. "I hope the firm will buy a Mercedes for me."

We could acquiesce to the strange work schedule Marek requested, considering that I played tennis every morning before coming to work while Jack started his day by reading the classics. We figured that in Marek we were hiring not an hourly worker, but an executive whose services could be judged by performance rather than time put in on the job. However, we drew the line on the Mercedes, especially since both Jack and I drove the lowest-priced Chevrolet and Ford models. For Marek, as a start, we bought a second-hand Edsel with some damaged fenders. It would have to do.

The next to join our team was *William Mahoney*, formerly a vice president of one of the biggest polystyrene producers in the United States. He was no stranger to us. For several years prior to joining us, he was in charge of selling offgrade and scrap material for his company and we had had many business dealings with him. When, during a meeting, he indicated that he was in the process of a career change and would be interested in a position with us, we were flattered. It was inconceivable that an officer of a major chemical company would even consider joining our insignificant, unobtrusive and unimportant company. If indeed he did join us, we thought, he would undoubtedly maintain the flow of materials

from his previous employer, and also, as a former marketing manager, he would bring us new customers and connections with other major producers.

William Mahoney seemed too good to be true. We were puzzled about why he would condescend to work for a salary that — enormous as it appeared to us — must have been relatively low compared to what a Fortune 500 company paid a godlike creature like a marketing manager and vice president.

The explanation was soon in coming. Bill made it quite clear that he could hardly afford to stay with us for any length of time at the salary we offered. But this was a transitional period for him; he was preparing for a mid-life career change and would be willing to work for us temporarily, as long as we gave him sufficient time off to study for a master's degree in city management. Awestruck by Bill's credentials, we agreed to his terms with alacrity.

Soon after Bill started working, it became evident that he not only took off two afternoons a week to attend classes, as agreed, but frequently had one of the women in the office type his assignment papers or do other work connected with his personal life rather than business matters.

We were very uncomfortable about this, but in the end we simply surmised that Bill was accustomed to having his own secretary at his beck and call, as one of the "perks" often provided by major corporations. Since Bill was new and unproven we thought we'd let him have his way, anticipating that his performance would meet our expectations and contribute to the overall profitability of our ventures.

Jack and I were proud of ourselves. How could a business not succeed, with such an unusual and talented crew? Others, looking at our setup, thought just the opposite: how on earth could a business succeed with a crew like this?

In the end both schools of thought proved correct. On the one hand, my partner Jack and I were able to enjoy more or less the life we had envisioned, while on the other hand, the result of allowing members of our staff the same privilege of deciding their own hours and doing their own thing was almost a financial disaster. Each month we barely managed to cover our overhead, and at the end of the year the company had accumulated no surplus and no reserve for bad times. The truth is that profits were far less than they could have been had everybody worked a full forty-hour week.

Any psychologist or business-management consultant could have predicted that sooner or later we would run into real problems with every person in this cast of characters.

A Marriage In Trouble Collapses As Well

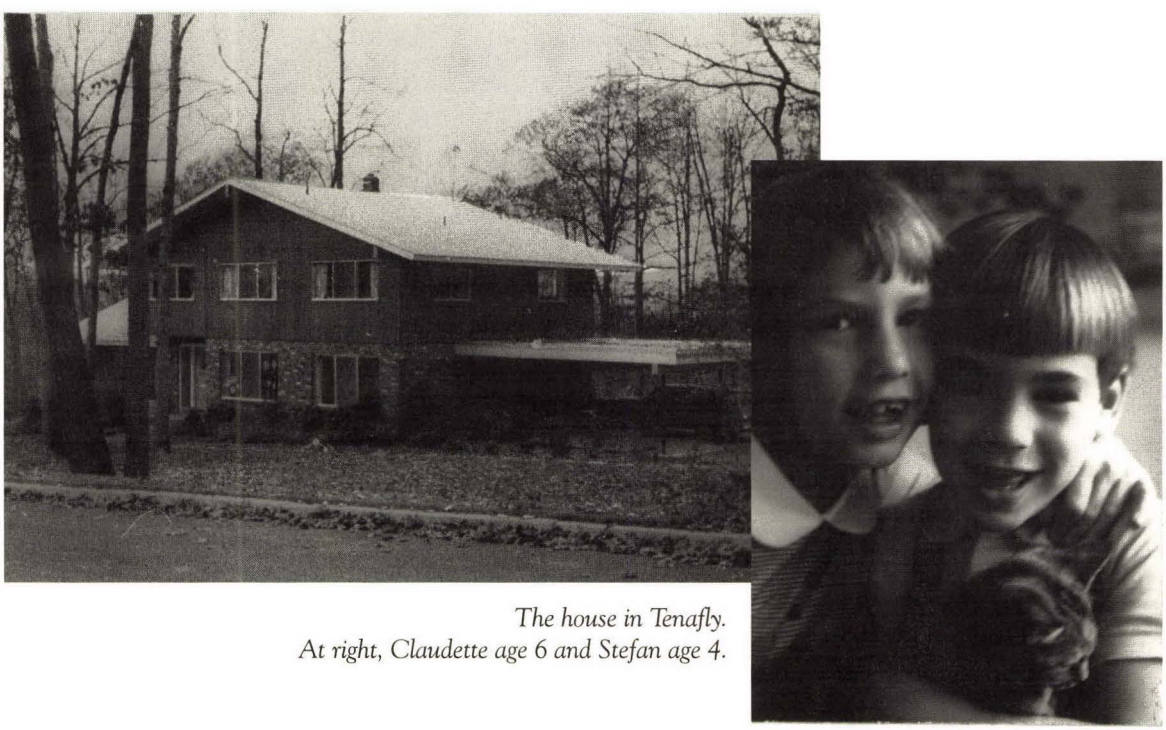
As our business grew, our plant in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn, had become more and more congested. When a secretary moved into our living room, and then a new bookkeeper into our bedroom, Kathy and I fled to a sublet, a lovely garden apartment in a brownstone house in Brooklyn

Heights. It was just just ten minutes away. Kathy stopped working, as she was eight months pregnant with our first child.

All through this period my personal life was in deep trouble. The predictions that my marriage to Kathy would turn out to be a mistake finally came true.

Claudette was born on June 23, 1958. Even though the office and plant had moved to New Jersey, we stayed on in our Brooklyn garden apartment. We had hoped that having children would solve some of our personal problems, and indeed for a while, the arrival of Claudette was a diversion. In 1960 Stephan came along, and a lack of space for small children in the now cluttered one bedroom flat made life miserable. My daily commute to New Jersey was strenuous and enervating as well. Yet Kathy refused to move. She felt that moving to New Jersey was not "dignified" for a dyed-in-the-wool New Yorker. I finally moved out, giving her an ultimatum that we either move or divorce. This forceful stand prompted her to finally agree reluctantly to move to New Jersey. We found a still-affordable piece of land, on which we built our dream house over the next few years — once again hoping that the improvement in our life-style would ultimately solve our personal problems. But personal problems follow wherever you go; having children and larger living quarters did nothing toward a permanent solution.

To help with child care, I imported a series of young *au pairs*, a practice then unknown in America. First, Steffie Schmid-Burgk, the daughter of a prominent physician in Munich, joined us; she was succeeded by Brigitte



The house in Tenafly.
At right, Claudette age 6 and Stefan age 4.

Barfuss from Augsburg. After Stephan was born, on Easter Sunday, April 17, 1960, we engaged Bettina Dieckmann, daughter of my father's friend Erich Dieckmann, the Bauhaus architect who had designed most of the rooms in our villa in Lichtenfels.

He had died during the war, and Bettina's mother, facing hard times, wrote to my mother, wondering whether we could sponsor her two daughters, who saw no future for themselves in postwar Germany and wanted to emigrate to the United States. Remembering how grateful I was that my uncle Gustav helped our family get a start in the new world two decades earlier, I was happy to comply.

Bettina arrived soon after Stephan's birth. She had promised to stay with us for a year, but she had fallen in love during the transatlantic crossing, and soon succumbed to the pressures of her lover, leaving us to go to Florida to marry him.

During the few months Bettina stayed with us, we grew very fond of her. She was a pretty, very German-looking blond young woman, artistically gifted. We hated to lose her help, but understanding her predicament, we wished her well.



Bettina and Mutti, 1957

Her marriage turned out to be a big mistake. To her disillusion, Bettina soon became a battered wife instead of a loved one. Nevertheless, she hung on for a few years when she finally obtained a divorce.

After the marital failure she remained single for a good many years,living in Chicago. Eventually she fell in love again, this time with Raymond Sons, a respected and successful sports columnist working for the Chicago Sun Times, who was recently elected to the Chicago Journalism Hall of Fame. A happy period followed ,when the two traveled pretty much all over the Western Hemisphere, attending Olympic games and other major sports events. Today, they have become good friends of ours. Retired, they now live in Fort Collins, Colorado, and we meet at least once a year, hiking or skiing together.

But now back to my own marital problems with my wife Kathy.

Kathy came into the marriage with a traumatic inheritance from her childhood about which I knew next to nothing. But I thought that her difficulties, regardless of their cause, would be overcome by steadily given love and creature comforts. No one can really fathom what is in the depth of a human soul. Whatever it was that Kathy required from a mate, I could not meet her needs. When

a psychiatrist, whom she had consulted on my insistence, urged me to give her a good beating once in a while in order to save my marriage, I knew there was no hope. In 1965, at the age of forty-five I decided I needed "out" if I wanted to build a new life for myself.

Today young people marry, separate, and divorce within a few years without as much as batting an eyelash. However, before the generation of the "Flower Children" and the "American Cultural Revolution," in which customs established for centuries became obsolete, divorce was a long-drawn-out affair, contemplated only under extreme circumstances.

The steps which led to the ultimate dissolution of this union were agonizing and manifold. Although the marriage was in trouble almost from the start, we stayed together for more than fifteen years during which the many attempts to make our marriage "work" failed. Neither of us could accommodate the other's basic needs, and divorce was the only solution.

I admitted defeat and in 1965 started divorce proceedings, typically without Kathy's participation, cooperation or consent. The legal requirement for a divorce without the participation of a mate was a three year separation during which there could be no sexual contact. Also, both partners had to remain chaste during that period. Can anyone imagine enforcement of such a law today?

Supported by family and friends — particularly Jack who was having marital problems himself with Claire — I reluctantly moved out of our luxurious home in Tenafly into a furnished studio sublet on Second Avenue in New York. The upper East Side was then the center of the singles scene. I thought possibly this locality was fertile ground for the search for a new life companion.

The area was full of singles bars and discos where the "in" crowd congregated. It was not the kind of environment in which I was comfortable. But whenever my tight schedule permitted, I tried to overcome my inhibitions and plunge in, hoping to find "Miss Right," or, if not exactly that, at least someone to temporarily share my bed. Considering my responsibilities at work and towards my children, I found that I had almost no time to develop meaningful relationships.

One day each weekend I spent in Tenafly, mostly working around the house and garden and looking after the children while Kathy took the day off shopping, which was her favorite pastime. Holiday weekends also were spent in Tenafly, where I presided at the head of a table laden with seasonal specialties, surrounded by relatives. To all outward appearances, we were the image of the happy all American family.

Kathy appeared happier during that period than I had ever seen her; and no wonder, the setup enabled her to enjoy all possible advantages of a married woman, without having to fulfill any of the marital obligations normally required of a spouse. But I too benefited, since home and children were a refuge from loneli-

ness, while otherwise I was free to pursue a quasi-phantom love life, albeit without much success.

Since Kathy confided in no one, it came as a great shock to those who knew us, when some years later I suddenly appeared on the scene with a new wife. Louis Mandel, my neighbor, who in later years became one of my close friends, told me confidentially that during minor disagreements and squabbles, he and his wife Mary always cited "the Bambergers" as the prime example of a good marriage. Even Kathy's mother, Agatha McCauley, was flabbergasted when the divorce was finalized in 1970. She had had no inkling of the five-year separation.

Meanwhile Mutti, my mother, saw another possibility of matching me up with one of those sensible German Jewish refugee girls, of which there was no dearth in her circle of friends. Following her advice I dated some of them. They were unquestionably wholesome and nice and excellent wife material, but there was no spark. The chemistry was missing.

Instead I dated a series of most unsuitable women. Aspiring actresses, painters, artists, dancers — they were looking either for men with money, ready to support them in their chosen lifestyle, or someone to sweep them off their feet and into bed. Though I was in a position to provide both, I succeeded in neither.

Tired of the time-consuming cat and mouse game which was the required etiquette on the singles scene, I resorted to advertising — then an unheard-of method of finding a mate. Long before the endless columns of "personal" ads now so common in magazines distributed all over the United States, two clever young people living in Greenwich Village published every two months a booklet known as "The Black Book." It contained ads of unusual people looking for companions of the opposite sex. My ad read as follows:

> "M-160-NJ: Recently separated, dislike cocktail parties, crowds, love quiet dinners with wine, conversation. Looking for female pal to share the joys of life and, who knows, perhaps FOR life.
>
> Interested in music, theatre and humanities. Successful in business, unsuccessful in love.
>
> I dream of meeting someone slim with good figure and brains covered with long hair; long hair unessential, brains a must.
>
> Should like walking, skiing, beach-combing, cycling and a million other things. Age, color, immaterial; good looks and sense of humor a MUST.
>
> Am very active, a young fortyish European, multilingual travelled world-wide. Known as warm, sensitive and considerate. Strictly a one woman man."

Feeling that my ad was irresistible, I was disappointed to get relatively few responses. Following up, I found to my dismay that although most of the applicants had long hair, the brains and the other required credentials were missing.





A moment of history: love at first sight.

The ensuing adventures with the "dates" resulting from these ads are enough material for another book.

All this took place between 1965 and 1968. Much of my time was spent away on travels around the world in an effort to develop the international business of our new company, Claude Bamberger International Corporation, founded exclusively to export plastic materials.

My life changed drastically when in 1968, on one of these trips, my dream came true. Visiting the National Museum in Taiwan, I not only admired the incomparable treasures exhibited in the display cases, but also a dark-haired beauty among a group of Asian students. Her name was Mo-Li Siow, who two years later became my wife.

My divorce with Kathy finally came through in 1970. Kathleen was terminally ill with cancer. On her deathbed she said, "Well Claude, I have no choice, I leave you with two kids and a lot of debts." She died in May 1971, at the age of forty-five.

Mo-Li — West Meets East

By 1968, my life was drab and colorless. The myth that once relieved of the doldrums of a bad marriage a man is free to choose from a smorgasboard of beautiful, attractive women had been dispelled years ago.

In March 1968 I was on a business trip in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan. At loose ends on a Sunday morning, I decided to visit the world-famous National Museum with its incredible collection of art which Chiang Kai-shek had spirited out of China at the time of the Communist take-over. But not only art works were to be seen. A group of strange-looking individuals, among a sprinkling of other visitors, caught my attention. This group consisted of young people, who looked neither Indian nor Chinese, and although olive- to dark-skinned, did not have Negroid features.

I focused my attention on a black-eyed beauty with shiny ebony hair cascading well beyond her delicately shaped shoulders, almost down to her tiny waist. Taller then the rest, she appeared to be the leader of this group. Wrapped in a sheer, black sheath, which I learned later was a "Sarong Kebaya," the national costume of Malaysia, she looked exotic and fascinating.

Approaching her I said, "Pardon me, but could you tell me where you are from?" She looked a bit puzzled, but then with a gracious smile explained: "We are a student group from the history department of the University of Malaysia, on a field trip to Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong to promote student relationships between these countries." Here the conversation seemed logically at an end, though I was interested in prolonging it. I tagged along as the group moved on to the next exhibit hall. Trying to make conversation, I said something about the weather, and addressing no one in particular, asked what studies were required by the history department of a Malaysian university. Then the tall girl on whom I had my eye gave me a splendid opening: "You speak with a strange accent. You don't sound like an American. Where do you come from?"

When I told her that I was originally from Germany, and had fled because of Hitler's persecution of the Jews, her eyes lit up and she said, almost in utter disbelief, "You are a Jew, and you come from Germany?" Then, candidly: "I never saw a live Jew, and I wouldn't know a Jew if I saw one." It turned out that she was writing a paper on Nazi Germany as part of her work for a B.A. degree in history.

The time had come for a "formal" introduction. I introduced myself as Claude Bamberger from New York, feeling that an admission that I lived in New Jersey would make me seem considerably less interesting. The tall girl then introduced herself as Mo-Li Siow, and proceeded to introduce me to her fellow students. After a pause the conversation continued. Mo-Li said, "I could not get any material on the subject of German Jews in the university library in Kuala Lumpur. When I went to the German consulate for information, the staff there didn't seem to know anything either." After a little pause she added naively, "They acted as if they had never heard of Hitler or that there were ever any Jews in Germany. How can that be when the Hitler period is such an important part of German history?"

"Well!" I exclaimed, "I think I can explain that to you, but it is rather complex." Then I added hopefully, "Maybe we could meet for dinner tonight?" Then in a rush before she could refuse: "You are really lucky. I am not just a German, but also a Jew. I know a lot about Hitler and the Jews. I can probably help you get some history books covering that period."

That evening we talked somewhat about Hitler but more about my life. Years later Mo-Li confessed her thoughts during that evening. They were something like this: "What a talker! Will he ever shut up? Well, I should be tolerant. He is a tottering old man and went through a lot, so I must be gracious."

When it came time to part, Mo-Li, being proud and wishing to reciprocate, asked, "Would you be my guest for dinner tomorrow night? I would like you to meet some of my fellow students." Flattered and charmed, I agreed with alacrity.

At that time the Vietnam war was at its height. Anti-American feeling was prevalent among students all over Asia. That evening I was given the third degree. Confronted with a barrage of questions as to why the United States was fighting there. I felt I was held personally responsible . "It is obvious you are losing the war," one student shouted, and another said, "Americans have no business in Asia." I was very much on the defensive. I explained that I too was against the war and told the students that there were millions of Americans like me. It was a lively evening and I was astounded at the eloquent language these students used and how much they all knew. Certainly more than the average American would know about Malaysia, I mused.

Impressed with the maturity and knowledge of these young people, and struck by Mo-Li's beauty, youth, and quick wit, I was anxious to convert this chance meeting into a friendship. It was our last night in Taiwan. Early the next morning I had to catch a flight to Hong Kong, while the Malaysians were on their way to Japan to meet fellow students, and visit dams, power plants, Shinto shrines, as well as other natural and man-made wonders.

Following our two day meeting, a whirlwind exchange of daily letters between Mo-Li and me developed into a regular pen-pal courtship over the next six months. "Tottering old man" notwithstanding, I must also have made an impression on Mo-Li — or perhaps she needed the books and information I could provide, so she could finish her thesis. In any event, the daily letters from Malaysia were to me an open window into a girl's heart. I was constantly amazed at the maturity of this young person writing to me from the other side of the world. All the letters started with "Dear Mr. Bamberger;" then followed chronicles not only an account of the day-to-day life of an attractive female student at the University of Malaysia, but in a very refreshing and uninhibited way.

Gradually our letters got more familiar, "Mr. Bamberger" became "Dear Claude," and in the end I decided to travel to Malaysia to have a second look. In the fall of 1968 I made another "business trip" to Asia — this time ostensibly to develop the Malaysian market. At least, that is what I wrote to Mo-Li.

On the way I made stopovers in Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. The closer I came to Malaysia, the more ill at ease I felt, thinking I must be crazy to fly halfway around the world to visit a young college girl half my age of whose background and family I knew next to nothing.

However, her many letters had given me a great deal of insight into this young person's character. Though chronologically half my age, she was able to communicate with me as an equal. Her letters were uncannily mature, and I tried to convince myself that I was really not crazy.

Mo-Li confessed many years later that she was equally apprehensive about the impending visit of this stranger. "My allowance is five dollars per month," she worried, "What do I do if he drinks five beers a day, each costing five dollars? What am I going to tell my family? How can I see him? No reputable girl can visit a friend in a hotel. What if my family won't allow me to see him?" A million other obstacles occurred to her, but since I was inevitably on my way, she resigned herself to facing the coming catastrophe.

When I made final flight arrangements in Hong Kong, I cautiously allowed for a stopover of only three days in Malaysia, just in case things went as badly as I apprehensively anticipated.

During this stay I learned from Mo-Li that she was about to accept a scholarship for graduate studies at a university in Osaka, Japan. Hearing this, I suggested that she consider getting her doctorate degree in the United States, something that had never even occurred to her. I thought that as a graduate of the University of Malaysia she would have no problem getting accepted at an American university. "There are no Malaysians in America," I told her; hence, there would be less competition. What finally tipped the scale in my favor was the disadvantage that in Japan she would have to spend a year or more learning a new language, before she could commence her actual studies. That I had some connections with the New School for Social Research in New York, which was famous for its political science program, also helped, and just possibly, I like to delude myself, she may have favored studying in the United States because of me.

Upon my return, I checked with the admissions department of the New School, and they were indeed interested in sponsoring a Malaysian student. After submitting the proper credentials, Mo-Li was accepted, and in the spring of 1969 she came to the United States to begin her studies.

Meanwhile, my business troubles kept getting worse. Jack made another stab at retirement by announcing that he intended to move to Portugal. For the umpteenth time he suggested that I buy out his share and let him go, an offer I vehemently declined, as I could not possibly manage the business without him.

Portugal had one of the lowest per capita incomes in Europe. Jack figured correctly that he could live comfortably on four thousand dollars a year, which would be available as income from the assets he had accumulated during our partnership. In order not to lose him altogether, I finally agreed that he could move to Portugal provided he would "commute" and return to work periodically if needed.

He settled down in a hilltop villa surrounded by orange groves, vineyards, and gardens, with enough servants to "make life bearable." In any event it was a far cry from the walk-up cold-water flat in which he had lived for many years in the East Village in New York. Basking in the Portuguese sun, he and his new wife Lenore lived like a king and a queen. He could now read the classics all day long. I for my part was sweating it out in Carlstadt, trying to meet the monthly overhead of the company.

It was obvious that I was not ready to retire. I felt that I did not have the resources to support my ex-wife and children while simultaneously building a new existence for myself.

I married Mo-Li in 1970. For the next years, even while she was deeply involved in her studies, she was a sympathetic listener intrigued with the bizarre day-to-day happenings in our business. Because of her youth and inexperience I never took her advice very seriously. Only many years later did I realize what headaches I could have avoided by following what she had to say. The mistake I kept making over and over again was that I did not consider what ultimate consequences a simple, seemingly logical step might have in the future. Mo-Li's warnings about such consequences always fell on deaf ears.

Chapter Thirteen

An Exotic Staff Causes Exotic Problems

1970 - 1975

How To Handle Problematic Employees

"Don't hire them," would be sound advice, but even the employer who takes reasonable steps during an interview cannot know how good a person is until the individual has actually begun to do the assigned work independently. Unfortunately, depending on the complexity of the task, this may occur only after six months or even a year, usually when it is too late for any alternative but to dismiss the incapable employee.

The Japanese have a famous saying: "The problem is not the problem. The problem is with the people with whom you have the problem." Never a truer word was spoken.

David Emery, one of the first experts on tackling management problems in big multi-national corporations, once told me, "If I could prevail on a company to be only 10 percent more efficient in employee management than their competitors, this company would save so much money that they could put all their competitors out of business." A famous physicist came to the conclusion that the most efficient human actually works at only 10% of his or her potential. These statements may be an oversimplification, but since it is established that everyone works more or less inefficiently, no one has a competitive advantage in this respect.

One might ask, how can a small business compete effectively in the labor market, acquiring efficient help, even though it cannot offer the job security and fringe benefits granted by much larger corporations? But on closer examination, the opposite turns out to be true. During the economic crunch in the early nineties, it was the large corporations that failed their employees with respect to job security, showing no qualms at dismissing long-term employees nearing retirement age.

The first step toward this corporate "final solution" is to give it a fancy name, such as "down-sizing," "re-engineering," or "re-structuring." This is accomplished by eliminating the jobs of seniors, shifting locales, and imposing very difficult conditions to make the life of an aging employee, who may have been with the company fifteen, twenty-five, or thirty years, so unpalatable that he is forced either to quit or to save face by accepting an unsatisfactory early-retirement package.

Small businesses can ill afford to treat a mature employee of many years standing in this manner. For them, such a person is usually impossible to replace, and the owner of a small company will do almost anything to induce this valuable employee to stay on as long as possible.

The reputation of a small business is largely dependent on the reliability, friendliness, and efficiency of its key people, who are in day-to-day contact with suppliers and customers. A contented, well-treated staff of workers is unquestionably a major asset. In fact, it is a firm's individually trained, unique personnel that its competitors cannot purchase or duplicate.

Owners of small businesses feel that the methods of hiring, motivating, and promoting employees developed by the larger corporations are too impersonal for their little group of intimately known workers. The human element in the small business, which boils down to a close personal relationship between owners and employees, has proven to work far better for them.

By offering a career opportunity, a share in the profits, and the possibility of a partnership arrangement down the road, a small business can in fact offer greater job security and future potential than a very large multi-national corporation.

However, with labor laws and government regulations becoming ever more complicated the management of a small business would be wise to routinely take the following logical steps when considering someone for a key position, even if the candidate is a relative or personal friend:

First, the applicant should fill out a form, supplying all the vital background information the employer will need to comply with federal and state regulations once the person is hired.

Second, the successful applicant should be provided with a written job description. This is the most important document in the hiring process, spelling out exactly what is expected. Very often of what has been taken for granted looks very different when recorded on paper.

Third, once all conditions of employment are agreed upon, the company should write a confirming letter to the employee, once more spelling out these conditions and specifying what the company expects from the new staff member.

Bill Mahoney — Expert In Projections, Failure In Business

In 1970 we had fifteen people in the warehouse, several women in the accounting department, and three persons in the front office to answer the phone and do secretarial work. The executives included Juan Rodrigues, an apprentice salesman, and three key persons whom we thought had managerial potential: Jason Loebel, Marek Polski, and Bill Mahoney. Keeping things afloat with such a motley crew was difficult even with Jack or me present, let alone in our absence, when I was traveling and Jack was vacationing in Portugal, as happened more and more frequently. While somehow we managed to live with Jason's constant moodiness and Marek's idiosyncracies, the other key person, Bill Mahoney, soon proved to be a disappointment.

We could have tolerated his disagreeable habits, his yawning enormously during a conversation, filing his nails, or looking at the ceiling at sales meetings, if he had to contributed something positive to help solve some of the problems at hand. Coming to us from a Fortune 500 multi-national corporation, Mahoney had one great talent. He was a very smooth talker. He would talk endlessly about

targets, goals, and performance records — even when they were irrelevant to the point under discussion. But he was unable to help us with real, down-to-earth solutions.

Bill was excellent at preparing useless long reports on market projections, complete with immaculate graphs and statistical tables, presented in beautifully bound folders, but he would hardly ever leave the office to visit current customers and suppliers, let alone go out and find new ones. His one significant contribution was in maintaining contact with friends in his former employer's office and thus ensuring that the flow of material from that firm to us would continue to increase. While our reason for hiring him was to develop our customer and supplier base as required by supply and demand, just maintaining his old connection was as important as finding new ones.

As a trading company, we are totally dependent on a continuous supply of materials at prices which will allow us to resell them at a profit. Bill's ineffectiveness in that area first became evident when we asked him to make an effort to find us another source of high-density polyethylene. Lacking a good connection for obtaining this type of scrap from N. P. Corporation, a producer of this material, we asked Bill to work on establishing a connection with them. After a few phone calls, Bill reported that a woman named Marilyn was in charge of selling the polyethylene scrap and offgrade material. He was very optimistic and said, "In fact, Marilyn's position is the exact counterpart of the one I had with my old company." Having a lot in common with Marilyn, Bill thought, he would have no problem working with her. We thought so too. After their initial meeting, Bill reported that Marilyn weighed about three hundred pounds and loved food. "Since I am into cooking myself, we discovered we even share the same interest," he reported. I suggested that he take Marilyn out to grand meals in the hope that by winning a place in her heart, via her stomach, he would get her to sell to us some of the scrap and surplus material she was selling to our competition at the time.

Following my advice, Bill diligently took her out to numerous lunches and even some dinners. Each time he came back from one of these expeditions, which more or less took his whole day, he would report that things were going very well. "It takes time and patience," he used to say. "Things are going along just swell."

After about six months of this I said, "Bill, things may really be going swell, but when on earth are you going to do some business with Marilyn?"

"I will broach the subject the next time I meet her," Bill answered, to my utter astonishment.

"What do you mean 'broach the subject'?" I exclaimed, agitated. "Haven't you been talking about buying materials from her every time you meet?"

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "that would be very bad manners. She must first have confidence that I like her, before I can talk about business matters."

"You mean that in taking her out all this time you have never discussed any business matters?" I asked, incredulously.

"Well," Bill said, "that's more or less correct. I mean... I think... I may have hinted at times... that we were interested in buying materials, but I never really asked her directly to make us any offers."

It became evident after a year that Bill was no good at business. He was excellent at preparing charts and making projections, but totally incapable of doing anything useful beyond maintaining the contact between us and his former employer. On the other hand, our purchases from that particular source had more than doubled since he had joined us. Making some quick calculations, we decided it didn't much matter what else he did; his maintaining our connections with that supplier paid for itself.

After Bill had been with us about a year and a half, we hit a very slow period. His former employer, whose business had slowed down as well, offered us more material than ever, but these offers turned out to be quite useless, since we could not sell this additional quantity of resin.

We had been paying the same price to Bill's former company ever since Bill had joined us. Now he was unable to get this price reduced to reflect the new market conditions. In any event, what we needed most of all at this moment was additional customers.

Having been a marketing manager for his former company, Bill was acquainted with end-users of the kind of resin produced by his alma mater. We had therefore assumed that he would be able to introduce us to potential new customers interested in buying this material from us. After all, he had always boasted that he was in charge of twenty-six salesmen (with whom he had had interminable "meetings") and so we thought it logical to expect him to know the market and especially to know who would be interested in this particular product.

We were wrong! When we tried to switch Bill's focus from purchasing to sales and asked him to go on the road, call on his old customers, and actually try to sell something, he balked. He said he did not think that was his job, but he would be willing to hire salesmen and supervise their activity. That was the last thing we needed in the stagnant economy of the time.

When in the early seventies the economy started to slide into a recession, our relationship with Bill rapidly approached a crisis and he knew it. Fortunately, he had just finished his courses and obtained his master's degree. Suggesting that the city government would be enriched by a man with his talent, we offered him a modest sum as severance pay and proposed that he resign. He accepted grate-

fully, grasping the opportunity of saving face and avoiding a confrontation. He left us ostensibly by mutual agreement.

Juan The Money Manager

Next we lost Juan, our truck driver turned salesman. Juan soon started making sales without first having the approval of our credit department. Anyone can sell to people who have no intention of paying for the goods they buy, and Juan was highly successful at this.

Once, before I left on a trip, I told Marek that Juan had one account that particularly needed watching. The company, Magic Plastic Toys, was almost bankrupt; they owed us an enormous sum of money, and under no circumstances was Juan to be allowed to sell this company another ounce of material.

When I returned from abroad six weeks later, Juan picked me up at the airport. The first thing I asked about was how things were going with the Magic Plastic account. To my dismay he told me that they now owed us even more money than when I had left, but he also said that Marek had taken over and had managed to straighten things out.

When I went to the office the following day, I met a stressed-out Marek who told me that in Jack's absence I could no longer go away. Managing our business simply took too much out of him.

He said, "Ever since you left I have spent sleepless nights, and I am unable to take the strain any longer."

I tried to reassure him, saying that I was back now and he need not worry. At the same time, I asked about the status of the Magic Plastic account.

"Oh that," he said, "yes, we received payment yesterday, and the matter is all straightened out."

Not until several months later, during some business discussion, did I ask Marek how he had been able to get the full amount from Magic Plastic so quickly, when Juan had just extended further credit instead of collecting the old balance. Marek answered, "What I'm going to tell you is just between us. You must promise me never to tell Juan or anyone else how I collected this money."

A little bit puzzled, I agreed, curious to know just what Marek had done. What he then told me is perhaps one of the most bizarre collection stories in the annals of any business.

Marek began telling me that after I had left, having given precise instructions not to extend further credit until we received payment, Juan went to Magic Plastic and brought back a check as a payment on account. In return, the owner, Buddy Weinstein, extorted a promise from Juan to deliver another load of polystyrene the next day, as he was completely out of material.

Juan was so happy to have received payment for at least one load that he did indeed ship a new one the next morning. He figured that we would be no worse off than we were before and would ultimately make a good profit on the new load, for which he had obtained a premium price. What Juan neglected to consider was the possibility that the check might not be good.

Sure enough, three days later our office received a call from our bank telling us that a check from Magic Plastic Toys was being returned for insufficient funds. Now, instead of owing us for two loads, Buddy owed us for three, and it was obvious that he had no intention of paying. This, after my precise instructions not to extend any further credit whatsoever. Marek, feeling responsible as the person in charge while I was away, did not want to confront me with this bad news. He decided that one way or another he would get payment from Buddy before I returned.

He called Magic Plastic Toys and said, "Buddy, I am Marek Polski of Claude Bamberger Molding Compounds. May I speak to Juan?"

"Juan?" Buddy Weinstein said puzzled, "I did not expect Juan this afternoon."

Lowering his voice to a conspiratorial tone, Marek whispered, "Buddy, quite frankly the reason I'd like to speak to Juan is that I am very worried for your safety." Then he continued: "You see, Juan was our truck driver; he is a very violent person. He has been promoted to salesman in our company just this past year. I suspect he is into loan sharking or drug dealing and has some strong Mafia connections."

"What has that got to do with me?" Buddy responded rather curtly, ready to hang up.

Marek answered, "A lot! In fact, I'm really concerned. I don't want an accident to happen. When Juan heard that the check you gave him bounced, he was very upset." After a pause, Marek continued: "About an hour ago, Juan rushed out of the office screaming that he would teach that Weinstein a lesson, that he'd get him one way or another".

Then Marek spoke even more softly, his voice indicating extreme confidentiality, "Just between us, Juan is really dangerous. He has a criminal record, but Claude wanted to give him a chance and promoted him to be a salesman. Claude is away on a trip. Before he left he gave Juan instructions not to sell you any more material. Now that your check has bounced, Juan knows that Claude will fire him on his return. His whole career is at stake. Buddy, I know Juan! I know his background. He will stop at nothing when someone double-crosses him. That's why I am calling you. If he shows up at your office, ask your secretary to tell him to call here immediately, and I will see what I can do."

"But what should I do?" Buddy Weinstein stammered, obviously shaken.

"Go to your bank this instant and wire transfer six thousand dollars to us, from your personal account, if need be. When Juan calls me, I will tell him that you have called and that you are on your way to the bank right now to transmit the money. I will tell him to come back to our office." In conclusion Marek added, "And this is no joke, Buddy. If you value your life you'd better go to your bank and don't return to your office today. Fellows like Juan don't fool around."

When our bank later that day confirmed receipt of the funds by wire transfer, Marek told Juan that the Magic Plastic remittance had been received. After this incident I was very leery of Juan's business acumen. Besides functioning as our salesman and indulging his penchant for the ladies, notably gorgeous Barbara, Juan appeared to be active in "other areas." While Bill Mahoney was diligently pursuing his graduate studies at our expense, Juan had the habit of disappearing for long periods of time, with or without official leave, to attend to "personal business."

Since he always seemed to have a lot of money, far beyond what might be expected from the relatively modest salary he earned, we soon concluded that he was involved in drugs, loan sharking, or some other not-so-laudable enterprise. His career with us came to an end when he was found one day with multiple stab wounds in a Miami gutter, more dead than alive. It took him almost a year to recover, and when he returned to our office we told him that we had made other arrangements in the interim and had no opening.

While Marek was the best managerial prospect in our group — ingenious, creative, and the most trustworthy and loyal person on our staff — in personality he was perhaps the most unsuitable individual for a business dealing in scrap. Nevertheless, he stayed with us for more than ten years, specializing in buying and selling exotic engineering materials, an activity actually quite in keeping with his character.

As Jack and I were often both absent, Marek found himself in a position where he had to manage a leaderless operation filled with unmanageable people. Since he was a very ethical, conscientious person, this task proved too much for him. Giving us adequate notice, he left soon after the Magic Plastic incident and started his own company, Polyfibers International, specializing in the sale of nylon fibers and scrap.

Sandra Dunham Resurfaces As An Export Manager

In 1972 my friend Sandra Dunham needed a job. Nathan, Sandra's husband, had been owner of Dunham's Waste Material Corporation, a now defunct scrap company with which I had done a very nice business in the past. Nathan and Sandra had been close friends of mine ever since they helped

me out by storing some of our scrap during the infamous strike in 1953. Sandra, a tall, statuesque blond woman, was in her mid-fifties, but looked like she was in her early thirties. She lived in Wantagh, Long Island, well east of Manhattan and more than an hour's drive from Carlstadt. In short she was what we call today geographically undesirable from an employment point of view. Sandra and Nathan had been among the first independent American plastic-scrap dealers to travel to Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia, in the early sixties, and had helped develop the demand for plastic scrap in those areas. A specialist in exporting plastic scrap, Sandra would have no problem finding work in that field.

I suggested that she apply for a job with Bamberger Polymers, in New Hyde Park, Long Island, only a thirty-minute drive from her home. Sandra, knowing that there was no love lost between me and my cousin, was reluctant to apply. "Are you sure you don't mind if I work for them?" she asked. I assured her that I didn't mind at all, but I did not wish to be held responsible if things did not turn out as anticipated.

She got a job there after her first interview and told me that she was impressed. Apparently Gerald, who conducted the interview, was charming and Sandra could hardly believe the stories I had told her. "There must have been some enormous misunderstanding," she told me after accepting the job.

Six months later Sandra quit. Another friend of mine, Norman Plotkin, at one time president of the Novamont Corporation, also joined Bamberger Polymers for a brief period. Both Sandra and Norman confirmed the continuation of practices like the ones I and so many others had encountered twenty years before, adding only a few more horror stories. A leopard never changes its spots, so the saying goes.

In the early seventies, the only persons we had left to buy and sell material were Jason Loebel, the moody one, and on occasion Jack, who now lived a good part of the year in Portugal. Desperate for help, I persuaded Sandra to join our company. Commuting from Wantagh, Long Island, to Carlstadt, New Jersey, is no mean feat; it takes a very heroic and determined person to even consider such a possibility. Sandra was that type of person. We worked out a flextime arrangement so she could avoid being stuck in rush-hour traffic, and she agreed to work for us three days a week.

She took charge of the international business, with which she was familiar, freeing me to work on other projects. For a couple of years I had someone who was capable, and who actually did the job without burdening me with time consuming personal problems.

As is inevitable, there came a downturn, and the export business temporarily all but collapsed. There was no choice but to switch Sandra into the domestic activity of our firm. But involvement in domestic sales — with all the

credit problems and complaints about quality — was not her cup of tea. It was very different from sending telexes and dealing with irrevocable letters of credit. The last straw was the bankruptcy of a domestic customer to whom she had just made a shipment with the approval of our credit department. Our company lost a few thousand dollars, and she felt personally responsible for the loss even though she was not to blame. The commuting also became too much, and after giving us notice, she left in 1975.

Travels With Mo-Li — A Great Companion

Back in 1975, my wife Mo-Li's class work for her doctorate degree was practically completed and essentially she was working on her thesis, which had no set deadline. My children both were in prep schools, hence Mo-Li was able to accompany me on business trips to Europe, South America, and Asia. In the past these trips had often been lonely and depressing for me. Always cheerful and flexible about quick changes in plans, Mo-Li was possibly the best traveling companion anyone could have. In addition she was also frequently a great help to me in handling problems which resulted from cultural and ethnic differences. Our Asian customers in particular seemed to be much more comfortable with me now that I arrived in the company of a Malaysian wife

Furthermore she was an experienced researcher, and often when I had business appointments, I asked her to visit the local chamber of commerce or trade association to ferret out names of potential users for the scrap and offgrade materials we were trying to sell.

For instance the Shell Chemical Company, from which I was buying polypropylene, had come out with a new thermoplastic rubber called Kraton. They had mountains of offgrade material for which they asked me to find a market abroad. They did not want this new, sensitive material sold in the United States for fear that it would end up in their prime market.

No one in Asia was familiar with this new compound and I was unable to find anyone willing to try it. During a trip to Taiwan I asked Mo-Li to visit the local chamber of commerce to find out if they could recommend a possible buyer. When she returned to the hotel she produced the name of a rubber company and said, "The man said this firm might be interested in this new product." Having had previous contacts with other rubber companies in Taiwan, I didn't think much of the idea. The temperature was 95 degrees and I was not anxious to travel twenty miles into the suburbs in one of those decrepit taxis with cracked upholstery, no springs, and no air conditioning.

However, Mo-Li insisted that we go. The owner of this small company did not speak English, so Mo-Li acted as both interpreter and salesperson. To make a long story short, over the next decade this company became our biggest customer

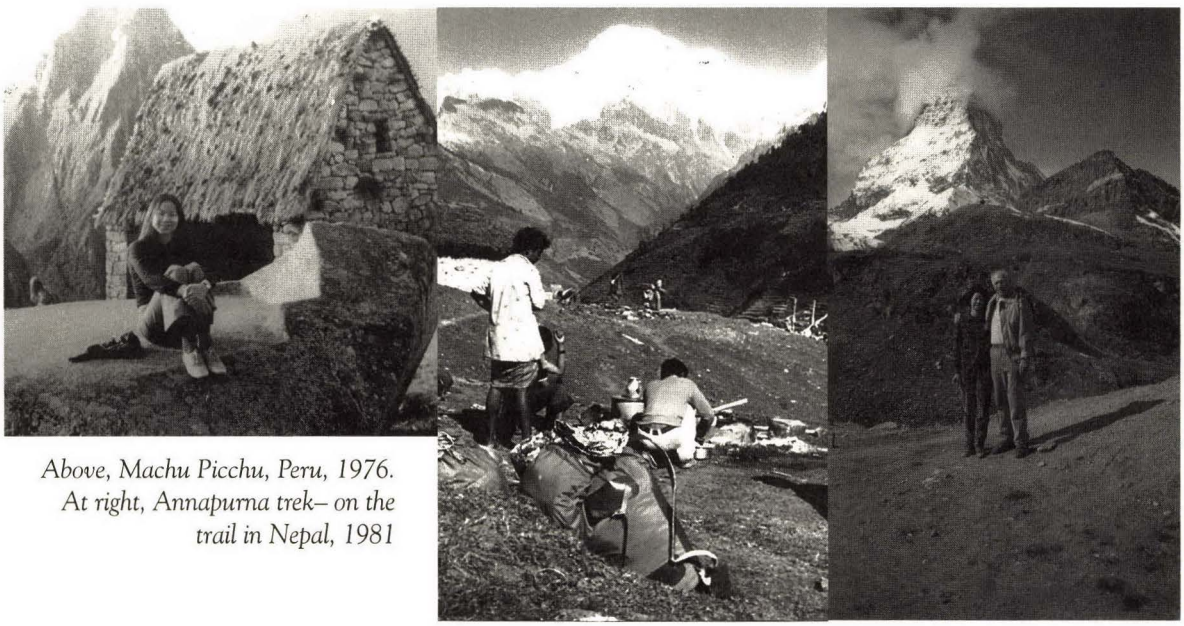
for offgrade Kraton. At the time, Mo-Li, still intent on an academic career, did not realize that this was her first account.

Traveling with Mo-Li was a great boost to my ego. Our international business was mostly centered around the capitals of the world, but we found time to make side trips to remote areas. Once on a side trip from Bogotá, the capital of Colombia, we flew in a cargo plane to Leticia, deep in the steamy Amazon jungle. From there we continued on to Machu Picchu in the Peruvian Andes and then went clear across the Alti Plano and Lake Titicaca via train, boat, and taxi to La Paz, the 12,000 foot high capital of Bolivia. This journey took a month. Back then, in the absence of faxes and cellular phones, such a trip would have been unthinkable without Jack taking care of the Carlstadt office.

During a business trip to India we visited the king of Nepal, who was a partner in Nepal's only new extrusion plant, from which we received a huge order. In Nepal we took ten days off to hike — there they call it trekking —around the base of Annapurna at altitudes of up to 14,000 feet. From there we flew to Chitwan National Park, a remote jungle preserve on Nepal's border with India.

On another trip, after a week visiting customers in Karachi, Pakistan, we flew to Peshawar, gateway to the Khyber Pass and Kabul, Afghanistan. We ventured into the virtually unknown Swat valley running along the border between Pakistan and Tibet, unsafe for tourists because of the fierce Pathan tribesmen inhabiting that region. Notwithstanding the problems in our business, I could fulfill my dreams of traveling to exotic places with the most wonderful person with whom I was in love, and who loved me. These were possibly the happiest years of my life.

Claude and Mo-li below the Matterhorn, 1995



Above, Machu Picchu, Peru, 1976. At right, Annapurna trek– on the trail in Nepal, 1981

Chapter Fourteen

Two Expansions–Two Calamities

1975 - 1978

Coping With Business Reversals

Unlike businesses with a product line, which can be gradually upgraded and altered to keep up with the latest developments, a company trading in scrap and surplus materials is subject to rapid changes in the market. Some of these fluctuations in supply and demand a company can easily absorb, but others are sudden total changes in the marketplace, and these can devastate a trading company almost overnight, unless the management has the financial resources and flexibility to withstand the shock.

For example, an established foreign market may abruptly disappear: a country which has been the principal worldwide customer for certain materials may suddenly impose a ban on importing these materials, with the result that existing orders are canceled, letters of credit cannot be opened, and not another ounce of these materials can be exported to this particular nation.

A case in point is Taiwan, which in the 1970s was the largest importer in the world of all types of plastic scrap and offgrade materials. As the petrochemical industry in Taiwan came into its own, Taiwanese producers of thermoplastic resins prevailed on their government to ban the import of all plastic scrap, thus eliminating low-priced competition and securing for them a captive market. Overnight, hundreds of small firms engaged in reprocessing and upgrading scrap were put out of business.

Domestically too, a trading company is at the mercy of sudden changes. An increase in freight rates, for example, may make it no longer possible for a purchaser to ship low-priced materials over long distances to be processed. Unable to absorb the increase, such a company would have to open a facility closer to the supply in order to stay in business.

We encountered a situation like this in the early seventies. The center of the plastic industry shifted from the Northeast to Houston, Texas, which was enjoying an unprecedented oil boom. All the important scrap dealers either relocated to Houston or opened branches in that area in order to be close to the source of the polyolefin, styrene, and thermoplastic rubber scrap generated by producers of oil-related plastic resins.

Since packaging low-end, mostly wet plastic scrap such as floor sweepings and partially polymerized material was uneconomical and cumbersome, the logical approach was to place open dumpsters on the premises of the producers. When full, these dumpsters could be hauled to a buyer's nearby facility where the scrap could be classified and packaged or, in a more sophisticated operation, reprocessed and pelletized. Once upgraded and properly packaged, the material would be more compact and could be sold profitably. These factors are critical when dealing in huge quantities at a very low markup.

The Texas Disaster

In 1975, Jack finally made good on his "threat" to retire. At the age of 53 he moved to Portugal, but not until I extorted a promise that he would come back

"to mind the store" whenever I needed to travel extensively. In return he would remain a full partner in the business, sharing the profits but not drawing any salary. That same year, 1975, dealing in polyolefin scrap from the Carlstadt location was becoming more and more difficult. Instead of buying directly from the producers, who no longer packaged their scrap material, we now had to buy from dealers, who turned out to be mostly unreliable. Selecting the best part of the scrap for favorite customers, they essentially shipped to us what no one else wanted.

As a result we lost a good portion of our business. While the loss of the polyolefin business was partially made up by expanding our activity in acrylics, which had been the backbone of our company since its inception, I concluded that if our company was to continue doing business in polyolefins the only way to do this was to relocate to Texas or Louisiana to be close to the source.

As matters stood, things did not bode well for the future. Every time I went abroad on a long business trip or took a few weeks vacation our business fell to pieces. With Jack retired in Portugal and Marek and Bill Mahoney gone, the only one left at the executive level was moody Jason. He had lost confidence that there was any future in the plastic scrap business and had become even more dissatisfied, disgruntled and moody than ever.

Obviously, to make up for lost ground, we needed a Houston-based operation, as Houston was rapidly replacing Leominster, Massachusetts, as the capital of the plastics industry in the United States. I felt that if I could find the right person, I would eventually relocate our headquarters there and use Carlstadt as a regional office.

In essence I had the pipe dream that our company could find someone in Houston who was thoroughly familiar with the business, and had the right connections with the producers there to buy and sell scrap material . Eventually the trading arm could be expanded to include a compounding operation, and ultimately we would create a product line of reprocessed compounds. In fact, this idea was not at all original since this was exactly what all our competitors were doing. I wish I had been offered such an incredible career opportunity before I left employment at my uncle's firm and started my own business; but on second thought, in view of what happened a decade later, maybe I was better off without it.

In my search for the ideal executive to head up such a project, someone introduced me to Robert Sullivan, formerly a vice president with Europa-Plast, a huge German company dealing in plastic scrap and chemicals with offices all over the world. Robert told me that he had been a victim of company politics. Even though he had been instrumental in increasing the plastic sales of Europa-Plast by 575 percent in a couple of years, they had dismissed him and put someone from the home office in his place. I was somewhat skeptical about the circumstances of his dismissal, but his references, given by people we both knew, were so good that I felt that this was an opportunity I could hardly pass up.

Robert came to New Jersey for an interview. To get to know him better, I invited him to have dinner and stay overnight in my home. My wife Mo-Li, working on her dissertation, was in Malaysia at the time. Nothing untoward happened during that visit, except that Robert, grooming himself for the day, stayed in the bathroom for an hour and a half. He also had the obnoxious habit of spraying his mouth every hour or so to prevent bad breath.

When Mo-Li returned from her trip a few days later and I told her about Robert Sullivan's visit, she said succinctly, "Forget about him. Anyone who spends an hour and a half in the bathroom getting ready for work will never be successful in your business."

But I had already made a decision. Robert was amenable to every suggestion. Our investment would be minimal, as he agreed to work out of his home and charge the company only for his out-of-pocket expenses. After more than two decades in business, I was still unable to see that a rather small, innocent-looking investment could rapidly blossom into a major financial debacle.

In addition to the bathroom episode there was another warning signal. Soon after he was hired, Robert called from Houston and asked for permission to purchase a fancy new car with company money. He claimed that it was an unprecedented bargain because there was no charge for the high-powered stereo system, power steering, cruise control, trim, and half a dozen of the totally unnecessary extras that dealers throw in to unload a car. I thought that the "bargain" was considerably more costly than a simple, stripped compact car, but kept my own counsel and authorized the purchase.

At first things looked promising. Robert was able to make some purchases thanks to his previous contacts, and we exported the materials. He also generated some small local sales, and during the first six months our Houston operation broke more or less even.

However, as time went on, some of Robert's hitherto unknown characteristics began to emerge. It soon became apparent that he was petrified of Susie, his wife, who was somewhat neurotic. From the start, she didn't like the "intrusion" of the business into her home, and often refused to give messages to her husband. At one point we invited Robert and Susie to visit Carlstadt at company expense, where they would meet Robert's fellow employees. I was anxious to get to know his wife, since spouses are a critical factor in any business relationship. We scheduled an office luncheon and I had gotten some theater tickets for the evening; at first Robert was very enthusiastic, but a day later he called back and said, "I talked to Susie about our visit to New Jersey. She pointed out that since we are all on profit sharing, the expense of this visit would tend to reduce the overall profit. What we need more than theater tickets," he continued, "is a new couch." Of course the scheduled V.I.P. visit to the home office was canceled, and the Sullivans ended up having neither a gala New York weekend nor a couch.

Things really started to get out of hand when Robert informed us that his wife didn't want our Houston office in her home any longer. He himself was of the opinion that he could not increase the business unless he had a presentable office in which he could "receive" customers and suppliers. In New Jersey we rarely had suppliers coming to our office, and most of our customers were in Asia and unlikely to visit very often.

I thought maybe things were different in Houston and reluctantly gave my approval. Robert then rented a two-room unit in one of the fancier office towers along a fashionable freeway. He furnished it rather luxuriously, justifying the expense by declaring that we needed to give an appearance of "substance" to the outside world. Next he needed a secretary to handle the office details. As it turned out, the secretary handled everything and he handled the secretary.

When the move had been accomplished, our overhead, if not our sales, quickly "improved" by a substantial percentage.

Of course there was some increased business, but it consisted mostly of sales to companies with terrible credit standing. Blanche, our bookkeeper, who had our unqualified trust, spent sleepless nights and predicted utter doom, but her stock phrase — "Claude, you have got to do something about this situation" — fell on deaf ears.

All of Robert's hopes revolved around a huge company which was setting up a plant in the Dallas area. They had developed a process for manufacturing fence posts, a big item in the Southwest, out of contaminated plastics, to be used as a substitute for scarce and expensive lumber.

Knowing Bamberger's reputation for discretion, this company approached Robert, giving him carte blanche to quietly line up the contracts before anyone else got wind of the project. "They don't want to publicize the fact that they could use millions of pounds of hitherto worthless materials, and have appointed our company as the sole agent," Robert told me exuberantly.

The project was to be kept shrouded in secrecy. The idea was that, while the company's huge new plant was under construction in the Dallas area, contracts should be quietly negotiated with the major producers of plastic materials. Obviously they would be more than happy to sell contaminated scrap for which they had no outlet and which was expensive to landfill.

In retrospect I should have had my head examined when I agreed to leave these delicate negotations up to the as-yet-unproven Robert Sullivan. But Houston, Texas, was far away and I had my hands full just keeping the teetering business in Carlstadt afloat.

Every week Robert told me how well things were going with this project, although there was no sign of any actual business. Robert said that, as the sole supplier of raw material, he had been invited to be a guest of honor at the grand opening of the plant. "But where is the business?" I asked. "When will they start buying?" "We have not yet come up with a satisfactory price," Robert replied,

"but I am working on it." The whole affair was starting to give me a sense of déjà vu, recalling Bill Mahoney's dealings with fat Marilyn.

Years later, the president of the fence-post company said to me, "We never could understand Robert. A jerk! We even told him where to buy the material we were looking for, but he never gave us an offer for a single pound. So we had no choice and finally just negotiated directly with the producers."

After sixteen months, the Houston branch still showed no profit. Worse still, despite repeated warnings from Blanche, Robert continued to ship materials to firms with no credit standing. When the uncollectable accounts receivable reached $120,000, it was time to call a halt. I flew to Houston one day, went to my fancy office, asked Robert to hand over the keys to the car and the office, and suggested that he seek employment elsewhere.

His secretary and Del May, my plant manager, who had flown down with me, helped to load the fancy office furniture into a U-Haul trailer I had rented the night before. Del hitched it to our cruise-control-equipped Chevrolet Capri and headed for Carlstadt. I flew home, relieved that our "Houston Branch" chapter was at an end.

Looking back, I think the Texas disaster may have been a blessing in disguise. Had we gone further and opened a plant for reprocessing low-end polyolefin scrap, as most of our competitors did at the time, we no doubt could have lost considerably more than $120,000.

Within a decade, at least 80 percent of the plants which had invested possibly millions of dollars in high-tech processing equipment went bankrupt, after a change in technology enabled producers to channel material directly to the manufacturers of lumber substitutes, bypassing the trading companies altogether.

With Misgivings, Bamberger Starts A Compounding Operation

In 1978, with the Texas disaster behind us, we had to consider once again what to do in Carlstadt to keep our operation profitable. Like my uncle Anton's business, my company had always maintained a very paternalistic attitude toward the employees. The fringe benefits included ample vacation time, medical insurance, a pension plan a profit-sharing plan, and a generous bonus. These consumed most of the company's earnings each year.

Jason was still the only one who was left to help to run the business, and as always, he had a lot of personal problems. Originally hired to be trained as the eventual president of our company, he had become increasingly disenchanted with the work, the working conditions, the salary and everything else connected with plastic scrap. Many people of the sixties generation habitually have a high opinion of their skills and feel that immediate gratification is essential. The idea of taking the time to prove themselves worthy of promotion is generally alien to them.

Since Jason had no faith in the scrap business he was unwilling to buy Jack's share and commit himself to a real partnership. Even a 25 percent profit-sharing arrangement, which he accepted, did not keep him happy very long. Finally, in order to appease Jason's never-ending dissatisfaction, and also in the hope of improving our domestic business in a sagging economy, I gave in to his suggestion that we start a compounding operation.

The idea of adding a compounding arm to our scrap business was not new; it had been under consideration every time there was a downturn in the economy. Remembering A. Bamberger's grandiose undertaking with the Banbury-extruder monster, I always shied away from the compounding idea. Furthermore, the machinery required to do this work was now very sophisticated. It was expensive to acquire and install, and we lacked the skilled personnel to operate such equipment.

For some time Jason had been doing business with Panamerican Thermoplastics Corporation, a manufacturer of plastic molding compounds. This company was in financial trouble. Alan Kirschner, who was in charge of the compounding operation at Panamerican, told Jason that he was planning to leave and start his own company.

Alan had access to some very good secondhand compounding equipment and was looking for partners to help him finance the venture. Jason thought he and I should participate. Here was an ideal chance for Bamberger to upgrade some of the more or less unsalable inventory into reprocessed molding compounds, with the work done by a company over which we would have some control, and which would yield some extra income if successful.

After we had obtained some legal advice and developed a complex stockholders' agreement, a new company Compounders International Corporation, saw the light of day. The enterprise started out with four equal partners, each having invested five thousand dollars to provide the capital needed to set up a compounding plant with a used extruder, grinder and blender. The home of the new company was a decrepit shack, in the Ironbound district, a run-down neighborhood in Newark, N.J.

Alan Kirschner, the technical man, came with a partner Chris, whose last name now escapes me, who claimed to be a whiz in polymer chemistry. Both of them were out of a job, and after contributing their life's savings, they needed to make money quickly.

The idea was that the technical partners would set up and run the Compounders International plant. This plant would convert scrap owned by Bamberger into reprocessed molding compounds, on a toll basis. The Bamberger partners would find customers for the reprocessed pellets.

All this sounded so harmless, logical and simple. For a minimal investment, Bamberger would be able to convert otherwise unsalable scrap into salable material. Jason and I would have a financial interest in making the

venture a success, with the ultimate goal of developing for Bamberger a regular line of reprocessed molding compounds. Just about all of our competitors had started compounding, to upgrade scrap materials which could not otherwise be utilized in the newly developed sophisticated molding and extrusion equipment becoming predominant in the industry. Ignoring the lesson of the Texas disaster — that one can never reap huge profits from a minimal investment — we saw the new proposal as provident at a time when our business needed a dynamic change to get out of the prevailing doldrums.

To give this fledgling company a good start and to avoid duplication of overhead expenses, we agreed that Claude Bamberger Molding Compounds would provide office space, telephone service, bookkeeping, and trucking facilities as needed. Compounders International was to pay for these services, thus reducing our always hard-to-meet overhead expenses. In blueprint this really looked like a winner.

But things never go as smoothly as anticipated. Instead of three months, it took more than six months to set up the plant. By that time there were no funds left to pay the technical partners, who needed money to live on. With no immediate, substantial income-producing work in sight, our new compounding venture was insolvent before even one pound of material was ever compounded. Having lost confidence, the partner who was a whiz in polymer technology sold his share to Jason and me on the basis that we would pay for it once the operation was turning a profit. But it looked as though the new company would be out of business before it really started. The only salvation would be additional capital to pay Alan Kirschner, on whose technical skills the entire operation depended. He insisted that unless he was paid enough to make ends meet, he would have to walk away and find another job. To buy time, Jason and I contributed another five thousand dollars each, thus acquiring more than 80 percent of the stock, with Alan Kirschner holding the remainder. This was the only way to save our investment.

The outlook for the new venture was dim. As a shot in the arm, Claude Bamberger Molding Compounds gave Compounders International just enough compounding work to meet operating expenses and pay Alan's salary. Then an unforeseen turn of events changed its course.

About a year earlier, Claude Bamberger Molding Compounds had purchased a hopper-car load of low density polyethelene pellets from an obscure scrap metal dealer in Midland, Texas. But when the hopper-car arrived, it was loaded with 135,000 pounds of dirty-gray pellets which bore no resemblance to the compound we thought we had purchased.

When we filed a claim with the supplier, he was furious. He told us that the producer had assured him that the material was a bargain, being a "special polyethylene slip concentrate." Unfamiliar with this business, the supplier had assumed that "slip concentrate" was just an ornamental phrase, and in selling us that material had described it simply as regular film-grade polyethylene. Actu-

ally, slip concentrate is used as an additive in the production of polyethylene film, with perhaps five pounds required for every hundred pounds of regular material. The average producer of polyethylene bags at the time usually purchased slip concentrate in batches of 500, 1,000 or 5,000 pounds, never in hopper-car quantities. We figured that even if we could find a market for slip concentrate, it would take us years to sell what we had purchased.

To be sure, the price of slip concentrate was normally about four times higher than the regular polyethylene we thought we had bought. In our business we get very unhappy when we are told that someone did us a favor by having shipped something more expensive without extra charge. Special materials, no matter what the bargain, often have special, limited applications. When making a deal, all we and our customers want is what we contracted for. "Don't do us any favors" is the standard reply when, as in this case, someone who doesn't know the business tells us we should be very grateful for having received something more valuable and better than specified.

But this was one of those crazy deals where a disaster turned into a gold mine. The supplier was willing to reduce the price of the "very expensive special material" just to settle the matter.

Jack, who before his retirement had agreed to come occasionally from Portugal to help out, just happened to be in and took on the project of finding a buyer for this slip concentrate, an item our company had never handled before. Always good at solving this type of problem, Jack soon found that there was some demand for this material. In fact, he was able to get a price four times higher than orginally anticipated, though the drawback was that the material could only be sold in increments of 500 to1,000 pounds per order. This increase in profit helped to offset the cost of keeping the material in our inventory for whatever time it would take to sell it. In fact, it turned out that by shipping us the wrong material the supplier was instrumental in adding slip concentrates to the line of materials we could offer to the industry.

Selling the original shipment took more than a year. During this period we received several reorders from satisfied customers, and eventually we were faced with the problem of how we would satisfy them after our current supply ran out. The first shipment had been a fluke, a one-time occurrence, and no further carloads of offgrade slip concentrate could be expected from that supplier or from anyone else.

Aware of the situation, Alan Kirschner, our technical partner in Compounders International, was able to figure out how to manufacture this slip concentrate. By the time Bamberger had run out of this irreplaceable material, Compounders International was in a position to produce it on their compounding equipment at a very attractive, competitive price. In short, they satisfied the demand of the few customers developed by Jack. In addition Jason now actively embarked on marketing this slip concentrate to the whole, huge polyethylene-film industry at prices lower than anyone else's.

To make this product on a continuous basis we had no choice but to purchase prime resin from the producers. Compounders International now needed hopper-car loads of prime resin. Since the company was financially weak and had no credit standing in the industry, Claude Bamberger Molding Compounds purchased the material, and then sold it almost at cost to Compounders International.

Though Jason and Eddy Damiano, a salesman he had hired to increase Bamberger sales, were full-time employees of Claude Bamberger Molding Compounds, with handsome salaries and a lucrative profit-sharing arrangement, they became more and more preoccupied with the problems of Compounders International, developing sales for slip concentrate.

Jason's heart and soul were clearly with the new company in which he was a partner. He had lost all interest in the plastic scrap business and possibly even hoped that I would give up the Claude Bamberger Company and it would fall into his lap by default. At least that is what my Italian friend Roberto Pietrocola suggested. Roberto, who owned two huge plastics factories in Italy and Ireland, was invaluable in giving me advice on how to handle my various business problems. We saw each other regularly, on ski trips to the Alps where we had ample time to discuss business problems and our love life while waiting on the lift lines.

I had long ago stopped regarding Jason as a potential successor, having learned that the more one favors a person, and the more one tries to accommodate a person's individual needs, the more arrogant, demanding, and impossible such a person gets. Gratitude is never anything one can expect, and the situation with Jason, difficult from the start, was not any different. Despite the agreement that all services performed for Compounders by Bamberger were to be billed and paid for, invariably Bamberger came out on the short end. There was continuous squabbling about how charges should be assessed, and very little attention was paid to the Bamberger enterprise. Everything was slanted toward the operation of Compounders, the rising star of the future. On my insistence Jason did agree to a cut in his Bamberger salary and profit-sharing; he made up the difference from the now burgeoning compounding operation.



Roberto Pietrocola

Compounders International operated totally with credit established by Bamberger. Although I owned over 40 percent of the shares, I was treated by my

partners as excess baggage and a major nuisance. Disgusted, disenchanted, and thoroughly fed up with my noncaring partners, I would have loved to get rid of my interest, but under the circumstances this was impossible without having an enormous financial exposure.

Compounders was doing relatively well, but it was undercapitalized and needed the credit standing of my company, Claude Bamberger Molding Compounds, to function. In 1978 Compounders owed Bamberger well over $120,000, a far cry from my original $10,000 investment. I was alarmed. I had more than one confrontation with Jason, who had invested only $12,500 even though he boasted that he was making a fortune by speculating in the commodity market. When I complained about my high risk and suggested that he invest some of *his* money in Compounders, he went too far when he told me brazenly, "If you have no faith in Compounders International, why don't you get out!"

I had to wait another year before taking him at his word. For the moment my financial exposure was too large to permit the change. Aside from that, I thought I needed what little help I could get from Jason and Ed Damiano, both of whom were still drawing a minimal salary from the parent firm and were therefore expected to carry on the business on days when I was not there.

While Jason and Damiano were busy expanding the Compounders operation, I was desperately trying to keep the Bamberger trading business going. I felt the future was in the international field, and to develop this end I had to do a lot of traveling between 1975 and 1979. As I could not trust Jason to mind the shop during my prolonged absence, I persuaded Jack to come out of the mothballs periodically, and look after things while I was absent.

By now, the reader must have concluded that our various enterprises survived only through sheer miracles. On the face of it, our practices may seem to exemplify bad management, and yet, given all the circumstances, we not only survived but did moderately well. In fact the various Bamberger corporations enjoyed an excellent reputation in the plastics industry throughout the world.

So what was the secret? Our company always believed in humanistic management, as opposed to hard-nosed, profit-conscious management, interested only in the bottom line or the growth of the enterprise. At all times we tried to be democratic in the management of our company, to be considerate and supportive of our employees not only while they were at work but in their personal lives as well.

For the most part our staff was in turn very supportive, though it was not always capable or efficient, since there were no guidelines, specific job descriptions, or precise goals. This lack often resulted in chaotic situations which took a lot of time to resolve, time which could have been spent getting more business.

Chapter Fifteen

New Blood, New Management, A New Ball Game

1979 - 1995

"The One Minute Manager"

For a decade or more prior to 1979, the American Management Institute, the first of many such organizations, operated on the principle that there was a market in teaching executives how to manage a corporation and especially how to train new managers. I would have been the perfect candidate for such a course, though the idea of taking it never occurred to me.

While by far the largest portion of any company's overhead is the payroll, most companies spend less than 1 percent of their budget to properly train their employees. More money is spent on advertising and on maintaining buildings and equipment, than on developing people. Yet a happy, efficient work force is a company's greatest asset.

Most employees do not have the entrepreneurial qualities needed to run a business, otherwise they would not be employees. People instinctively know their limitations and are happiest if management recognizes these and does not expect them to do what is beyond their capability. When people know what is expected of them by management and reach these goals, they feel good about themselves and try to do even better. By contrast a person who does not know what is expected will be constantly on the defensive and unable to do a good job.

It is alright for a management to be humanistic, but it must also set firm guidelines on all issues. Religious holidays are one example. If one group is allowed to take time off for its religious holidays, others will demand the same right. But one group may have three important religious holidays a year, while others may have many more. So a uniform policy is essential, with guidelines that are clear and apply to all, without exception.

Management must not only set goals and guidelines, but above all must set an example. The executives must themselves adhere to the policies that have been established. Employees need and want a leadership they can respect, admire, and emulate.

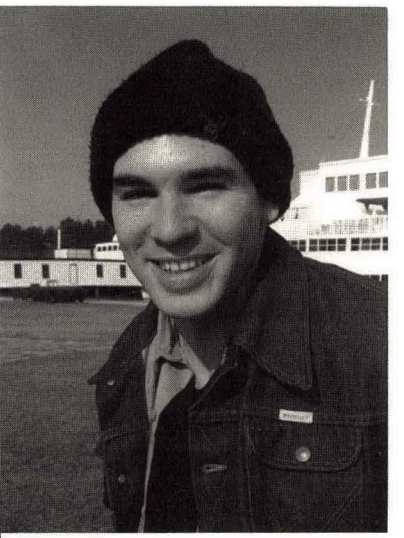
Mo-Li Takes A Test

By 1978 I concluded that though my company managed to cover its overhead and pay its employees a decent salary, we could have done a great deal better and spent fewer agonizing hours and sleepless nights. What was needed was an efficient management, neither too humanistic nor too autocratic. Had our employees known clearly what was expected of them, our profit margin throughout the years would have been considerably better.

I realized by then that I had fairly good entrepreneurial qualities but no skill in company management whatsoever. While Jack had been active, word had spread that if someone wanted something out of the ordinary they should never ask him but go to Claude. Claude would say "yes." The truth is that when people came to me with their specific requests I would have liked to say "no". The only problem was that I didn't know how to say this. What our organization needed,

and what I had been looking for after Jack retired, and could not find, was a responsible, skilled manager with entrepreneurial qualities, who would know where to draw the line and say "no."

While my business was a constant source of strain and worry, thanks to Mo-Li my personal life was pleasant and relatively worry free. My son Stephan, who I assumed might be my successor, was sowing his wild oats as a seaman in the merchant marine, working on a tanker on the Middle East circuit. He was ambivalent about his future career at the time, but ultimately decided against joining his dad in the scrap business. He went to medical school and became a physician.



Stephan and Claudette



Claudette married a classmate she met in Ireland while studying abroad during her junior year at Smith College. Thus the children were launched into adulthood and Mo-Li and I started to build a life for ourselves.

When Mo-Li was working on her doctoral dissertation in 1976, she accepted a teaching position in one of the larger universities in New Jersey. After the first couple of semesters she was disenchanted. Many of the students had no interest and took her courses only because they were required. Her salary was low relative to the work she was expected to do, and the faculty was full of petty rivalries and jealousies. Mo-Li soon decided that academic life did not really suit her temperament.

One day Arie Chaplin, a Romanian refugee and former classmate from the New School, gave her an application form for an experimental course for doctoral candidates called "Careers in Business" and subtitled "From Campus to Corporation." Arie told her, "I am not smart enough; I would never get it, but you'll have a good chance."

At the time, statistics indicated that by 1990 there would be sixty thousand persons with Ph.D.s in the humanities who could not find teaching jobs in their field. It was hoped that this course might help bridge the gap between academia and the business world, and provide alternative career opportunities for people with doctorates. The course, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, was funded by the New York State Education Department, some Ivy League universities and Fortune 500 corporations. The sponsoring companies would also set up job interviews for the participants, indicating the possibility of some lucrative job offers after completion of the course.

Administered by the New York University Graduate School of Business Administration, the course consisted of an intensive five-day-a-week seven- week M.B.A. program. It offered a $750 stipend for living expenses and free lodging on the New York University campus. Twelve hundred applications from all over the United States were received. About 120 potential participants were selected for special interviews, and from these, the final forty would be chosen.

The morning Mo-Li left for her interview she was terribly nervous. I assured her that everything would be all right. I said, "Relax. The world will not come to an end if you don't get in."

When she came home that evening, all done in, she said, "I am absolutely certain that I failed. It was terrible! I insulted the whole panel! How could I be so stupid?"

"What happened? What did you do?" I asked.

"They asked impossible questions," she exclaimed. "For instance, they said, 'Miss Siow, what specific position do you envision for yourself in business?' to which I replied, 'If I knew, I wouldn't be here.'"



One of forty finalists out of 1200 who applied

When she called her friend Arie to tell him this story, his reaction was quite different. He said to her, "You don't understand the American culture. It's not what you say, that counts, but how you say it. That is the important part. I am sure you made an impression. You'll get in." Two weeks later Mo-Li was notified that she had been accepted.

The intensive seven-week program included case studies, in which the students attempted to resolve hypothetical crisis situations as well as aptitude tests in management. Then there were lectures given by sales managers, product managers, and other high-level corporate personnel. This was followed by interviews given by representatives of the sponsoring corporations who hoped to find talent for positions open in their respective organizations.

At the end of the program Mo-Li, as promised, received a number of job offers from insurance companies and banks. The best one came from a bank which needed an assistant manager in its office in Nairobi, Kenya. "You must be prepared to leave within four weeks," the officer said. "The starting salary is thirty thousand dollars a year, with all expenses paid." Mo-Li having a job in Kenya, while I was struggling in Carlstadt, New Jersey, was not exactly the glue which would cement our marriage.

Trying to prevent Mo-Li from fleeing to Nairobi, I contacted my friend Norman Plotkin, then president of the Novamont Corporation, and asked him if he would have a position for Mo-Li. But it turned out that Novamont was closing its domestic operation and in fact Norman himself was looking for a job. During dinner, listening to my multiple managerial problems, he pointed at Mo-Li and said to me, "What's the matter with you? Your manager is sitting right here." When I protested that she knew nothing about plastics, he countered that a bright person like Mo-Li could pick up whatever was necessary in a matter of weeks. As for himself, he might consider a job with me if proper compensation was available.

Unable to promise Norman a salary commensurate with that of a corporation president, I discussed with Mo-Li, a more affordable candidate, the possibility of her joining our company. Forever cautious, she was not interested in my job offer, being fully aware of the day-to-day chaotic conditions of our operation.

To get over what seemed to be a looming impasse, she finally agreed very reluctantly to help me out for three months on a part-time basis while exploring other job opportunities closer to home.

After Mo-Li started working for the company, I soon realized that the successor I had been searching for everywhere to continue the Claude Bamberger business, had been living right under my own roof.

A New Type Of Employee Joins The Firm

When Mo-Li became a part-time employee at the beginning of 1979, the Claude P. Bamberger Corporation and its subsidiaries were practically without an executive work force. All we had left were Blanche Aronowitz, the head of the bookkeeping department, and Pearl Treuhaft, the executive sec-

retary and office manager. Each had been with the company for almost twenty years. Pearl was the one I selected to fill the breach. Hard-working, industrious and loyal, she was familiar both with customers and suppliers and literally managed the organization during some of my prolonged absences when Jack was not available for some reason or other.

Pearl had a wonderful "phone personality," and exuded confidence; all the people she came in contact with could rely on her to do what needed to be done. Unfortunately, as good as she was in the execution of orders, she lacked the entrepreneurial qualities needed to initiate business.

In fact, in 1979, after being in business for close to thirty years, there was no one left to actually make new contacts, travel or in any way assure the growth and continuity of the business.

Miraculously, we had somehow survived, still enjoying an excellent reputation. The only other men left in the office were the "tenants," Jason and his sidekick Ed Damiano, who drew a minimal salary from Bamberger, and perfunctorily maintained some contacts for the company. However, they made no effort to get more business. Both had lost all interest in the plastic scrap business, which in their opinion had no future. Instead they concentrated on expanding the sale of additives produced by Compounders International, the company in which they had a financial stake.

By then, Compounders International, with its business expanding, had outgrown the original Newark location. Jason and Ed were searching for larger quarters, yet another project which took a lot of their time. I encouraged the effort, as I could not wait to be rid of them and their company. Their presence in our office fostered a tense and unpleasant atmosphere. In addition to constantly arguing about the charges our company assessed Compounders International for trucking, bookkeeping, and rent, they were downright arrogant and uncivil to everyone. They stalked about the place as if they were the landlords and we were the undesirable tenant.

I also found out that they planned to hire away some of our staff as soon as they had found a new location. Once, when we questioned double-time charges for work on a Sunday, we discovered that our truckman had been asked to move Ed, who was in the throes of a divorce, from one house to another during a weekend.

Clearly, like others who had worked for me over the years, Jason had turned out not to be successor material. There was still no one to take over the business or at least share in the management responsibilities.

When Mo-Li came on the scene as a part-time employee, I had no confidence that things would be better. A very young Asian woman with no business experience would be, I expected, just another failure. Her sense of direction was so bad that each day she got lost on her way to work. But having really no choice,

I thought it worth a try. As I didn't want to be accused of nepotism, I offered her a very low salary, with the promise of an increase at the end of the three-month trial period.

Typically there was no advance planning, no interview, no job description. On her first day in the office I told her confidently, "I will train you from the ground up. What we need right now is someone to answer the telephone. Could you do that?"

Mo-Li was incensed! The shift from college professor to a telephone operator in a scrap company definitely sounded like a demotion. She told me in no uncertain terms that while she was willing to help me three days a week to run the scrap business, she would do so only in a meaningful capacity.

Of course she was right. Doing clerical work would have been a waste of her talents, especially in view of my dire need for someone with entrepreneurial ability. Hence, one Sunday morning at breakfast I took two hours to teach Mo-Li the "plastics business." The gist of this lesson was that we had a market for certain materials but did not know where to find them, and we had materials on hand for which we had no market.

Mo-Li took notes and asked numerous questions on how one would go about finding the materials we needed. Then she asked what applications our unsalable inventory could be used in. Of course I knew the answers to these questions, and what needed to be done. My main problem was that I had no time to do it. I was busy "managing" the business. After about two hours, Mo-Li reviewed her notes and said, "I am not going to the office tomorrow, I want to go to the library first." I was appalled! I wondered what my uncle, bless him, would have said if I had told him one day back in 1943 that I was going to spend my day in the library instead of at the office. But Mo-Li belonged to a new generation, with a mind of its own. So I did not object.

To make a long story short, Mo-Li the academician tackled business problems totally differently than we had in the past. Within a few weeks she had located plants which had the materials we were looking for, and had made the necessary contacts by phone and letter. She then informed me that she had lined up appointments in Virginia, Georgia, and the Carolinas to visit the people whom she had contacted and who had actually asked her to come and look at the materials she was interested in purchasing.

On these initial trips I went with her , primarily to teach her how to inspect scrap material, though I let her do the talking. In the late seventies women in business were rare, and Asian women were unknown. Business people, accustomed to seeing salesmen in Brooks Brothers suits, were invariably both impressed and charmed by Mo-Li. It didn't take long for her to start actually concluding deals. Within six months she had not only sold the goods she had located to our establised customers, but had found new accounts as well.

While I was constantly kept busy advising and helping my various employees, accommodating their foibles and appeasing their discontent, trying at the same time to please whatever customers and suppliers we had, Mo-Li quietly managed to develop quite a nice amount of business on her own. I soon realized that academia had certainly lost at least one Ph.D. to the world of commerce.

In the evenings at home, she carefully created charts which showed that 80 percent of our time was spent on materials on which we barely broke even. The profitability of our company rested just on our efforts in the remaining 20 percent of the time. Looking at the overall operation she concluded that our company was high in inefficiency and low in accomplishments.

"That Ed Damiano," she said one day, "he spends all day looking at the ceiling. What does he see there? Plastic?" Then, after a pause: "Did you ever keep track of how much business this guy brings in for Compounders International? Remember, you are still a substantial partner!"

"Of course not," I replied. "We only look at the bottom line at the end of the month, and if we cover our overhead we are satisfied," I said defensively.

Referring to the Bamberger operations she said, "You don't know how much those on your staff contribute to the profitability of your companies?" Then she added, "It looks to me as if you create all the profit just to support these people. You ought to find a way to keep track of the productivity of each employee and how much they take of your time."

Shortly thereafter, with the help of record sheets designed by Blanche, we found out just how much our staff actually produced each month. The results were amazing! It turned out that none of them were contributing to the profitability of our company; all of the profits came from deals originated by either myself or Mo-Li. Once a deal was initiated, it was handed over to others, who were expected to monitor and execute the instructions.

Unfortunately, I had to monitor and supervise the supervisors, often spending valuable time arguing with employees to convince them that something could be done more cheaply or efficiently.

The Demise Of Compounders International

Meanwhile there was no love lost between my "tenants" — Compounders International — and myself. My plan was to get them out of the office as quickly as possible— as a first step toward a wider disengagement. To minimize my large credit exposure, I told Jason that the company must work toward getting its own credit line, and arranged with our bank to provide Compounders International with a certain amount of credit under a limited guarantee from my corporation.

When toward the end of 1979 Jason and his partner finally found a suitable new office and plant location, I encouraged them, as a partner, to go ahead and sign a long-term lease.

Their business had steadily increased, and Jason was confident that the company would continue to thrive. A couple of months later, after the move to the new location had been accomplished, I sent a formal notice through my attorney stating that under our stockholders' agreement I was offering them my shares at 20 percent over their current net worth.

Compounders had plenty of orders and was doing well at the time. The last statement showed a net worth substantially higher than the twenty-thousand dollar original investment made by the partners. Greed being in the nature of all human beings, Jason thought he had a fantastic deal on his hands. As Alan, broke as usual, was unable to contribute anything, Jason decided to buy my shares himself, thus acquiring control of the corporation. A proper agreement for the sale of my shares, whose current book value was now a hundred thousand dollars, plus 20 percent, was signed between the partners and myself. Jason would pay me for my shares in thirty-six monthly installments. The notes were personally guaranteed by him and further secured by liens on all of Compounders' machinery, inventory, and accounts receivable.

On the day the papers were signed, my wife Mo-Li, who had loyally shared my sufferings with these unsavory partners, remarked drily, "I hope they don't go bankrupt before these notes are paid."

Three and a half years later, precisely three months after I received payment of the last note, we heard that Compounders International went out of business. Industry gossip had it that they were being sued by the family of an employee of a polyethylene-film manufacturer, who had died during an explosion. Simultaneously a nationally known cereal manufacturer sued the producer of the film, and Compounders International, for huge damages after millions of boxes of cereal had to be recalled from all over United States because a foul odor emanated from the film in which the cereal was wrapped. I suspect that the lawsuits may just have been an excuse to call it quits. Probably their main reason to close shop was disunity between the principals of the company. Now that our company had ceased to be Jason's "whipping boy," the forever discontented Jason had no doubt endless arguments with his partners. Be that as it may, Compounders International ceased to exist shortly after all my notes were paid in full.

It was a bittersweet satisfaction that, of all the partners, I was probably the only one who made some money on this venture. Considering the headaches and sleepless nights it had given me, I concluded that this was the hardest money I had ever earned.

The only person on my staff who worked altogether independently was Mo-Li. Quietly developing new contacts, purchasing and selling new types of materials, she soon brought about a marked improvement in our bottom line. After

three months she could no longer handle the business she had created on a part-time basis, and we agreed that she should quit her teaching position. Blanche, our bookkeeper, who had been put in charge of monitoring the productivity of the employees, came to me about that time and said, "You know, you ought to double Mo-Li's salary. Next to you, she seems to be the only one able to produce new business and create additional profits."

Indeed, Mo-Li had started to to develop relationships which in years to come became the backbone of our business. She carefully cultivated a group of knowledgeable customers in various overseas countries — customers like Mr. Kim in Korea, Mr. Chang in Taiwan, Mr. Soong and Mr. Lam in Hong Kong, and many others, all with interesting personalities on whose loyalty and reliability she eventually counted. Today,some seventeen years later, these people and their companies are still actively doing business with us.

In a larger corporation, the sale of scrap and offgrade material is normally handled by a purchasing agent, a shipping clerk, or some other employee on the bottom rung of the corporate hierarchy. Mo-Li from the very start always tried to make contact with top management. Normally executives at this level have little interest in what happens to scrap and are not inclined to talk about it -let alone to get involved in luncheon meetings on the subject. But Mo-Li was able to overcome this reluctance.

A case in point is the relationship she developed with Robert Bench, director of the Styropor Division of the BASF Corporation.

One day, while Ron Dugger, a very nice guy with whom Mo-Li was working, was on vacation, Mr. Bench happened to pick up the phone when she called. As a result of this phone conversation, Mo-Li managed to wangle a luncheon appointment out of him. During this meeting they explored hitherto untapped sources of scrap, notably materials which the plant landfilled and had never sold.

Mr. Bench described his first meeting with Mo-Li in a letter he wrote to us in December 1994, after he retired.

> "I first met Moli in the early 1980's. She had called to buy off-specification material and asked if we could meet to explore any areas of mutual benefit.
>
> We agreed on a time and date but at the last minute I had to cancel the meeting. I did this twice more and finally said: 'Moli, I am not trying to avoid you, let's try one more time.' Moli was very gracious about the whole thing and we finally met for lunch. It didn't take long for me to realize that Moli was a very intelligent young woman. Normally I don't like to do business with women

who are smarter than I am, but Moli never tried to impress me with her intelligence. She would ask question after question about the Plastic Industry and about specific materials. I suspect she knew most of the answers before she asked the question.

After business discussions I always enjoyed Moli's stories about how her family came to live in Malaysia and her early years attending Catholic school.

Moli talked about India. She liked the country and the people but had some difficulty in her business dealings. It was probably because Indian business men were the only ones where she finally met her match.

Although she may not admit it, Moli is pretty chauvinistic. I visited her office and factory on one occasion and aside from her husband and a couple of men in the factory there were only women, to the extent that I felt a little uncomfortable. Chauvinistic or not, she ran one of the most efficient companies with which I have done business.

Moli likes mushrooms. We met one day and Moli had a mushroom the size of a grapefruit. While driving she had spotted it growing near the road. Not being too fond of mushrooms in any form I declined her offer to give it to me. This led to a discussion of various foods eaten in Malaysia. Sure enough the next time we met she gave me a can of 'No 3-Snake Soup'.

Unlike many Asians, Moli is not inscrutable — at least I don't think so. She is one of the most open and refreshing people I know.

Although I knew Moli for about five years before my retirement and she and Claude would meet my wife Marjory socially, she always addressed me as 'Mr. Bench'.

Maybe she is inscrutable after all!"

Pearl — The Quintessential Secretary

Next to myself, Pearl and Blanche were then the highest-paid people in the company. Blanche was doing the work of an accountant, pulling the activities of our multiple small corporations together in a consolidated balance sheet, a gargantuan job in those computerless days. Pearl's salary was higher than was justifiable even for an executive secretary loyal to the company for many years. This created a dilemma which is common to many businesses, small and large.



A Pearl indeed.

After being with the company for nearly two decades, during which she received annual salary increases and ever greater fringe benefits, Pearl had simply become overpriced for the work she was doing. While Mo-Li was busy enlarging our export business, we needed someone to replace Jason and Ed to take care of our domestic dealings. The only way to justify Pearl's salary was to switch her from secretarial work to the entrepreneurial area.

Ignoring the lesson I should have learned from Juan Rodrigues, truckdriver turned salesman, I asked her to engage in trading and the result was disaster. Once again I had made the mistake of promoting a person to a position for which she was not suited and in which she had no training. As a result I lost a good secretary and gained an unhappy employee who no longer liked her job. Pearl would have been happiest to continue her work as a secretary. By promoting her I did her an injustice which ultimately cost her a job and us the loss of a very good person.

Unable to emulate Mo-Li, whose rapid success was evident to everyone, Pearl was in a constant state of agitation. Though an excellent secretary, she was unable to initiate and conclude business transactions, even though she was well known to the people with whom we worked. After many agonizing weeks, we had no choice but to arrange for Pearl a prolonged leave of absence with pay.

One evening, we had dinner with a businessman dealing in used plastics machinery. The man told us that he had recently lost his invaluable secretary. "I wish I had a Pearl like you," he remarked enviously, then added wistfully, "Of course one can never find such people; they are all working."

Seizing the opportunity, I said, "Teddy, do you believe in miracles?"

Teddy looked puzzled. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Well, you know — those puppet shows, where the good fairy waves a magic wand and will grant you one wish?" Teddy still looked perplexed. "Well, just look at me as such a fairy. You clap your hands three times - thunder and lightning - and magically Pearl is yours." I then told him our problem, and within the week Pearl had reluctantly agreed to temporarily "help him out."

Pearl worked for him for a number of years as an executive secretary, and our friend was overjoyed and grateful to have found such a capable, dedicated person. We were truly happy for Pearl, as once again she had a niche in which she could function, be useful, and most important of all, be appreciated.

We Specialize In International Trade

By the early eighties Mo-Li had carefully and methodically studied the activity of our companies and concluded that we should stop dealing indiscriminately in all types of plastic scrap. By then hundreds of small dealers had jumped on the plastic-scrap bandwagon. Every time an employee of a plastic scrap dealer left or was fired, he started his own trading company, dealing in what had become known as "commodity" plastics, the polyolefins, styrenics and PVC compounds. Dealing in these materials meant low profit margins and high risks.

Most of the materials Mo-Li chose to handle were not well known. They were high-priced engineering resins, and their producers were very reluctant to sell their offgrade and scrap remnants, for fear that they might end up in their own market, giving their prime product a bad name.

Just at about that time, EPA dumping regulations became more stringent, and major producers were urged to reduce their landfill operation to an absolute minimum. Knowing this, Mo-Li and I now set out to persuade the producers to let us export these materials. Their immediate reaction was negative. But gradually Mo-Li gained their confidence in our reliability.

Once it became evident that some of them might indeed sell us their high-priced specialty products, Mo-Li and I made a few exploratory trips to foreign countries to find local trading firms which knew this business and could understand that the success of this marketing operation required mutual trust, accurate market information, and above all finding applications for these materials in areas other than those already covered by the producer's agent. We stressed time and again that selling these offgrade compounds for prime applications would have immediate repercussions, resulting in the loss not only of our reputation but of our supply as well.

We were successful in finding such firms, and as the market in each country was small, we decided, without formal agreements, that for a given product we would work with only one dealer in each country. Invariably, once we intro-

In the swing



duced a product into a market, we would get numerous inquiries from potential buyers. Instead of negotiating with them, we would simply refer them to the firm we had selected to work with in that area.

One of these difficult materials was thermoplastic rubber, then relatively new. Among "commodity" plastics one generic type is compatible with the next, but thermoplastic rubbers in different formulations are not compatible with one another, and are used for unrelated applications. Sometimes, in storing offgrade materials, producers would place two incompatible formulations in the same box, creating an almost unusable mixture which usually ended up as landfill.

Everywhere Mo-Li went, she quickly made friends who went to any length to teach and help her. One of those was Jim Sattler, sales manager for the Firestone Synthetic Rubber and Latex Company in Akron, Ohio. He suggested that Moli take a correspondence course in rubber technology. She took the course and graduated within six months.

Some years later Jim Sattler wrote me the following letter, in which he had this to say about his dealings with Mo-Li:

> "As far as we were concerned, Moli set standards in the offgrade business when it comes to integrity, service to customers and suppliers, and her ability to communicate her customer's needs, eliminating misunderstandings and errors.
>
> Early on, Moli told me she never did business with anyone she didn't like. While there are some people in our company who may try her patience, she thankfully continues to come to our rescue and our relationship remains as strong as ever.
>
> I also like to think we contributed a bit to her 'Americanization' with side trips to McDonald's, Burger King and Dairy Queen on her visits to our plant. I hope she will not hold it against us, but I don't think most of the exposure has taken root."

Another Firestone executive, Dan Salopek, Division Manager of Marketing, also became a good friend and later wrote as follows:

> "I vividly remember my first contact [with Mo-Li] in early 1982. My telephone rang and this voice on the other end started asking about 'Stereon.' Many questions were asked about types, quantities, price etc. Little did I know that I would be immortalized in her little 'Black Book' of business contacts. I was to find out later that I was classified as 'different,' but not a 'jerk.' This is good, because 'jerk' is a term that Moli uses for people she doesn't particularly care for or respect.
>
> The Bamberger organization is unlike any other company in the scrap business. Words that best describe the organization are honesty, integrity and trust, just to mention a few. Moli practices all of these to the maximum.
>
> However, I found out early in the relationship that the key element in dealing with Moli is that she has to 'like' you personally. She has a problem dealing with people she doesn't like. The thing I respect most about her is the fact that she does what she agrees to do and doesn't deviate from an agreement. If she has a problem, she comes and talks about it and doesn't just go on her merry way to do what is best for her side.
>
> On the light side, the only problem I have with Moli is the fact that she has this weird phenomenon that *all* women are better than *all* men. We have had many debates on this subject and neither one of us has given in to the other. Describing her as 'headstrong' is probably a gross understatement. On numerous occasions I have had to remind her that she is not *always right!*
>
> In closing I can only summarize saying that I enjoy the relationship and the challenge immensely. She has made doing business 'fun.'"

Invariably Mo-Li made an impression when talking to potential suppliers of new materials. We have a saying in the scrap business that for every pound of material there are ten scrap dealer who want to buy it. The trick is to convince

the person in charge of sales that you are better than the next guy. This is not necessarily a question of price. When the chips are down, just about anyone in this business can meet the price of his competitors. What a seller cannot so readily determine is the integrity, honesty, and trustworthiness of a potential buyer. Any buyer will try to say what the seller wants to hear, but there is no guarantee that after the material is shipped the buyer will do what was promised, nor is there a legal way to enforce a promise. Once a sale has been completed, the seller has no control over the ultimate disposition of the material.

In 1979 Mo-Li developed an export market for the polypropylene film used for wrapping candy, cigarettes, and food products. This is produced in large standard-size rolls, which the manufacturers then slit into the widths required by their customers. The remnants, to be sold as scrap, include leftover rolls, varying in width from 1 to 48 inches, along with full-size substandard rolls.

Realizing that the narrow leftover rolls could be utilized in packaging small items, Mo-Li tried to convince the large producers that she could export this film at a much higher price than was paid for polypropylene scrap. At first she was unsuccessful in getting this material because the producers were fearful that it would end up in their prime market. Then Mo-Li convinced one producer that this was already the case. She pointed out that some unreliable scrap dealers were separating the rolls from the other scrap and selling them as film. Persisting, she finally managed to secure a regular supply of this material, which she exported to a third world market.

At the Norprop-Quantum Corporation the man in charge of selling scrap was Mr. H. H. Hormozi. In June of 1994, after he had retired, he wrote us the following letter:

> "The first contact I had with Mo-Li was a phone call about twelve years ago. She introduced herself and asked for scrap. We did not have enough scrap to add another customer to an already long list. I told Mo-Li this fact and yet she still insisted that she would like to try at least one type of the many off-grade films we had.
>
> A couple of days later I had dinner with my boss and somehow Mo-Li's name came up. He told me that Mo-Li thought that I did not like to deal with women!!! My boss, who knew I was a Baha'i and believed in equality of men and women, was surprised.
>
> The next time Mo-Li called and demanded some off cuts of film. In the process she gave me a brief, interesting story about her husband's family

> [the Bambergers] and how they were pioneers in scrap and recycling. I sold her a load. Since then we have become good friends. Every time I talk to her I learn something new, what a rich, dynamic personality.
>
> Mo-li has been one of the most enjoyable people in the world with whom to do business. Her honesty, integrity, high standards will always be remembered by those fortunate enough to work with her. Mo-Li has been said to be decent, discreet, diplomatic and demanding. They forgot to add that she is a sincere and knowledgeable lady, an inspiration for herself and those around her."

Over the years, these suppliers and customers were not only loyal and excellent to work with, but became good friends as well.

Mo-Li Scores A Scoop

One of the milestones in our forty-five years in business was the "ethyl cellulose deal," described in a previous chapter. Despite all our problems we made a decent living during the following decades, but until the late eighties nothing like this happened again. Then, thanks to the connections Mo-Li was able to build in Asia, two particular incidents became the highlights of our business in the late 80's and early 90's.

One of those was a big fire in the plant of the American Cyanamid Company in Wallingford, Connecticut, where they produced a highly inflammable acrylic copolymer material, the scrap of which was landfilled for lack of an outlet. The main problem was how to store and package the scrap, which came in the form of extremely hot lumps weighing 500 to 1,000 pounds each. At 500 Celsius when they came out of the extruder, the lumps could not be packaged, and they took days to cool.

On my suggestion the plant built a sheet-metal chute in the second-story wall of the building where the extrusion took place. The lumps could be pushed through this opening into a water-filled, dumpster on the ground level below. After a few days, the water could be drained off and the dumpster could be shipped to a purchaser's plant, making it a saleable product.

Talking to one of her business friends in Taiwan, Mo-Li found out that this material was compatible with ABS plastic — an expensive material used in the fabrication of break-resistant toys.

Just then the world was going through one of those periodic crazes,this time for a puzzle called Rubik's Cube, which retailed for about eight dollars and was made in Taiwan from ABS material. Mo-Li's friend succeeded in making this

product from the unwieldy acrylic copolymer lumps, and in one year we sold him several hundred thousand pounds. As a result the retail price of a Rubik's Cube toppled to a couple of dollars or less.

Another milestone was the development of flexible, inexpensive "rubber" sunglasses, manufactured from an offgrade polyester-elastomer which the producer had stockpiled for a number of years, unable to find a proper market . Once this item found acceptance we were able to purchase almost five million pounds in a period of two years. As the glasses weighed only a few ounces, this was enough material for more than a billion sunglasses which appeared on the United States and European markets. At first sportswear designers included these bizarre looking glasses in their line. The black frames with bright, iridescent colored temples, had a "campy" look, and they brought anywhere from $15.00 to $35.00 a pair. In the end, when they had run through the fashion gamut, they were offered by street and boardwalk vendors at "two pairs for five dollars."

Of course this unprecendented success did not come overnight, and it did not result from luck or chance; the development of this market required more than a year of hard work. In fact, the whole weary process started back in 1987.

The lifeline of the scrap business is a regular supply of material, the larger the quantity the better. Anyone can sell well-known, reusable materials; then it is only a question of price, and competition is keen. Offgrade or scrap of newly developed plastic compounds or sophisticated engineering materials are difficult to sell because the condition of the sale is always that the material should not be used for the seller's prime applications. Therefore a buyer either has to create a new product which does not conflict with the producer's prime applications or he simply violates the agreement and sells the compound to the producer's prime customers at a much lower price. Once the producer becomes aware of this, all sales of the scrap or offgrade material come to a halt. A producer would rather landfill this material than risk it ruining his prime market.

The first meeting Mo-Li had with the producer of the polyester-elastomer compound was during the American Chemical Society Rubber Division Show in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1987. It brought no immediate result, because just a few months before, a truckload of offgrade compound that the company had sold to an "exporter" had ended up with one of its prime accounts in United States. The fact surfaced when the domestic buyer encountered endless problems and called the producer's technical staff for assistance.

For those in the plastic-scrap field, nothing can be worse than such an incident. Once a producer gets a call from a customer who buys the prime product, complaining that *his* product purchased from a secondary source does not work, or another prime customer calls and complains that offgrade material is on the market and sold below the producer's price, no one in the marketing department of a big corporation will even consider further sales of offgrade material to anyone until the source of this violation is traced.

After the Cleveland meeting, Mo-Li persisted. Within a year she convinced her contact, a Mr. Kelly, that she might be able to sell large quantities of this product in a non-conflicting market in Asia. Mr. Kelly condescended to release some samples which we submitted to our customer in Asia. These samples consisted of various grades of this product all mixed together; some had a melting point of 150 degrees Celsius while for others it was as high as 220 degrees. Utilizing such a mixture was virtually impossible. At the request of our customer, Mo-Li did contact a chemist in the technical department of the supplier, who got very annoyed after her third call and told her bluntly "Forget about it — don't waste my time or yours. There is no way anyone can use this product."

For months our customer tried every conceivable additive and combination to create a usable compound out of this material. In the United States Mo-Li hired a number of rubber consultants and laboratories all of whom told her she had embarked on a Don Quixote project — fighting windmills — because it was impossible to link materials with such a wide range of melting points.

As luck would have it, after trying over two thousand compounding recipes, our Taiwanese customer found the proper combination of additives which could link this material together. He was so excited about this success that he called us at 3 AM one day in April 1989 to tell us the good news.

Now that we had succeeded in making a usable material came the problem of what to do with the new compound. Our customer, who supplied the eyeglass industry with offgrade cellulose acetate asked one of his customers to try it in an eyeglass mold. Lo and behold — after numerous trials some exceedingly flexible eyeglass frames emerged. A person could actually sit on them without risk of their breaking.

Mo-Li told the prime producer, in the United States, that we had an item which might consume the company's entire inventory of polyester-elastomer scrap. The producer insisted on knowing what the item was, before approving shipments to us. Under the seal of confidentiality Mo-Li wrote a letter stating that we had developed a "cheap, inexpensive flexible rubber sunglass frame."

Break-resistant, inexpensive, and attractive - with black frames and brightly colored often luminescent temples - sunglasses made of the new compound were an immediate hit all over the Western Hemisphere. Buyers for K-mart, Sears, and sporting-apparel chains placed huge orders for the 1990 season.

At year's end we were gratified to receive the following letter from D.J. Kelly, sales manager of the polyester-elastomer division:

> Dear Claude,
>
> A year's end is the appropriate time to think of past occurrences and friendships. In that spirit, I recall first meeting you and Moli and becoming

acquainted with the commercial role in the plastics industry played by Claude Bamberger International at the 1987 American Chemical Society Rubber Division meeting, in Cleveland. At the time I was deeply involved in the product management of the thermoplastic polyester elastomer material produced by our company.

In the months following that first meeting, Moli worked at understanding my view of the value of the transition compound during the production of prime material. She then assisted a potential customer in understanding the nature of this product so that he could convert it into a useful item. Her feedback from the customer also helped us better to tailor the production of the by-product. The end result of this work was a world full of people wearing "campy" colorful, rubber framed sunglasses, and a very significant sale of second quality polyester elastomer to the enhancement of everyone's bottom line.

While this commercial arch from New Jersey to Europe had a number of important supporters, Moli was definitely the *Keystone, she made it happen!*

Of equal value to me, was the enjoyment for working with Moli due to her constant interest and enthusiasm for both the project at hand and much else in the world around her. You are indeed blessed to have such an effective business associate, not to mention your fortune in the choice of a life partner.

Best wishes for the New Year.

Though everything was done under the shroud of secrecy, and the original product lost its identity in the compounding plant of our customer in Taiwan, we had no doubt that sooner or later our supplier's agent in Taiwan would realize that very large quantities of his company's polyester-elastomer scrap were arriving in his territory.

While the agent had previously been unsuccessful in attempts to find buyers for the scrap in Taiwan, and had even written a letter to the home office stating that the product was unsalable in his market, he now claimed that our

Taiwanese customer was shipping the product to his customers as prime material. He declined to supply either the names of such buyers or any other proof to back up his statement.

In the summer of 1990 "our" sunglasses were everywhere. Mo-Li never tired of looking for them. "Look at that guy," she would exclaim, pointing at a cyclist clothed in a tight-fitting multicolored outfit "he is wearing our glasses." They were sold in fancy specialty boutiques in the Hamptons for thirty-five dollars a pair, and by street vendors in Soho at "two for five dollars." It was amazing!

One day I was horrified to see the prime producer's trademark label on a pair of the glasses at an outdoor stand in Chinatown. I bought a few, and Mo-Li immediately called our customer to find out how that could have happened. We were told that the compound produced from our material was sold only under our customer's own trade name, and he could not understand how the label got on the glasses. However, he promised to investigate. It didn't take long to find out that the producer's own agent in Taiwan, jealous of our success, had gone around to the manufacturers of the sunglasses and "sold" them the label, saying it would make their product more attractive. Then he promptly complained to the head office in the United States about the illegal use of the producer's trademark on items made from offgrade material. Moreover, the agent claimed that his company had originally developed the eyeglass application from prime material and that Bamberger had ruined his market by using low priced, inferior scrap.



Everywhere you looked!

As a result we were immediately cut off from all shipments in the middle of our contract, for having violated our agreement. It took three months and an appeal to the upper management of the producer before investigation proved the agent's claims were false, and our good reputation was restored.

Meanwhile, our Taiwanese customer was in a panic, fearing lawsuits and all kinds of repercussions for not being able to fill existing commitments. His technical staff hurriedly developed a substitute compound made from much cheaper virgin material; this was available in unlimited quantities in contrast to the higher-priced offgrade, the supply of which was limited. By the time our problem with

the supplier had been straightened out, our customer was no longer interested in buying this product. In short, we had lost the market, and we informed the producer that we had no further interest in his scrap.

In the interim period, the Taiwanese agent of the producer had purchased a number of truckloads of the offgrade material for his own account, and found to his dismay that no one in the eyeglass industry wanted it. Indeed, because he didn't have the compounding recipe developed by our people, the material would not work in any application. Unable to sell it, the agent too lost interest, and by the end of 1993 a large inventory of offgrade material had once again accumulated in the producer's warehouse.

It gave us some satisfaction when, a little later, a changed management asked us to make an effort to find a new application for their scrap. Only after we received written assurance that there would never be a repetition of what they had done to us three years before did we agree to work on the problem.

While "our" sunglasses, now produced by any number of manufacturers, are still obtainable everywhere, the rage has long subsided. Though we did not receive any credit for them, we were very happy during a recent visit to Paris to see in a display of late-twentieth-century fashion products a brilliant, colorful pair of rubber sunglasses — part of the permanent collection in the museum of the Centre Pompidou.

Unfortunately, crises like the one just described are not uncommon in our relationships with the producers of synthetic rubber and plastic materials. Some years ago, Pecten Chemical, a division of Shell Chemical Company, bluntly told Mo-Li that they would no longer sell us any of their Kraton offgrade materials, as they had made an arrangement with another broker to market all their offgrade material. Understandably Mo-Li was very upset, and insisted on a face-to-face meeting with management, she promptly flew to Houston, Texas.

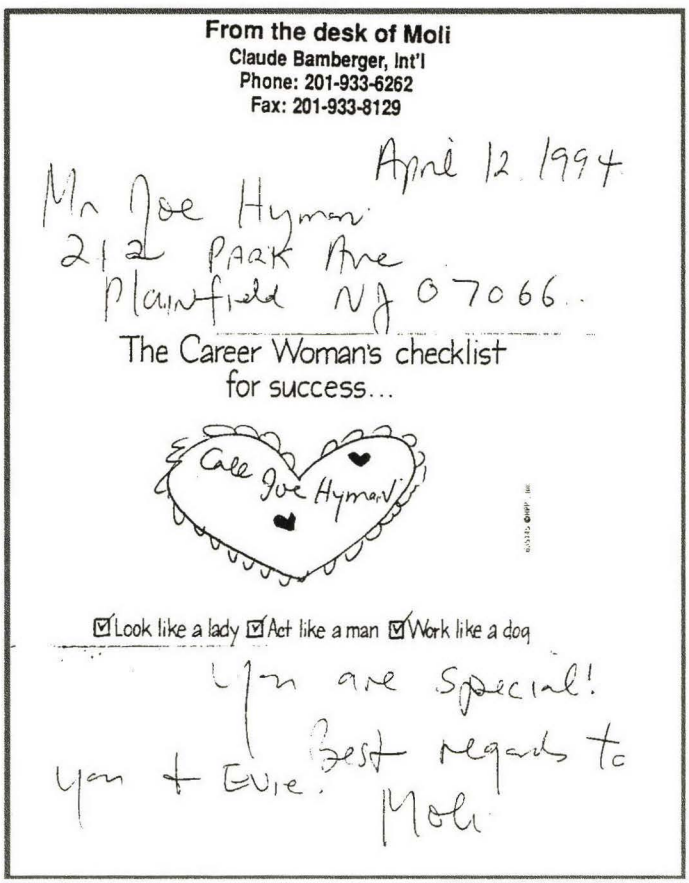
Mr. John.R. Curtis, then marketing manager for Pecten Chemicals, the export arm of Shell Chemical, wrote us years later as follows:

> "Do I remember Moli? How can I forget!
>
> In the Spring of 1980 I was handling the sales of Shell Chemical prime polymers for the international market. Suddenly I was handed the additional challenge of moving the off-grade and scrap materials in the same area. When I assumed this responsibility, there were 25-30 brokers/traders handling these products for Shell and the market was in shambles. In an attempt to bring some degree of order into the situation, it was decided to drastically reduce the paths of distribution. In

fact, the goal was to eventually have the off-grade material handled by only one reseller. Claude Bamberger Corp. was not the 'chosen' one.

When Moli received this information from the Sales Manager, she was infuriated and *demanded* an immediate audience with me so she could explain the 'errors' of the rationale of (1) using only one reseller, and (2) not selecting Claude Bamberger Corporation. I agreed to see Moli and selected 11.00 AM, thinking I could end the discussion at lunch. Wrong!!! In the first place, it was unthinkable that she would travel so far and be allotted so little time. And anyway, she always dined with her suppliers.

This little lady from Malaysia was/is one of the most intriguing entrepreneurs that I have had the pleasure to know. Our discussion/lunch ended at 4 p.m.. During the lapsed time, Moli had spo-


From the desk of Moli
Claude Bamberger, Int'l
Phone: 201-933-6262
Fax: 201-933-8129

April 12 1994

Mr Joe Hyman
212 PARK Ave
Plainfield NJ 07066

The Career Woman's checklist for success...

Call Joe Hyman

☑Look like a lady ☑Act like a man ☑Work like a dog

You are Special!

Best regards to you + Evie.

Moli

ken (lectured) eloquently on the value of long-term supplier/reseller relationships, value of market and product knowledge, essentially of reseller ethicality, the fallacy of 'putting all your eggs in one basket' (apparently an old Malaysian saying) and the MIT theory of Business Management applied to the Asian Pacific Market.

In summary, Moli made her points emphatically. Claude Bamberger was retained as a reseller of Shell off-grade polymers, a relationship that is now approaching 30 years in tenure. Besides I gained the friendship of two wonderful people — Moli and Claude Bamberger, who incidentally are also excellent dining companions."

Dealing in scrap and offgrade materials is not a bed of roses. It is a constant battle and requires persevering vigilance. Any day, a stroke of lightning, coming without warning from who-knows-which-corner, is apt to wipe out a whole segment of your business.

We Have A "One Minute Manager"

Up to 1980 our management had no clear policy about what was expected of employees and in fact no clear policy about anything at all. The idea that people would not exploit the company under such circumstances proved only partially correct. There were always a number of employees who took advantage of the firm's laxity then; those who remained conscientious felt resentful toward management for not recognizing their dedication and contributions, and themselves became less efficient. In the end no one was satisfied.

With the exception of her brief course in "Careers in Business," Mo-Li had no management training, she instinctively followed some of the ground rules described in the beginning of this chapter, using a sensible, practical approach on how she thought an office and plant should be run. Besides doing the lion's share of the trading, Mo-Li took an increasing interest during the mid-eighties in the actual management of the corporations.

One of the first rules she made was that all employees, including herself, must be treated equally, with no exceptions! Each person was entitled to so much vacation, so many sick days. When she found that Blanche was busy keeping track of people who took vacation time in half-day and even hourly increments (one woman went home each afternoon to watch a favorite TV program, saying she was taking a "vacation hour"), the practice was stopped. Tacking on a couple

of vacation days to an already long holiday weekend was not acceptable, since there were not enough long weekends to allow everyone to take advantage of such an arrangement.

She streamlined everything; computers appeared everywhere; voice mail made its appearance; and she revolutionized our internal communications system. "Inter-office memos, was her motto, not talk." Employees were encouraged to first think through what they wished to communicate to a coworker, then write it as an interoffice memo, with copies to employees in other departments whose work may be affected. This method not only forces the originator to think out what is to be conveyed,but also gives the recipient time to absorb the message and formulate an appropriate response. Inevitably, from time to time a meeting had to be scheduled, but since meetings actually prevent employees from doing their work, they were infrequent and brief. However, everyone was encouraged to state their views and problems, which received the attention of management and serious consideration.

Access to our warehouse by outsiders was stopped once and for all after Mo-Li found one day that two of our employees were carefully selecting a number of acrylic sheets and cutting them to size for a stranger claiming to be "Claude's cousin." Our warehouse workers, who were in the habit of starting and leaving at odd hours, often asking their friends to punch time cards for them, were told that we worked from 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. with half an hour for lunch. No exceptions. No arbitrary overtime or payment for hours when someone was "out" for personal business.

By the mid-eighties Blanche had retired after twenty-seven years with the company, but not before computerizing our complicated, bookkeeping system. As a result, we had a 50 percent reduction in staff and our overhead declined, while the volume of our business quadrupled. This was quite an accomplishment, considering that exactly the reverse was happening in the economy nationwide.

In short, after struggling with my business for almost thirty colorful and troublesome years, I finally found in Mo-Li a capable manager, who changed the business from a marginal, though comfortable, enterprise into a very efficient international operation. While fax machines and computerization reduced the requirement for secretarial work, the amount of documentation needed for our rapidly growing export business increased. Letters of credit took more and more time and could no longer be handled by the bookkeeping department. We thought Micki Galgas, a lovely person who had been with us for more than a decade and was in charge of domestic shipping, could learn to handle letters of credit and export documentation as well.

Burdened with this new responsibility, and having no experience in international shipping, Micki relied largely on expensive freight forwarders to guide her in this job. We therefore decided on an experienced person to handle our export shipment which increased in volume every month.

We now hired Lucy Gonzalez, purportedly a shipping expert. However, she made so many costly mistakes that we decided to look around for a more qualified person. We placed an ad in the *New York Times*, and Mary Jethanamest, a petite, very pretty Thai woman, applied for the position. We liked her immediately. Mary was working for a very large forwarding firm in New York, but she was moving to New Jersey, and she wanted to work for a smaller company, which she felt would give her a better career opportunity. She told us that she was in no hurry and would only change positions if she thought she had found the opportunity she was looking for. Apparently we fitted the bill. Though she said little during the job interview, she did say that she was willing to wait until we found a good reason to dismiss Lucy.

This didn't take very long. A month after this interview Micki married and moved to Florida. Lucy, thinking that we were now totally dependent on her, gave us notice, claiming she had been offered a much better job at a substantially higher salary. Unless we were willing to meet her demand she would leave immediately. We called Mary to make sure that she was still interested in the position and we agreed that she would give notice to her present employer and start working for us within two weeks. To Lucy's great consternation we accepted her resignation. Apparently the "better" job had evaporated, or had never existed.

It didn't take us long to find out that Mary's shipping skills, as compared to Micki's inexperience and Lucy's costly mistakes, would save the company a lot of money. Indeed, this amounted to many thousands of dollars over the years. With this reorganization Mo-Li was now free to concentrate only on purchasing and selling materials. Once a transaction was completed, Mary arranged to move the cargo from source to destination at the lowest possible rate. No freight forwarder or even monitoring was needed. Now, after fifteen years with us, Mary has yet to make a mistake. The combination of Mo-Li and Mary was infallible. In fact, the team became so formidable and efficient that my retirement from the firm's day-to-day activities, which I had contemplated for some time, rapidly became a reality. Today, Mary is the secretary and treasurer of our corporations and is invaluable to our operation.

All during the eighties Mo-Li worked with producers of specialty materials, the offgrade and scrap plastic which could be used as substitutes for otherwise much cheaper prime materials. Right from the start, when, as a student, she was able to find our first big customer for thermoplastic rubber in Taiwan, it was obvious that she had a special affinity for rubber and related materials.

During the decade that followed, our company gained the trust of the producers with whom we worked. Today we are known to follow to the letter their guidelines concerning how we we should market the material being offered us. In turn, material is made available to us at prices which make our scrap competitive even with the lower-priced prime resins. More often than not, we are offered this material not because our bid is high but because the producers know that we will make sure that it disappears into markets in which they have no interest.

Gone are the days of endless conferences with accountants about financial problems. Gone are the sleepless nights spent worrying about discontented employees, unsalable high-priced inventory, or customers with bad credit ratings. Most of our business is now done on the basis of payment against letters of credit, eliminating any credit worries. More and more materials are shipped directly from the producers to the pier, without an expensive detour via our Carlstadt warehouse, ending the need for a large warehouse staff and inventory.

A new wind is blowing. Gone are the days when we catered to every employee's special needs. All are treated fairly and alike. Surprisingly, they seem to be a lot more content and happier. In the words of Jerry Simmons, aged seventy, who is still working in our warehouse after being with us for more than forty-one years: "Since Mo-Li joined our firm I go down on my knees every night to thank the Lord, because without her there would be no business and no job for me."

Mo-Li's course in "Careers in Business" had brought sweeping changes to our organization, but most of all for myself. After my career of half a century in plastics, I finally learned that "business management" is not something that grows on trees. It's a science and it has to be learned.

Ed Garinger, president of International Merona, which specializes in exporting prime virgin plastic materials, sums it all up as follows:

> "Dear Claude:
>
> Comparing our two companies I must admit that you had one big advantage over mine — the advent of Mo-Li. While both of us had the benefit of sound European-American business experience, we must have become somewhat petrified and not flexible enough in a plastic world changed by the influx of Asian competition. This is where Mo-Li came as a saviour to your firm.
>
> With her keen oriental acumen, smooth and pleasant approach to people and problems, she has been able to operate your company in a most successful way.
>
> When I had the pleasure of meeting her a few years ago in Hong Kong my own impressions were confirmed by a number of mutual Chinese customers.
>
> I had first met Mo-Li quite a few years ago when she was still studying for her docotorate at a university. It was amazing to see how she devel-

oped within a short time into a mature and experienced trader full of vigor and ideas. Claude you are to be envied — and Moli has to be admired.

With my best wishes for a continued success, with Mo-Li's active assistance."

* * * * *

A story of a life is never complete until the actual end. Due to the limitations imposed by peripheral circumstances, no autobiography is ever finished. Many stories worth recording could not be mentioned here and may find their place in future writing.

Often, someone asks, "What was the best part of your life? If you could, which part would you like to live again?" Such questions cannot be answered. Each stage in a person's life, each moment of triumph and defeat has a poignancy of its own. Together they make life's cycle complete. Triumph cannot exist without defeat, happiness comes only in contrast to unhappiness; each is necessary so one can savor and appreciate the other.

Looking back at my life as a whole, I feel I should be satisfied. I had the good fortune to be born into an affluent family whose resources allowed me to escape the destruction wreaked by the Nazi regime on most of Europe's Jews. Given my upbringing, background and education, I was well equipped to deal with the ups and downs that are part of everyone's life. At each crucial juncture, saving hands appeared to help me over whatever obstacles obstructed the path to my goal. I never lacked the basic material things which millions of people work for all their lives and never achieve.

In the final scoring, one's love life always emerges as one of the important determinants of happiness. After a number of misadventures, I was incredibly lucky in that area, too, finding the wonderful, supportive Mo-Li, though I had to go to Malaysia, at the other end of the world, to find her.

Taking stock, which is what a memoir is all about, I find the answer in a remark by the little orphan boy who is the protagonist of Romain Gary's wonderful book, *The Life Before Us*: "I don't understand all these people who constantly worry whether they are happy or not. All I want to do is get on with my life."

Appendices

Ending Corruption in our Business

Some years ago a major producer of prime plastic resins asked me to give a paper on the Control of Handling and Selling Off-grade and Scrap Materials. I was very flattered by this request, although I realized that, having been active in this particular field from its infancy in the early 1940's, I was perhaps one of the few surviving persons qualified on this subject based on my long experience. In any case, I reproduce here what I said on that occasion about eliminating corruption in the sale of scrap and off-grade materials.

Historically, producers of plastic resins have always been primarily concerned with the development and production of compounds that will fulfill certain functions and improve and possibly replace existing materials. These compounds are the 'prime' resins, as opposed to off-grade resins, which are invariably a by-product during the production of the prime product.

Off-grade resins, while identical in appearance, must not be sold for use in applications for which the prime product is intended. When offering off-grade material for sale, the producers' main fear is that it will end up competing with the sale of the prime product.

In addition to off-grade *resins*, a fair amount of *scrap* of the same material is generated during the production of any plastic compound. While off-grade resins often can easily pass for prime quality, scrap comes in many irregular shapes and color and though it can be reprocessed — which means upgrading it into an *appearance* of prime quality — it can rarely pass as such.

Circumstances vary of course from case to case, but one may reasonably assume that almost every producer is guilty of some neglect when it comes to marketing their off-grade and scrap materials. The following is a list of the most serious and frequent errors.

Mistake No. 1:

While in reality the ultimate destination and application of scrap and off-grade materials should be of great concern, for the most part top managers rarely give it the attention it deserves.

As the percentage of scrap and off-grade material *is incorporated in the price structure of the prime product*, it does not exist officially on the books of the company, and as such has no official value.

In the infancy of the plastic industry, from 1940 to 1960, most producers of plastic compounds actually preferred dumping their scrap, fearing that, if it

was sold, it would end up competing with prime resins and thus cause repercussions with buyers of their products.

As the volume in the production of plastic materials increased and the dumping of materials became environmentally unsound, the producers recognized that they had a problem on their hands and were forced to delegate the sale of this material to some employee or other.

Because of the sensitive nature as to the ultimate destination of this type of material, it would seem logical that management would carefully select and appoint the employee handling its sale. A material irregular in quality, uncertain in availability and, from the producer's point of view, critical as to its end-use application, is far more difficult to sell than the prime product of uniform quality with a set price.

Yet because of its official non-existence and relative unimportance in the eyes of top management, just the opposite is true. Responsibility for selling scrap material is usually given to anyone whose primary task in the firm does not seem to occupy him or her fully. As a result, the person or persons in charge of selling this material may have no entrepreneurial experience in selling anything.

Mistake No. 2

Once the responsibility of selling scrap and off-grade materials is assigned to someone, management is often no longer concerned what happens next. As far as they are concerned, the headache has been passed on to someone else and for better or for worse will somehow be handled.

No one is appointed to monitor those in charge of selling this 'non-existent' material. And as long their transactions cause no repercussions in the prime market (which invariably happens sooner or later), the people in charge of the sale begin to get the message that indeed no one seems to care.

On the other side of the fence, sophisticated buyers of this material are often left stranded with an inexperienced salesperson, without access to someone higher up in the hierarchy of a large corporation to whom they could appeal for technical or commercial guidelines.

The result is that producers often sell scrap materials to unreliable buyers concerned with making a quick buck, instead of looking for on-going business relationships which would be beneficial for *both the supplier and the customer.*

Mistake No. 3

Because of their company's concern for prime materials rather than for the sale of scrap, people in charge of scrap sales often rely on information given to them by their plants as to the grade of materials they have for sale. Unable to

take the time to *verify* what they are being told, or because of their inexperience or lack of authority to tell their plants how to classify and inventory scrap materials, they often unintentionally sell the wrong material.

Quality claims are the inevitable result, and they are invariably costly and time consuming. Returning scrap material as a result of a claim is not economical; travelling to the destination of the scrap shipment to verify the justification of the claim is time consuming and expensive. Hence it puts the supplier in the position of arbitrarily allowing or disallowing a claim, neither of which is beneficial to his company in the long run.

To avert such an outcome, producers often assign the task of selling scrap and off-grade material to plant personnel who are presumably more knowledgeable about it. In so doing, they literally open the door to potential thieves.

In the course of the years I personally have come across innumerable cases where irresponsible scrap dealers, often local people who are neighbors and friends of the plant personnel, have been able to corrupt the people in charge of sales. Ways to defraud a company by way of getting a kick-back from buyers are many and varied. Here are just a few of the more common ones: (a) classify salable material as 'landfill;' (b) 'downgrade' off-grade material as scrap; (c) classify some prime resins as off-grade; (d) ship whole truckloads of materials without billing; or (e) bill them slightly higher than the market price but ship a higher-priced, better quality material, thus justifying the sale to a particular outlet.

Furthermore, management's lack of interest in the sale of the ostensibly unimportant scrap and off-grade materials produced by their plants, may give rise within their organization to a subversive little empire with a life and operation of its own. Like an invisible cancer, it grows over a number of years until it bursts out in a gigantic scandal, resulting in costly litigation and the disruption of normal business.

Without proper guidelines or monitoring of scrap and off-grade sales, people in charge of selling such material naturally begin to have a propriatary interest. Since the availability of this type of material is limited and since the pricing of it is more or less left up to those in charge of sales, this power of being able to decide whom to sell to and at what price soon goes to their heads. They begin to view themselves not as employees working for a large corporation, but instead as entrepreneurs selling *their* scrap.

How corruption can be avoided.

To be sure, if a key person in charge of dealing with customers has a tendency to be corrupt, he or she will find a way to do so, no matter what precautions an employer may take. Corruption rarely comes from within; it is always outsiders who profer the "bait." If the suggestion falls on fertile ground,

these individuals will have ample creative ideas on how it can be done in order to avoid detection.

Here are some guidelines on how to handle scrap and off-grade materials more efficiently and to minimize the chance of corruption and payoff schemes.

A. Hitherto— at least through the mid 1990's — women have been more conscientious than men and less liable to be tempted by offers of payoffs. Therefore wise employers include women in the team responsible for the disposal of this scrap and off-grade material

.

B. Never allow the team to sell *all* scrap materials to just *one* company. The team should carefully select *two* or possibly *three* (but not more) qualified buyers and divide the sale of this material more or less equally among them, making sure that no one is favored at anyone time. If scrap is sold to *too* many buyers, the producer will have a hard time detecting the "source" when trouble in the marketplace occurs. Moreover, by selling to too many outlets, a producer fosters disinterest instead of building loyalty. By carefully selecting a few outlets, a producer usually obtains better prices and more control of the market place.

C. In the hierarchy of a large producer, the product manager, sales manager or director of marketing are usually responsible for assigning personnel to sell material. It should be a matter of routine that the manager gets a monthly report of their activities, i.e. to whom, what quantities and at what prices materials were sold.

This can be done by creating a simple worksheet or form which is to be handed in once a month. For the most part, managers are too busy to concern themselves with the sale of such an unimportant item. They may not even have time to look at this report. Yet, the mere fact that the "big boss" *insists on a report* will cut down on the temptation to get involved in corrupt practices.

D. Since the basic calculation of the cost of producing a prime product includes a certain amount of waste material, the above mentioned reports will give the top management an idea whether their original calculations are accurate.

Moreover records of the quantity of raw materials shipped to plants that produce prime resin are a matter of company record. Co-relation between *input* and *output* should be possible. The difference between the two should be in scrap/off-grade product sold or held in inventory. Any secretary can do this co-relation which makes discrepancies immediately apparent.

E. The president of the company should instruct the market manager not only to give him periodic reports of the sales of prime product but of off-grade/ scrap material as well. He need not spend a great deal of time analyzing these reports, but *the simple fact that they are required* will tend to keep all parties honest.

These reports also will have a cumulative, historic benefit in case a president would like auditors to check the accuracy of these records once or twice a year.

F. A smart market manager will meet with the customers for scrap/off-grade material once or twice a year. Why? Because a smart manager will realize that the customers purchasing this material from his company usually have a lot of market information which is not accessible to him in his day to day activity.

During such a meeting, a manager will not only hear what happens to the scrap after it leaves his plants, where and how it is sold, but also what his competition may be doing, what new ways to utilize scrap are being developed and all kinds of other information which may prove invaluable to him not only for handling the sale of scrap *but for the the sale of the prime product as well.*

In my personal experience, I have been able to meet on occasion with the president of a corporation. Invariably it is precisely with those particular companies that we have been able to establish a mutually profitable long-term relationship over the years.

While any number of the above suggestions will not be feasible for all producers, I am certain that at least some of the suggestions may prove beneficial.

Having been active for more than half a century in this field, I have come to know all the ins and outs of how scrap and off-grade material are being marketed, and how they should be marketed to give supplier and customer the best of both worlds. Unfortunately, few producers follow the principles outlined in this discussion, invariably with unpleasant results that could easily have been avoided.

When I started my business my legal adviser was Bob Kantrowitz, of Alpine Ski Club fame (see ch. 7), a senior law student at NYU. I have mentioned him throughout this memoir but I'd like to add one more wonderful story here as a special tribute to him.

Like Selling Dog Sleds in Arizona

Bob could best be described as an incorrigible optimist. He saw pink clouds in the pouring rain and whenever he set his mind on doing something there was nothing in the world that would stop him. The most notorious example: during his student days, he swore out a summons against his mother, who had locked up his car to prevent him from driving to Alaska in 1947. The Alcan Highway had just opened to the public. It was then nothing but a very, very long gravel road. During the war a special permit from the Department of the Interior was required to travel it.

Bob loved movement. It didn't matter if it was a bus, a plane, a boat, a bicycle or a car — as long as it moved. During the last days of the war and until new cars once again became available to the public, Bob discovered an ingenious way to earn some money towards his law school fees.

He discovered that used cars brought higher prices in the mid-South than in the metropolitan area. He arranged with some local used car dealers to buy a car, drive it over the week-end to Virginia and sell it there to another used car dealer for a profit. Then he came back by Greyhound Bus, train or even plane. Most of his profit from his deals was used up in such transportation, but since "movement" was his hobby he felt well compensated, if not in cash then in kind.

When Bob heard that used cars brought even a better price in Alaska, he decided that he could make the trip in a week and fly back on his profit for an all important law exam the following week. No wonder his mother took a dim view of this project and promptly confiscated the car. Bob went to court, got an emergency injunction, and was on his way.

He had made arrangements with two other friends from our circle of adventurous souls from our Friday night folk dance group: Lotte Koch, a school teacher who wanted to spend her summer vacation hiking in Alaska, and Ernest Hanauer, a union member in the upholstery trade, who thought that Alaska held a promising future for a man of his skills.

As neither Bob, Ernest or Lotte had money to spare, they pooled their resources, with Bob providing the car for transportation and Lotte and Ernest paying for oil and gas.

Gasoline on the Alcan Highway sold for astronomical prices, so Ernest bought a dozen 5-gallon Jerry cans to transport the needed fuel.

A hitch in this well planned arrangement developed as they neared the Canadian Yukon. The three adventurers met a driver coming down the Alcan Highway with the news that he had just bought his car in Fairbanks for *next to nothing*. Why? Because ordinary passenger cars were almost worthless in Alaska, as there apparently were no roads in the territory suitable for them. What *was* in demand were four-wheel drive vehicles and pick-up trucks that could survive Alaska's tundra and dirt roads.

Bob had a dilemma. It was obvious that, once there, he could not turn his car into cash in time, if at all, to get back to New York for his law exam.

Ernest, the hard-hat upholsterer, said that Bob must honor his commitment and take them to Alaska. After all, what would he do with all that gas stored in the Jerry cans? Bob, desperate for a solution, suggested that Ernest buy his car once they reached Fairbanks and give him enough money to fly back home.

Ernest, a very stubborn fellow of German extraction, insisted that this was not part of the agreement. He refused. Lotte was non-committal. For hundreds of miles the battle raged, to the point that Bob and Ernest stopped speaking to one another. Lotte, sitting between them, had to relay messages from one to the other.

More passesenger cars came down the highway and all confirmed the story of the first driver they met. In fact, they said, people were actually *flying* to Alaska to buy cheap cars! Bob decided that he would have to turn back immediately and drive to New York in time for his law exam. They were stopped at the moment in the middle of nowhere. Bob asked Lotte to pass on his decision to Ernest. Ernest was furious. When he saw Bob getting into the car to head home, Ernest yelled, "Hey, you have *my* Jerry cans and I want them." Bob remonstrated that he needed the gas and would send Ernest a check. "I want my cans now," Ernest insisted. He succeeded in retrieving them and then proceeded to pour out the precious gas into a ditch next to the road. Bob looked on crestfallen.

Some hours later an army truck passed by and picked up Ernest and Lotte. There was no room for Ernest's Jerry cans so he had to abandon them. In the first town they reached, Ernest and Lotte had to wait several days for the weekly bus to Fairbanks.

Meanwhile Bob started his long drive south back to New York. He fell asleep at the wheel once or twice, waking up in a ditch. He also ran out of money. At length he called his brother and asked him to wire some money to Chicago. Bob reached that city the night before his exam and, more dead than alive, flew back to New York just in the nick of time.

Ernest did well in Alaska. He got rich as Fairbank's only upholsterer/ real estate speculator. Lotte returned to Alaska in 1951, sponsored by the Alaska Native Service, and for two years taught Eskimo children in a remote Eskimo village called Kasigluk near the Arctic circle.

It speaks well for Bob that years later, when Ernest came to New York in full Alaskan regalia, rancher hat, boots and all, to display his newly acquired wealth, he was a frequent and welcome visitor in Bob's home.

Later when Bob had his own plane and flew regularly to Alaska to attend to a large apartment house complex in Anchorage which he had acquired, he visited Ernest regularly in Fairbanks. Bob was one rare person — incapable of carrying an old grudge.

When Bob died of a heart attack in August of 1981 at the age of 54, our family and business suffered an irreparable loss. Bob left a vacuum in our life and our heart which has not been filled to this day.



Bob Kantrowitz (r.) with flight instructor.

Here's my mother's recipe for Nuss Torte. What it's doing in a book on the plastic scrap industry is for you to figure out.

A Lingering Taste

Mutti's Nuss Torte

Grease high torm with removable bottom

6 eggs

8 oz. ground almonds

1 lemon, juice and grated peel

1 ¼ cups sugar

⅓ cup bread crumbs

1 tsp. baking powder

1 tbs. flour

1 pint heavy cream





1. Preheat oven to 350° F
2. Separate yolk from white
3. Beat egg white very stiff
4. Add sugar to yolk, using mixer, mix until light
5. Take off mixer, then using wooden spoon, add almonds, bread crumbs, grated lemon peel, lemon juice, flour and baking powder
6. Lift egg white into mixture with the spoon
7. Pour mixture into torm, bake ¾ hour and remove from oven
8. After 24 hours, beat 1 pint heavy cream

Cut cake into 2 layers, fill with whipped cream and decorate outside with cream before serving.

A Tribute to a Great Woman

Ilse Wolff, my mother's youngest sister, played an important part in my life. Though all six Wolff children were exceedingly bright and all successful in their own right, it was Ilse who achieved a certain amount of fame. The United States Senate endorsed Senator Abe Ribicoff's heartfelt eulogy of her when she died in 1974, and it voted unanimously to include the record of her accomplishments in its own Congressional Record.

In some ways, Ilse beat Senator Ribicoff to the punch. Forseeing the possibility of an early death (she had a chronic heart condition), she wrote her own obituary two years earlier in 1972. She wanted to avoid the usual trite eulogies offered by a rabbi or distant relative. I include her account below, followed by the Congressional Record excerpt.

I was born 1901 as the youngest of 6 children in a small town in South Germany. In thinking back to appraise the start my parents and my home provided me with, the following facts stand out: a large family with an open-door policy, where relatives and friends dropped in for the day or for weeks, and where all of us children could bring their friends, gave me a good preparation for the give and take of life.

The basic simplicity with which my parents — though quite well off according to the standards of our little town but also living in the county seat where the officials set a tone of frugality and puritanism — conducted their home, and both parents' interest in worthwhile things gave me a grounding in what is essential, and a life-long aversion against materialism and ostentation.

Probably due to family size, we were never much fussed over and regimented and within reason were allowed to explore and experiment and to choose our own friends. Later on we were allowed to learn what we wanted at a time and in a society where girls were still married off rather than permitted to choose a career and thru their own decisions shape their destiny.

My chosen career was social work, underpinned by nurses training and one year of home economics in an agricultural setting. The fringe benefits of these educational experiences were friendships which lasted for a lifetime and enriched life.

My career was shattered after several years of practice when the Nazi regime forced my dismissal from a job of vocational guidance and counseling under federal auspices.

I could now use my acquired know-how only in the framework of the Jewish community in the capital of Stuttgart, in the State of Württenberg. Young people were to be counseled and placed into training for immigration to many lands, but predominantly for Allijah to what was then the land of Palestine.

As more and more people immigrated, I inherited more broadened responsibilities. During my last years in Germany, I was the director of Jewish Social Welfare for the region and witnessed the unbelievable and little commemorated period of what Ernst Simon called *Aufbau im Untergang*. It was the development of a comprehensive system of Welfare, Health Care, Education, Child Welfare, Homes for the Aged and Handicapped, and a rather rich cultural life in music, the arts, theatre,dance , adult education on many levels, and this all within hardly a decade. It was a high privilege to play one's part, even though it was a small one, in this proud and defiant effort to keep life intact against overwhelming odds.

I consider these years, 1933-1941, the highest spot reached in my life and career. Never before or after was one so needed; never were relationships so rich and so manifold; never did one feel so full of purpose. It was during these years that I came to terms with my Jewish identity; it had been a painful struggle up till then and finally it fell into place. In addition to the outside threat, it was facilitated by meeting a much more stratified group than the one I was born in, the Jewish bourgoisie which I had rejected. These were the "little"people, Jews of Eastern origin first or second generation, the young people embracing different ideals and life styles. And personally getting a bit wiser through suffering, I discovered that among the Jewish middle class I had held in such contempt as being spoiled, materialistic and superficial, there were many who showed their mettle when deprived of the trappings of material security.

With all these people I could identify as sharing a heritage of suffering and survival. For the first time in my life I felt the pride of belonging to a people who "could be treated as outcasts but not made outcasts," as Martin Buber told us at an unforgettable workshop in 1934.

In spite of having been needy and receptive religiously thru all my life, I was not able to find my spiritual home within formalized Jewish religion, nor in other religions, which at times offered a religious homestead, such as Unitarianism and Quakerism. I have had a life-long gratitude for what the Jews of old had given to the peoples of the world. The basic tenets of decency in human life and human relations in the 10 Commandments above all, the treasure house of the Old Testament, for me especially the Prophets, the book of Job and the Psalms.

But thru all my life I remained an eclectic in the religious sphere, borrowing and taking freely from everything which helped me to bear and endure life and its intrinsic tragedy. This deprived me of the mutuality, warmth and shelter of a congregation, but according to my lights, I could not do other-wise.

My immigration to the United States with the proverbial "last boat" in 1941 was not different from that of thousands of others: a hard beginning — for me, starting over again at the age of 39 as a student nurse in Louisville, Ky., and a slow, steady re-gaining of educational and professional status over long years. I felt always consciously grateful for the generous accepting atmosphere which



this country offers to all its new-comers from the four corners of the world and that your chances were only limited by your abilities.

After years of schooling, re-schooling and working, I served for 18 years as consultant for mental health in the Connecticut State Department of Health, the longest time I had ever held any position. This rooting allowed for establishing a home with my sister, who was during all my life my closest friend.

Considering death now, I feel the natural human regret to leave those who are close to me, especially this dearly beloved sister. That I have to leave her behind is a deep sorrow, though I know she shares my attitude toward death for those who have lived out a full life cycle as I did. But in this last serious illness I am looking forward to death as a friend and liberator.

> To be allowed to fall asleep when one is very tired and to drop a burden, which one has carried for a very long time, that is a precious and wonderful gift.
>
> Hermann Hesse, *Das Glasperlenspiel*

ILSE S. WOLFF

Mr. RIBICOFF. Mr. President, it is with a deep sense of sadess that I learned of the death of one of Connecticut's outstanding leaders in the field of health care, Miss Ilse S. Wolff.

Ilse, who was a retired mental health hursing consultant for the State health department, served our State faithfully and with dedication to high quality health care for over a geeration.

Born in Germany she worked as a Jewish social worker helping with the emigration of Jewish families from Nazi Germany.

After coming to America, she received her degree in nursing from the Louisville Jewish Hospital School of Nursing and then came to Hartford.

While with the State health department, she developed the first ex-patient rehabilitation community program and initiated the first formal visitation program by public health nurses for returning psychiatric patients. Miss Wolff also was instrumental in establishing the first halfway house in Hartford for mental patients. She wrote many articles for public health, mental health, and nursing publications. She received the Connecticut Mental Health Bell Award in 1972 for her outstanding service.

She was a member of the Board of Greater Hartford Council on Alcoholism, the Mental Health Association of Connecticut, the Connecticut League for Nursing and the Connecticut Association for Public Health Nursing Agencies. She was appointed to many consultant and review committees for the U.S. Public Health Service. She was also a member of the National League for Nursing, American Nurses Association, and American Public Health Association.

Ilse worked in a field of such great importance and too often of great neglect. It is only because of the deep commitment and involvement of people like Ilse that progress can be made and mental patients taken out of the shadows and become part of society.

I ask unanimous consent that an article from the Hartford Times, entitled Ilse S. Wolff, Nurse Leader, be printed in the Record.

A New Generation Speaks Out

The reader may recall the fate of our family villa and the 'restitution' offered by the Wagner family for it after the war (ch. 8). Here is a translation of the letter the Wagner grand-daughter sent me in October, 1994. It illustrates for me that, while Germans of my parent's and my own generation engaged, for the most part, in outright denial of wrongdoing, the third generation after the Nazi regime has finally come to grips with the problem, questioning the part their elders played during that period.

Dear Mr. Bamberger,

Many thanks for your letter and for the two books you enclosed. I read these with great interest, the more so as some sections concern the past of my own family. Your accounts, particularly the fate of the portrait of your sister Ruth, have troubled me greatly.

I visited Lichtenfels at the end of July. Mr. Schulze gave me the address of Mrs. Schoepf and I attempted to talk to her. I explained my point of view and asked her to return the portrait of Ruth to the Bamberger family. The conversation proceeded politely, even if she was not prepared to return the painting during her lifetime. My proposal that she might at least will the portrait to the Bamberger family had not met with a direct refusal when Mr. Schoepf entered the room. He has evidently listened to the whole conversation from an adjoining room and became very rude. His intervention made any further discussion with his wife impossible, and I left the house without having achieved anything.

Mr. Schulze told me, that you visited Kronacher Str. 21 in 1986 and that you recognized many paintings and other property. Perhaps you can describe briefly the pictures you have seen which you still know from your home. If one day these items come into my or my sister's possession, we would be glad to return them to your family.

I am conscious that this offer cannot make good any injustice of the past. Even in our family, the history is unfortunately being remembered and transmitted with a cosmetic gloss.

Please excuse me for writing this letter in German, but I find it clearly easier than in English. I would be very pleased to receive a reply from you.

Corinna Wagner

A Fragment of the Holocaust

"That period" — a phrase far too limp for all it describes. That is why I want to include here an excerpt from Claus Becher's Holocaust Experience. *I met Claus, you may know, in 1948 when he was a lab assistant at my Uncle Anton's business. He became my first employee in 1951.*

Claus was born in Hanover in 1926, son of a solid middle class family. His father made a good living trading livestock. As part of the Nazi repression of Jews, his family was deported to 'the Riga ghetto' in Latvia in 1941. Unbelievable horrors awaited them. Claus was rescued by advancing British forces four years later. Hospitalized first in Germany and then in Sweden, he recovered after two years and emigrated to the United States to join relatives and friends.

My Name is Claus

"It was on that night the authorities came to the buildings, made us and the other residents take all our belongings, loaded us crammed into trucks and took us to a very large school in the city of Ahlem. It was a school for Jewish children only, a *Gartenbauschul* (trade school). They made us disembark and marched us into the school along with approximately one thousand other people. Once inside they lined us up and ordered us to undress — strip naked. One by one we were thoroughly searched — inside our mouths, our private areas, our clothing, our bundles and baggage. They looked for almost anything of value they could find. What they found they took away from us and no one dared protest. We were then told to dress and move on to a designated area with our remaining few possessions. There they kept us until December 15th — four whole days — with hardly enough room to stand or sit, and with no food and no toilet facilities!

We were told once more to line up and were rush-marched to the railroad yard where we were loaded into closed railroad cars with as many people as could be pushed in. All the while we were so heavily guarded that any attempt to escape was futile. The few who tried were rapidly caught by the guard dogs and badly bitten, and then summarily shot. We quickly learned the full meaning of fear. None of us had any idea of where we were being taken to, and to make matters worse, we got very limited food and no toilets. There are no words to describe the suffering inside that train, the stench of bodily excrement, the decaying smell of vomit from the many who were overcome and became sick. Though I was a little boy then I still remember wondering why no one cried aloud, why I only heard moaning and stifled whimpering and softly mumbled prayers in Hebrew to the Almighty. I

too whimpered because I was hungry, because I couldn't breathe and because I hurt all over.

The train ride took three days until December 18th. It was when they finally opened the doors that we learned where we had been sent. There was a big sign before us reading: RIGA, LATVIA

It was bitterly cold as we climbed down from the train. In front of us were long lines of guards armed with machine guns at ready, and many police dogs — without muzzles. After the last of the displaced clambered down from their compartments, our "protectors" started barking orders at us to get into line, to pick up our bundles. Then we began a march in the below-freezing weather. The train ride had drained the strength and the will from so many but we had no alternative but to march along with the others or die. Weak, weary and shivering from the blood-draining cold, we were made to trudge somewhere between five and ten miles to a camp which they called 'the Riga ghetto'. There were already more than four thousand people interned there. Altogether there was space for about ten to twelve thousand This ghetto was a series of big apartment houses fully surrounded by barbed wire and this time heavily guarded by Himmler's SS. These thugs were not Germans but Latvian locals whose hatred of the Jew equalled that of their masters. Here again, families were allotted one or two rooms dependent on the size of the family, thus crowding a number of families into each apartment of rooms. The guards pushed and shoved and beat the people into the new quarters and then they left us alone for the rest of this day.

Almost daily there came another trainload or truck convoy carrying approximately another thousand prisoners (for that is what we had become) until the full limit of ten to twelve thousand was reached. Early every morning each one of us, young and old, was made to come out of our rooms and down into the street. As always, the biting cold penetrated the layers of clothing we wore, and as always the threatening shouts of "SCHNELL! SCHNELL!" by the SS men and the slamming of rifle butts against our already weakened bodies made us move rapidly into line-ups. They sorted us into work crews, some to work in the streets, others at the railroads or anywhere else that there was menial work to be done. We were treated and driven like slaves and with barely enough to eat to give us strength to work.

Every week they came and took so many younger and stronger men away to another concentration camp.named Salaspilz where they were made to build barracks and more barracks for incoming hostages The time came when they took my brother Jochen who had just become eighteen and shipped him with others to Salaspilz. As hard as we had to work at the Riga ghetto, it was even harder where Jochen was. He had to live in half open barracks with the icy wind cutting through the place while they tried to sleep huddled with nothing more than the clothes they wore. The temperature in

Riga was terribly cold every day — between five and twenty degrees below zero Fahrenheit; it was colder with the night winds blowing where Jochen was and they got even less to eat than we did!

I was fifteen and old enough to be sent with road gangs to work on the railroads with pick and shovel to free the rails and switches from the foot-thick ice caused by the heavy snows and bitterly cold weather. It was so cold that there were days my hands almost froze to the pick handles and were so chapped and cracked I thought they could never heal. While working on breaking the ice we got nothing to eat. Whenever we saw railroad cars standing in the yards, some of us boys managed to break in with the hope of finding something we might be able to eat. We were lucky sometimes when we found cars with fresh vegetables which were frozen solid and stole some to take back to our room for our families. Had we been caught we would have been shot on the spot by the Polizei as a lesson to the others — even had the vegetables been rotten.

Though many people did not have the strength to withstand the bitter cold, the hard labor and so little food, it was a miracle our family managed to survive in spite of everything.

Spring came, the weather changed and the temperature got warmer, helping to melt the many layers of thick ice on the streets of our ghetto camp. As the ice melted you began to see parts of bodies and whole bodies and lots of blood of people who were brutally killed by the Nazis or died from starvation or loss of will to live. They remained where they fell, quickly becoming frozen corpses who were granted a last merciful dignity of being rapidly covered by the fastfalling snows,

With the coming of spring, I was given a new job which the authorities called *Rollcommando*. We were ten or fifteen people whose job it was to transport and warehouse food for our ghetto, for the SS and the Gestapo. I was a scrawny fifteen year old and had to carry all kinds of food in boxes and many rough burlap sacks which weighed as much as one hundred kilograms each. I and the others had to haul those sacks up one or two, sometimes even three flights of stairs to be stowed into storage rooms. It didn't take me long to learn how to steal some of the food and, more important, to gain the courage to do it and to hide it on my person to bring back to the ghetto for ourselves and some of our friends. Though I had become inured to the dangers of stealing, the mental fear of cruel and inhuman punishment for getting caught in the act was always with me.

The little I was able to steal was truly little and certainly still not enough to keep us from hunger. So I and some of the others would take the chance of sneaking out at night and climbing into empty buildings in the hope of finding food left behind by the people who were evacuated from the houses in the first place. Sometimes we were lucky, but too often we found many

people dead, kids frozen in water in bathtubs as though they had been deliberately drowned, more children and older people killed and frozen stiff in basements and apartments. The Nazis and the Polizei had killed or sealed these people in those rooms and left them to die. All this had happened before we came to this ghetto in Riga.

I cannot remember all the exact details or perhaps I've shut them deeply away in the corners of my mind but it is impossible for me to forget the mass graves.

During the first months after we arrived at Riga, the Nazis systematically and deliberately reduced the Jewish population in our ghetto by elimination of the elderly and the terribly young — those too old or too feeble for the heavy work.

Every week the Nazi officers would appear and ordered the Polizei to force everyone into the lineup. Then they would parade up and down the line and cold-bloodedly cull out the very old and very little kids and order them into transports to be taken away never ever to be seen again. All I knew of those events in those early days is that I heard gunfire later.

After February 1942, all incoming transports arriving at the railroad yards were unloaded from the cars right at the yards. They were not brought to the ghetto anymore — there just was no more room. So the Nazis devised a solution to the problem. As the newly arrived displaced people detrained, they were instructed to leave their belongings where they lined up and were told that their possessions would delivered at their destination. They were then immediately loaded into the many waiting trucks. As usual, each train brought in about a thousand arrivals. There were enough trucks to accomodate all of them.

Once inside, the doors were closed and sealed and the trucks rolled out to their destination — the mass graves! All the people were gassed right there inside as the trucks went on their way. The screams of the dying could be heard through the trucks' walls. By the time they got to the graves almost all were dead. At the graves the trucks were emptied and the bodies dispassionately dumped into the mass grave layer upon layer — most of them dead but some still barely alive. The sound of the bodies thudding one on the other intermingled with moans of those who had not yet died. The perimeter of the huge open grave sight was patrolled by a handful of SS men carrying automatic weapons and when they heard any sound or saw any movement from below, they fired round after round into the half alive and the fully dead. If any still were alive, so be it; they were buried alive beneath the shower of continually dumped carcasses of what were once living, breathing human beings who did nothing wrong except for being born a Jew.

Gradually some of the workers in our camp were selected for work in factories. Most of the factories operated under the strict supervision of the SS

while others were still privately owned, with the owners having a close relationship with members of the Nazi hierarchy. Many of our people who were 'privileged' to work in the factories were able to come in contact with the private citizenry of Latvia. They too suffered the rigors and the deprivation which war brings about, and being under the heel of the Germans, they resorted to black market trading with the Jewish slave laborers who had things of value they were willing to give up for food. There were those us who were able to squirrel away from the prying eyes of the Nazi brutes such items as a fountain pen, an heirloom watch, a wedding band, even an extra shirt or underwear, all of which were extremely scarce. These items had to be used by us to trade for whatever scraps of food we could get. We were in no position to haggle too strongly for fear the Gentiles would turn us in to the guards. The Latvians were also in danger of the same punishment as the Jews if the SS found them trading with us. As always, death was the punishment meted out for this 'crime'. That is what happened to my older brother Rolf. He had exchanged a shirt for half a loaf of bread. As he came back to the ghetto in the evening from work at the factory along with his contingent, the entire group was searched and Rolf discovered . . ." [He was executed on the spot.]

Why some keepsakes survive the passage of time while others don't is a mystery to all of us. Here are three such – a blurb on guided tours to the Berkshires 45 years ago, an advertisement for a product we developed back in the '50s, still going strong, and – perhaps most fittingly of all – the certificate of incorporation that started this whole story.

Odds and — finally — Ends

ALPINE TRIPS

DIV. PARKER TOURS, INC.
87-66 253rd Street Bellerose, Long Island, N. Y. Phone: FIeldstone 7-4405



June 15, 1951

Dear Music Lover:

Time flies these days, and you will be surprised to hear that it is time once again to make plans to visit THE BERKSHIRE MUSIC AND JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVALS.



You will agree that EXPERIENCE is the best teacher, and since we are one of the first to organize trips to the Berkshire Music Festival, we feel you will benefit by joining our friendly, informal group.

We have learned that it is unwise to make last minute arrangements, and while the snow still covered the lovely Berkshire Hills, we carefully planned every detail for these long pleasant week-ends at the Festival.



The demand for accommodations, reserved seats at the concerts and dance recitals is tremendous, and the unprepared visitor to the Festivals may find himself waiting on long lines for food, tickets and information where to find a plane to sleep.



EXPERIENCE not only has taught us to make reservations early, but in order to avoid confusion and congestion within our own group, we decided to limit it to fourty persons for each week-end. Thus you are assured of being with a small, intimate group, where friendliness and companionship prevail, and where you will not be herded and rushed from one event to the next.



We do not provide dormitory accommodations, but if you do not come with a friend you are expected to share your room with another guest who may also come alone. Hot and cold running water are in each room, and you may swim right behind the Inn.

Reasonably priced meals are served in the Colonial Dining room of the Inn, and if you desire, the chef will pack you a box luncheon to take with you to the Tanglewood Grounds.

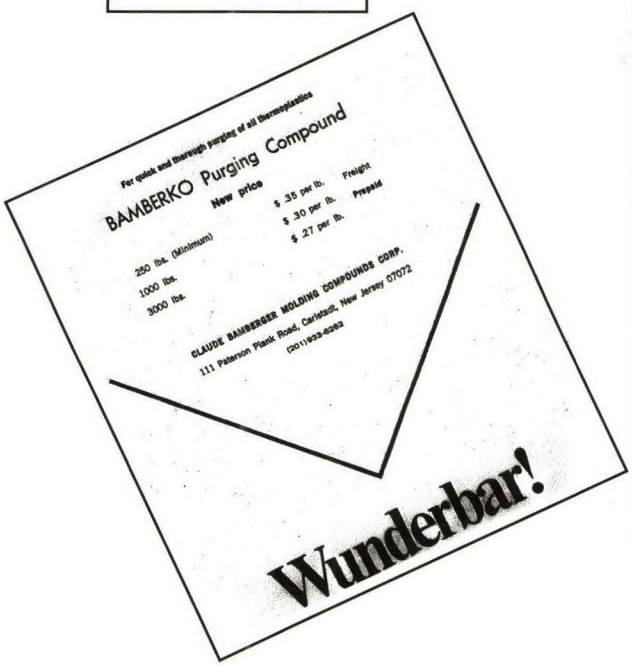


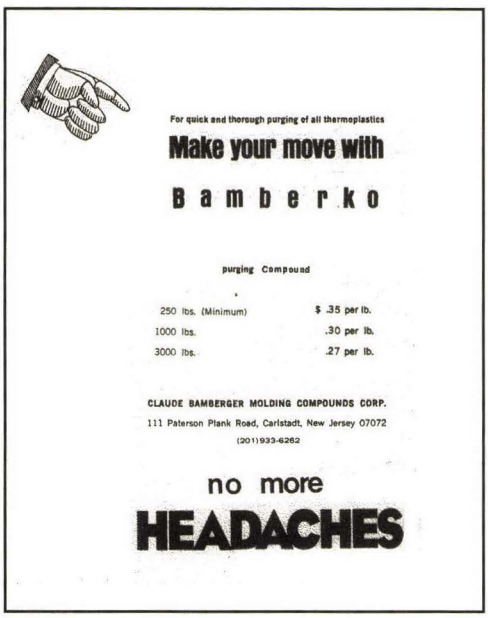
If you feel that we have something to offer you have been wanting to do for a long time, why not call us at once, as already at this early date subscription for the Festivals are quickly being sold out.

See you at the Festival.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
SIDNEY B. GORDON
Deputy Secretary—Corporations

Benjamin E. Kantrowitz, Esq.,
4863 Broadway,
New York, N.Y.

Albany, January 30, 1951

6998

Certificate of incorporation
of CLAUDE P. BAMBERGER, INC.
has been filed today.

SIDNEY B. GORDON, Deputy Secretary of State

Fees and tax paid as follows: Received by sk $50.00

Filing $ 40.00

Certified copy $

Tax, at 1/20 of 1% on $10,000.00

consisting of 100 shares par value $ 100.00 each, $ 5.00

" 5c, per share on 100 shares without par value, $ 5.00 Total $ 50.00

$10.00

County N.Y. Refund $

Department of State

By

Form 259. 3-15-50-25M (9C-497)

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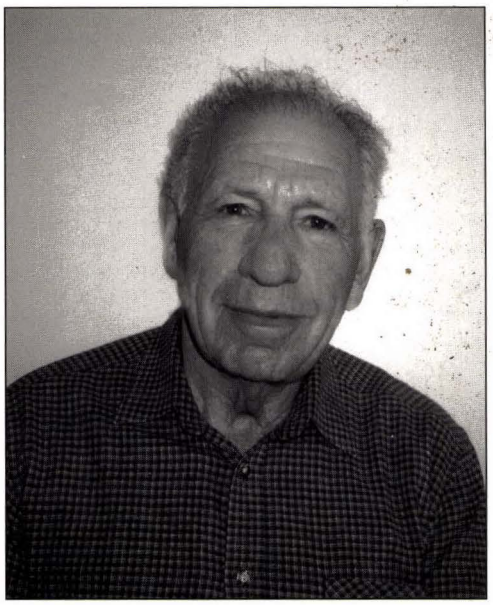
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The above is not a comprehensive bibliography. Some materials provided in italics at the beginning of some chapters are materials obtained from secondary sources of varying origin and rarely constitute direct quotes.



Claude Bamberger arrived in the USA in early 1938, a refugee from the Nazi regime. He knew no English and the great depression was in full swing. At first he made a living as a delivery boy, earning seven dollars a week. Then he drifted from one menial, low-paying job to another until he ended up in his uncle's rapidly growing plastic scrap business.

This book is a lively personal history as well as the story of a pioneer in the growth and development of the plastic scrap business in the USA. It spins an entertaining yarn about the do's and don't's of starting and operating a small, individually held company, but it is at the same time a comprehensive history of the plastic scrap industry. Now at the age of 76, Claude Bamberger is perhaps the oldest living authority on the beginnings and growth of that industry.

The book also contains valuable information for major producers of plastic resins on how to handle scrap sales and prevent the corruption frequently rampant in this area.

Claude Bamberger is the author of two previous books. *Art*, published in 1989, described the fate of his father's art collection which was confiscated by the Nazis in 1938, and *History of a Family*, published in 1993, covered his family's history from 1770 to 1992.