

A LIFE OF *Joy*

The Sidney Klein Story

NANCY I. KLEIN

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2025



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First published by AuthorHouse 8/18/2010

ISBN: 978-1-4520-2975-7 (e)
ISBN: 978-1-4520-2974-0 (sc)

Printed in the United States of America
Bloomington, Indiana

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

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INTRODUCTION

Sidney Benjamin Klein was a unique human being. His sense of humor was legendary; his sense of honor a matter of pride and his sense of loyalty to his heritage and his country defined his life.

I was privileged to share that life for over fifty years and learned from his outgoing nature and endless inquisitiveness to be a better person myself.

His children and grandchildren adored him, as did just about everyone who ever met him.

We are fortunate that he wrote down many of his adventures and thoughts (thanks to the invention of the word processor), so that writing his biography was relatively easy.

I dedicate this work to our children, Daniel Abraham Klein, David Lee Klein, Jonathan Joseph Klein and Abigail Esther Klein Leichman, their spouses, children and grandchildren. How Simmy would have loved those great-grandchildren and how much they are missing by not knowing him!

Chapter 1 – In The Beginning

"What do you want to be when you grow up?" We all remember being asked that question over the years. Simcha Binyamin Klein (Sidney Benjamin), known to most as Simmy, never did decide the answer. So for all his almost 73 years he was always ready to try something else, to learn something new, to keep all his options open.

He started life as the youngest child of Hanna and Lazar Klein, in Philadelphia, PA on October 24, 1927, joining his older brother Leo and his sister Lillian. His father was a *chazzan/shochet/ mohel* (cantor/ ritual slaughterer/circumciser) and the family moved several times as Pop changed jobs.

To get some idea of his background, we can turn to his own words – the memorials he wrote for the tenth *yahrzeits* of his parents. About his mother, (known as Mom until her grandchildren renamed her Mommo), he recalled:

"Iconoclast, humorist, realist, nick-namer, bottom-liner, oral historian, compassionate, cynical, perceptive … and more. What nurtured all this? Besides genes, Volova (Volovoye) played a strong part. (ed.note: This was Mom's home town, with more than its share of characters. The Rabbi (Ruv) ruled the Jewish community.) Only once in Mommo's memory did the townspeople revolt against the Ruv. There were two candidates for *shoychet*. The one the people favored was rumored to have actually caught a glimpse of his wife before they married. So the Ruv endorsed the other candidate. This was too much.

"Not only would they get their man, they'd fetch him to Volova in style. The president of the Shul dressed in his Shabbos clothes and the townspeople outfitted him with a two-horse wagon loaded with accessories with which to bring back the *shoychet*, his bride and belongings from his shtetl 25 kilometers away. And most importantly, two months' wages in cash were scraped together to be presented in advance to the *shoychet* to show him his new home town had panache.

"What a scene that must have been, everyone in town (except the Ruv) waving goodbye as the president disappeared down the road with those two fine horses, the loaded wagon and two months of wages. A few months later, the president's wife got a postcard from him, mailed soon after he arrived in America.

"As in other parts of Europe, ethical practices varied widely in the religious community. Mommo would say, 'We weren't *frum*.' Did that mean they ate *chazer*? *Chas veshulem*. She explained that theirs was the only non-chassidishe family in town. Evidently they were tolerated because her mother, Esther, was such a good tailor and her father, Joseph, was an expert shoemaker, bootmaker, and fashioner of all sorts of orthopedic devices made from leather. Sometimes they were even paid.

"Most people forget or suppress their bad experiences and over time, romanticize memories of the good old days. Not Mommo. She always called a spade a shovel and said it was hard to remember the good times because they were so scarce.

"Mommo learned sewing and business from grandma. She delivered the dress, but didn't hand it over until she had payment in hand. This was not easy. If she got, 'I'll pay your Tata in shul tomorrow," she'd discover a tiny defect in the garment that she had to take back for correction. She learned compassion and humor from grandpa. My brother remembers being 'spanked' by him at the age of two, with a handkerchief. Mommo insisted that she was the homeliest child in the family. But when she told this to grandpa he got angry and maintained (confidentially) she was the prettiest. Whenever he saw a little child do or say something especially clever, he'd wisely pray, '*Er soll nur nicht*

blaben bei der selver saychel'. Poorly translated, 'Hopefully his mental capacity will continue to grow with his age.'

"My favorite all-time aphorism of grandpa's, remembered each *Tisha B'Av*, is *'Es iz besser tzu essen tzain tayg vie tzu fasten eins'* – It's better to eat ten days than to fast one day. When Mommo was three, *Tisha B'Av* was a scorcher and all the adults walked around with their tongues hanging out. Grandpa put her in dishpan of water and taught her a secret *halacha*: so long as she stayed in it, she was permitted to eat. She remembered thinking that if those hungry, sweating folks knew her secret, they'd all get in a tub like hers.

"Mommo brought a lot of Volova to York, PA. Some of my friends asked me what 'Yoy' meant. It was tough to explain that it depended on the tone. When Pop brought home a white furry puppy, she complained with a Yoy, but was the first to feed it. Once when I surprised Mommo holding the puppy on her lap, she lovingly Yoyed and petted her.

"Mommo never formally learned English. Her shopping lists were a howl, with Hungarian spelling, such as veal 'csaps'. But she could understand a legal document. Pop once got a multi-paged contract in the mail with a note to sign and return it. Understandably, Pop couldn't figure it out. Mommo took it from him, glanced at it for no more than a minute and said, 'This is not a contract. It's an intelligence test. If you sign it, you flunk the test'. This was bottom-line Mommo at her best."

Pop, otherwise known as Poppo, was quite a different story. Although he came from Presov (sometimes known as Eperjes), not too far from Mommo's home town, he really came from a different world. He was a teacher, a *chazzan*, a *shochet*, a *mohel*. So his influence on Simmy was quite different from that of his mother – the combination helped make him the unique individual he was. In writing about his father Simmy summed up:

"Poppo was a stubborn, idealistic optimist. He saw and heard what he chose, and it was never anything evil or harmful. (He left that to Mommo. A marriage made in heaven.)

"The most amazing sight I witnessed was Pop at the swimming hole at Sanky's farm near Pottstown. Hugging his knees, he somersaulted off into the water, his body in a ball and his beard flying to one side.

That's the same man who wore the 'yoke of Torah' as a scarf, proud of its embroidery. It kept him cool in summer and warm in Siberia. Yes, he'd check the weather to see if he needed an overcoat to walk to Shul, but never whether to go.

"That was typical of how he taught us, even though he was unaware that some of his actions were the most powerful lessons he ever taught. He taught us formally, as well, but rarely with praise. I think he was wrong to withhold it, but Mommo would tell us our 'grades'. After one heavy lesson, she slipped me the word that Poppo had told her he wanted to squeeze me and *kish oss meine beiner* – kiss out my bones.

"Poppo was attracted to strangers. Give him 10 minutes and the stranger became a relative or was born within 25 miles of Eperjes or went to Hunsdorf (Poppo's Yeshiva) or all of the above. He greeted everyone. Nobody makes eye contact on the subway. Yet, one morning on the crowded Broadway Local as I escorted Poppo downtown, he looked around and smiled at each person. What a reaction he got. They couldn't believe that someone had noticed they existed. Startled, they all beamed back. And as his gaze continued its sweep, their smiles faded to a kind of wonder. You could see they felt they'd been blessed by this remarkable bearded stranger.

"One morning during a class when I was at Yeshiva University, an institution with plenty of bearded rebbes, all discussion in our room gradually dropped off. The rebbe stopped talking. Everyone was staring at the door. There was Poppo, smiling at the little window. He was in the neighborhood and popped in. A pal next to me whispered in awe, 'Who's that?' 'That's my Pop,' I said offhandedly. 'Oh, stop it!' he came back, annoyed that I would kid around at such a moment. I got up, went to the door and invited Poppo in, but he said no, that he enjoyed watching us learn but didn't want to disturb us. We spoke for a bit, then he left, unaware of the impact of his appearance. When I returned to my seat my classmate whispered, 'Where did YOU get a father like THAT?'

"How many people are asked such a question."

CHAPTER 2 – LIFE AS A U.S. MARINE

The place Simmy remembered best was York, PA, where he graduated from high school as a machinist. That was career number one.

World War II provided his second career – the Marine Corps. How his mother ever was persuaded to sign the papers for her over-protected, seventeen-year-old baby to become a Marine will forever remain a mystery. Pop, I can understand. He probably would have joined up himself, if he could. But Mom? This was the child for whom she hired a second-grader to put on his boots for him in kindergarten in the winter. This was the child who was protected and coddled and spoiled. My best guess is that she knew he would be drafted in another year anyway and what did she know from Marines?

So off the young Simmy went to Parris Island for training as a macho Marine. Practically as soon as he arrived on the base, he decided this was a big mistake. But it was too late to turn back. And so he became a Private First Class Marine. (He always said this rank equalled at least Captain in the Army.) He was the youngest in the group and since there was already one guy dubbed "Junior", he became "Junior Junior."

His training as a machinist landed him in the Motor Transport division, where he was able to use some of his skills. He was careful not to look too smart – you could be asked to do all sorts of extra work if you showed too much promise. One day a sergeant asked him if he knew how to weld. Of course he did, but he played dumb. "O.K., I'll teach you." So the sergeant lined up two pieces of metal, donned his goggles

and carefully demonstrated the fine art of welding them together. "Now it's your turn."

So he laid out two more pieces of metal, made sure his private was wearing his goggles and handed him the welding torch. Ever so carefully, Simmy welded the metal to the table (and he was a very good welder). The sergeant let forth a stream of choice curse words, impugning Simmy's intelligence, ancestry and common sense. But he never asked him again to weld anything.

The year and a half in Parris Island, during which the war ended, was not an easy time, but typically Simmy managed to find humor in his mishaps. Some of them he wrote about. For instance:

"On day three of Boot Camp, our platoon was herded into a large building to hear someone with brass on his shoulders tell us that war is hell, or some such message. Iwo Jima and Okinawa had happened just months ago, the assault on Japan was imminent and so we were warned to take our training seriously. Two quotes from this officer have stayed in my mind: 'Some of you will not return.' That was amusing, because he was talking about everyone else. The other was, 'Whatever religion you have, follow it. If you don't have a religion ...(here he looked at us intently)...GET ONE!'

"The 74 of us were then instructed to fall out to the side of the building to meet the chaplains. A benign-looking navy officer with crosses on his collar showed up, waved his hand to the right and yelled, 'Protestants over there!' A similar-looking officer waved to the left at the 30 of us who hadn't moved, and yelled, 'Catholics over here!' I was getting lonely, standing by myself, when another officer appeared. Reading from a 3 by 5 card, he asked, 'Klein?'

"It was Chaplain Barnston (ne Bernstein) from Dallas and his first question was whether I was orthodox, conservative or reform. His eyes bugged out at my response and he shouted, 'Orthodox? What the hell are you doing in the Marines?' His next question was 'Where are you from?' and when I answered, 'Pennsylvania', his eyes bugged out further. 'You're NOT from NEW YORK?' We became instant friends."

For a quiet, friendly non-violent person like Simmy, learning to shoot a rifle was not easy. But it was wartime and the idea that it could

be used to shoot the enemy, made the job doable. Fortunately, he never had to shoot in combat. The only lasting result of the rifle training was a hearing loss that did not improve with age. To help us understand the role of the rifle in the life of a Marine, Simmy wrote:

"Before you graduate to the rifle range, you practice on 22's fitted with sights that are identical to those on the carbine and the Ml. Thirty guys side by side fire on the '1000 inch' range (30 meters) at 5"x7" targets with bull's eyes about an inch in diameter. For a short while the shooting is ferocious, then we all go to check our targets. Then the coaches look at them and scream and call us awful, terrible names because we are shooting so badly. Then we shoot again. (No wonder I can't hear so well.)

"Sometimes the rifle jams. This can mean a $10,000 reward. But the coaches are quick to point out that it's your beneficiary who gets it. That's why you must clean and care for and coddle your rifle, because it is your very best friend. And that's why, when my rifle jammed and I hit it and said, 'Come on, you SOB', my coach blanched in mock horror. His next order to me was explicit.

"All activity stopped as the entire platoon sat in a circle around me to hear as I nuzzled my rifle to my cheek: 'I'm really sorry I called you an SOB, sweetheart. You know I love you more than anything in the whole wide world, that you are the only one who might save my scrawny, undeserving ass some day. I promise never to call you an SOB again. Please forgive me, darlin'."

Another story from the rifle range highlights the less-than-accurate aim of the new Marines.

"We're on the 30 meter range. Thirty guys, each with rifles that fire 20 rounds of .22 ammunition, are about to be given the order to fire. A seagull with a death wish and the wing span of a B17 comes out of nowhere and proceeds to fly from right to left, directly in front of the 30 targets. The coach goes insane with joy. 'Kill that SOB!!' he screams. The battle of Bull Run could not have been louder. That seagull did not fly fast. He actually sauntered across the targets, flapping only as if in contempt. He must have been deaf because the noise should have given him a heart attack.

"That's what our coach had, as that enormous bird gently wheeled about and flew out to sea, dropping not so much as a feather."

They say that an army marches on its stomach, and it is certainly true that food plays a vital role in the lives of everyone. It is especially so when you are a kosher Marine in a decidedly non-kosher barracks. Simmy kept kashrus as best he could – in war-time one has to make some accommodations in order to keep up your fighting strength. He never ate pork; tried (sometimes with hilarious results) to fill up on foods that he liked and were kosher. Part of every Marine's training included tours of mess duty, known in the Army as KP, or kitchen patrol. Some outstanding memories include:

"'You! Yeah you! Bring in the @#* ice!' The mess sergeant points out the tongs and the loading platform behind the mess hall where a small glacier has been deposited. I hook into it and find it can move, lubricated by its rapid melting. Once inside, where do I put it? I don't want to appear stupid, so I slide it into the large step-in refrigerator. It fits, now that half of it is a river on the deck in back of the mess hall. The sarge comes sloshing back. 'Where's the @#* ice? I don't see no ice!' 'I put it in the fridge, sir.' 'In the fridge? Why in the world would you put ice in the fridge, you dumb @#*?'

"I don't recall how that ended, but soon he bellowed, 'Make coffee, you little bastard!' as he points to a seven-foot high cauldron of boiling water with a sight glass down the front, several spigots at the bottom and a big, heavy lid on top. There is a ladder leaning on the bulkhead near the cauldron, and a huge burlap bag of coffee beans on the deck nearby. I figure it's like making a huge glass of tea. I struggle up the ladder with the burlap bag on my shoulder, lift the heavy lid, and with my face diverted from the hot water, manage to lower the bag into it. Replacing the lid, I return to earth and wait for further orders.

"Soon, the sarge is staring bug-eyed at the sight glass, which shows flecks of burlap floating in a grayish brown. 'What da @#* did you do?' 'Made coffee, sir.' ' Did you throw the bagga coffee beans inna water?' 'Yessir.'

"'How @#* dumb can you get, you little@#*? Fish that bag outta there!' His problem is that he never waits around after giving an order.

I spot a pole with a hook. Maybe it's used to open high windows. Standing on the ladder while holding the cauldron lid and trying to hook the well-cooked burlap is no small feat, and the audience cheering me on is no help. I finally got it out.

"I don't remember the rest of that incident either, but the sarge was giving me another chance. 'You see this, you stupid bastard?' 'Yessir.' What the @#* is it?' ' Fly swatter, sir.' 'Good! Take this fly swatter. You know which end to hold?' 'Yessir.' 'I want you take this fly swatter and I want you to kill every @#* fly in the whole mess hall. Think you can handle this job?' 'Yessir!' And I did."

Some other food-related memories:

"On the chow line, we're given orders such as, 'Put two pear halves on every tray.' I ladle them out of stainless steel pot that's a foot in diameter, where they're floating in nectar. At last, something I can eat. I look around and sneak one in my mouth. I think I am getting away with it once, twice, but the mess sarge has been watching and has seen this action before. Quietly he asks, 'Boy, you think you can eat the rest of the pears in that pot?' Looks like three to five inches to the bottom. 'No sir.' 'Well, you're gonna. Every @#* one of them. Now.'

"It took several painful days to recover from that.

"Marine *shalshudis* consists of well, I'll call it baloney and cheese. So my instruction that Saturday afternoon was to flop three slices of each on every tray. No serving instruments slow us down. After a while the mess sergeant comes along. 'Are your hands clean, boy?' 'They are now, sir.' The sarge strolls on by.

"I love milk, but it was served only in the morning, a little in a bowl to go with cereal. When I was put on garbage detail, I devised a way to steal milk. Every time I thought I wasn't watched, I'd hide a full quart carton of milk in with a case of empties and cart them off to the dump, about 100 yards behind the mess hall. Standing knee deep in garbage, I was alone except for bugs the size of silver dollars scurrying all over. Looking around furtively, I'd chug the whole quart. Then, I'd waddle back to work.

"Breakfast is ready and a thousand hungry Marines are at the still-locked mess hall doors, waiting to pour in. We've been slaving since

0400 (4 a.m.) for this moment. There's the usual bacon and other *chazerei* and today, huge pans of 'scrambled' (reconstituted powdered) eggs are ready to be carried out to the chow lines to be ladled onto each moving tray. A couple of guys have enough energy left over for a little horsing around -- slapping each other, wrestling, no harm intended. One pushes the other against a soda-acid fire extinguisher on the bulkhead. It falls to the deck and activates. Wow, the hose comes alive, writhing and spitting out a yellowish foam, much of it getting on the eggs. The mess sergeant looks at his watch. Two minutes to go. With a shrug, he grabs a ladle and stirs the foam into the eggs. Breakfast is served."

The Marines attracted a wide variety of men from all walks of life and all parts of the country. Some had enlisted, some had been drafted. All of them tried to make the best of the situation they found themselves in. They worked hard and they sometimes played even harder. Simmy developed great respect for most of his fellow Marines and learned early on that they all had to look out for each other.

"Corporal Mazza was one of many drunk, snoring shapes on the floor of a truck with no tailgate. We'd managed to hitch a ride on it earlier that night, returning from liberty. Since they knew I don't drink, my duty had been to find and herd them back to base. As soon as they crawled up onto the back of the truck, they passed out. Somewhere near Yamasee, the road takes a wicked sharp turn to avoid the Atlantic Ocean. That's good. But then, centrifugal force kicks in. And so it did that night, Mazza leading the potential exit of several limp bodies, sliding out the back. I don't remember much more than being awake, because I always did worry about that curve. With one hand I gripped something attached to the truck and with the other Mazza, as he came by. He was heavy, and since my grip missed his center of gravity (his stomach), he pivoted, blocking the other bodies following him. He awoke, staring at the speeding road passing below his face, and sized up the situation. Later, he reported proudly, 'If Klahn hadn't a grabbed a handful of my ass I'd a bought the farm.'"

In addition to mess duty, which didn't really occur that often, Simmy's main job was with the motor transport unit. He got to drive

big trucks and work in the machine shop that kept the vehicles in repair. He worked hard, but as usual, found some fun there too.

"Adamovitch, a Slovak from Pittsburgh, was the best body and fender man I ever knew. He could transform a crumpled mass of sheet metal into a fender superior to anything coming out of Detroit. And fast. His other talent was drinking – neatly and at minimum cost. Sometimes he'd go on liberty to pick up a few extra bucks working at a body and fender shop in town. Or, he'd go just long enough to buy a quart of vodka. Then he'd slide his locker box to the side of his sack, put a towel on it and place a glass and the bottle on the towel. He'd strip to his skivvies, sit on his sack and commence drinking until he passed out – on his sack. No one ever disturbed him. When he came to, he'd struggle up, stumble to the head, make terrible noises, return and resume. This continued through the weekend until the bottle was empty. Adamovitch knew how to party.

"Another thing about him: He maintained the integrity of his trade. One day Captain Keith drove into his shop with the colonel's big blue... Packard, I think. It was dimpled here and there and needed a paint job, but you could see character in that big old sedan. What a scene. Keith always assumed the superior attitude that two bars on his shoulders gave him, but that day he was subservient to the colonel, sirring the hell out of him, while the patrician colonel smiled pleasantly about, fascinated by all the interesting things we serfs were doing to vehicles.

"'What color would like your car, sir?' asked Keith. 'Black,' interrupted Adamovitch, 'is the only color for that car.' Keith gave him a murderous look until the colonel responded, 'Yes, that sounds like a good idea.' Keith was all smiles again and led the colonel out. When he returned, Adamovitch said, 'He didn't say what color he wanted the wheels.' 'Black,' answered Keith, with renewed authority, clearly agitated that Private Adamovitch never said sir. 'Black?' the private came back, 'it'll look like a @#* hearse! I'm gonna paint 'em red.' ''RED!? The colonel wants a car, not a whorehouse! You paint those wheels BLACK!' As Admovitch watched the captain storm off, he mumbled, 'The heck with him. I'm going to paint 'em red.' And he did. And it was gorgeous.

"We couldn't wait to see the captain's face the day he led the colonel back to get his car. Keith saw the wheels two seconds before the colonel did, and almost stroked out. A maroon hue rose quickly from his collar, but then the colonel exclaimed, 'Red wheels! I'd never have thought of it! It's beautiful!' His heart resuming, the obsequious captain smiled indulgently and replied, 'We thought you'd like red, sir.'"

Sometimes the guys could forget for a while, in the relative security of Parris Island, that there was a war going on. And then an incident would bring it home to them full force. The Marines were particularly involved with fighting the Japanese – fortunately Simmy never actually had to do that, but he was often reminded of the possibility.

"Some of the 'salts' in my outfit had souvenirs from exotic places like Iwo Jima and Okinawa. A Samurai sword was amongst the most prized. There was an article in 'Leatherneck' magazine about them and how to remove the handle to see possible inscriptions on the tang. (That's not an orange drink. It's the metal end of the sword that is buried into the handle.) A buddy brought two swords to me for help in following the directions. To my surprise, it worked. The handle came off the first one and there was some official-looking Japanese inscription on the tang. We made a rubbing of it in case he'd find someone who could read it.

"The handle of the second one came off nicely too, and it had a similar inscription. But in addition, there were two crude X's scratched on the hard metal. We looked at it and at each other and were completely silent as I put the handle back on and returned it to him. We both felt sick. I must have washed my hands for at least five minutes. And we never, ever mentioned that incident to each other afterwards."

Simmy managed to stay out of trouble most of the time, but it was probably inevitable that he would somehow do the wrong thing occasionally – and get caught at it. For instance:

"The exact manner in which I displeased Sergeant Bing escapes me, but I found myself driving a cab-over-engine garbage truck one Sunday. Joining the party in the cab were two prisoners who loaded the garbage and one MP who guarded the prisoners. My job was to keep the truck moving enough to stay ahead of the smell, an impossible task in the broiling sun, but made somewhat easier when I located the gear

shift. As we drove behind mess halls, the prisoners would bully the boots into dumping the garbage into the truck, while they went inside to steal food. Somehow, the heat and stench brought a comradeship of sorts to this unlikely foursome, so that between pickups, they shared the loot with the MP and me. Picture the four of us eating a case of rapidly melting ice cream packs, passed to us by the prisoners. They didn't steal spoons.

"Piled high, the truck simply could not hold any more. The MP gave me directions to the dump, but concentrated more on licking a rivulet of chocolate (I think) running down his wrist. As a result, I made a sudden right turn, flipping a bit of the load. I had the right of way over the convertible waiting at a stop sign, but unfortunately the 2nd lieutenant who drove it had the top down to give his girlfriend a thrill. A pound or so of chicken guts was not part of his Sunday plans.

"Backing up slowly, we could see him standing by his car as hound dogs appeared from nowhere, attracted to the feast. As I pulled up to his red (as I recall) convertible, I was too scared to climb down from the cab and he was too enraged to order me to do so. Instead, he glared up murderously, and with a strained neck, red as a beet, screamed for my name, rank and serial number. The next part was tougher. The presence of his girlfriend forced him to communicate without the usual four-letter words. This only increased his skull pressure, already dangerously high from his posture. Finally, he roared, 'That was pooor driving.... that was poooor driving... from Ayy... to ZEEE.!'

"Behind me in the cab, one of the prisoners, slowly and with awe, delivered the last line of this story: 'He... didn't... leave...out ...a....@#* letter!' "

It was not always easy (perhaps never easy) to be an orthodox Jew on Parris Island in the Marine Corps. There were very few Jews there, and certainly no observant ones. Many of Simmy's comrades were from the deep South and had never met a Jew of any kind. But you never know whom you are going to meet.

"We're lined up, at the rifle range. Gunnnysarge Tatum quietly looks over his new charges for a moment, then roars, 'Anybody here a Jew?' Everyone knew I was the only one and, though they weren't

especially crazy about me, were as startled as I. None spoke up or even looked my way. I yelled, 'Here, sir!' and he came over. 'Yew a Jew?' 'Yessir!' 'Meet me behind the target there!' I could see some of the guys move their heads as I ran. I'll be damned, they actually worried about me. Not as worried as I was.

"Soon it was just the gunnysarge and me. 'Yew really a Jew?' he asked again, quietly, in an Alabama drawl. 'Yessir.' 'Then why don't I ever see you Friday nights at services?' 'It's a training day, sir.' Though I probably could have gotten permission to go, it would be misinterpreted by the other guys. Specially skuzzy duties were generally scheduled then. 'Sir, I've never seen you on Sunday mornings.' That's when I did go. 'Hell, that's my sack time', he grinned.

"We talked some more and he told me he's a self-converted Jew. After Protestant services one Sunday morning, he told the chaplain he'd enjoyed his sermon. The chaplain replied pompously, 'Well, I'm glad you liked it.' Tatum said that's it and the next week thought he'd try the Jewish services. He hit it off with Chaplain Barnston and declared himself a Jew from then on. He'd already been circumcised in the field in Guadalcanal with others, for sanitary reasons, and figured he was fully qualified. Was I going to tell him otherwise? He had nothing but questions about Judaism, but he'd hold them for a future visit to my boot barracks. When I returned to the guys, waiting in formation, they looked me over and decided everything was o.k., though they hadn't a clue as to what went on. That was probably the only time I detected a sincere concern for me on the part of those guys.

"Tatum strode into our barracks one Sunday. The first boot who saw him was so shocked to see someone with five stripes on his sleeve that it took a second for him to remember to yell, 'Ten HUH' and jumped up. All seventy-four of us snapped to attention as he continued in, said, 'Carry on,' and came straight to me. It is hard to describe this scene without explaining Marine hierarchy. A boot is as low as you can get. A PFC is highly respected. Our lives were in the hands of our Drill Instructors, who were corporals and we rarely saw anyone with even three stripes up close. In addition a gunny is respected more than anyone, and by everyone, including generals. He's a line NCO (non-

commissioned officer) who's always in the thick of battle and has such a high casualty rate, that it's awesome just to see one walking around alive. And here is a gunny with a friendly grin, asking to see my *tefillin*. With utmost respect he rewrapped the straps, determined to do it just so. It was the first of many chats we had, including after boot camp. We corresponded a bit between Cullman, Alabama and Yonkers, NY after we were both discharged, but I never saw him again.

"I didn't know it at the time, but while I was in boot camp he wrote to Mom and Pop more than once, telling them I was safe and sound and doing well in training and how great it was to meet a real Jew. He'll never know what a mitzvah he did. Actually, as a parent and grandparent, I now fully appreciate it myself. Mom and Pop cherished those letters beyond description. It was enough that they got independent confirmation that I was really alive. The compliments were a bonus."

Before joining the Marines, Simmy gave a lot of thought to how he would observe *Yiddishkeit.* He recalled,

"I had extended discussions with Poppo, mostly about keeping the laws of Shabbos and Kashruth, but about other *halachos* too. Regarding *tzitzis*, he said if I couldn't always wear them, to try at least to keep them with me, maybe in a pocket. This was a good suggestion, because one of many regulations is to wear what you're told, no more, no less ... from your underwear to your rifle.

"Another rule is to expect the unexpected. Typically, an order would be barked, 'Stand by to fall out in fifteen minutes!' Then ten seconds later, 'Fall out!' And it was so, as we grabbed a moment to do our laundry at wash racks that were near our encampment.

"I scooped up my soggy mess on that hot August day, ran a few hundred yards to our tents and dropped the pile on my sack. Then off we ran on another training exercise. Running is difficult because Parris Island is almost all deep sand and your feet churn it up, spraying it on yourself as you try to go forward.

"When we returned a few hours later I began to sort out the mess on my sack that was streaked with encrusted sand and soap. I couldn't find my *tzitzis*. I panicked. I threw everything in the air and pawed through the pile, but they were gone. Suddenly I was a seventeen-year-old kid far

from home, alone in a sea of strangers, whose connection to my entire family and past was shattered. The five other guys in my tent thought I was crazy as I ran out. Maybe I dropped them in my rush, hours earlier, and I tried to retrace my steps back to the wash racks.

"I slowed to a walk, scanning the sand churned up by hundreds of boots, for any sign of my *tzitzis*. And there they were, lying on a rare patch of grass, untrampled, clean and dried by the sun.

"A miracle? A subtle message?"

CHAPTER 3 – ON TO THE REAL WORLD

Finally, with the war over, Simmy was discharged from the Marines in September 1945. He came home to Yonkers, NY, where his parents had moved while he was in service. He found a job as a machinist at Bloomfield's shop, where he put his training to work. He figured if he worked hard and was lucky, he might eventually earn $75 a week. What riches that would be!

And that Rosh Hashanah, at the Ohab Zedek Shul on Prospect Street, he met me, Nancy Isaacs. I was only sixteen years old and thought Simmy, a veteran, must be at least six or seven years older. We got to know each other a bit at weekly classes for singles at Ohab Zedek and I eventually learned, to my joy, that he was just nineteen. We started "going out" and gradually my parents realized that it looked serious. My father, who was Dean of Yeshiva College, was concerned that Simmy had not attended college and didn't seem interested in doing so. Ever the problem-solver, he initiated a new program at Yeshiva College, aimed at returning veterans who might not have the usual pre-requisites. Simmy, having graduated from a technical program in high school, certainly fit the category. He spent the summer brushing up on his Hebrew so he could pass a foreign language exam requirement and sure enough! was accepted into Yeshiva. Yes, there were a few other veterans who joined him there. It was at Yeshiva that his interest in and talent for math were

re-awakened and that became his major and the focus of his Master's degree.

We might have dated for the next twenty years if the Korean War had not intervened – it's an ill wind that blows no good. Simmy was in the Marine Reserves and was quickly called to active duty. Not wanting to leave me at home to the mercies of unknown suitors, Simmy proposed – and I accepted. With a diamond ring firmly on my finger he was ready to march off. He was to report to the Brooklyn Navy Yard the day after Yom Kipper, 1950. How he did *daven* all day – I did too. The next morning, a Friday, off he went to Brooklyn and my parents took me to their summer home for the weekend to distract me. There was no phone there and so it was not until Sunday night that I got the call from Simmy – he had been rejected, due to poor eyesight. (Did *davening* in the darkest corner of the Shul have anything to do with it?) His weekend had been a nightmare – he was released from the Navy Yard just before Shabbos and walked out into a driving rain, with no place to go. Wandering down Ocean Parkway, soaked to the skin, he encountered some men going to Shul, who took pity on him and sheltered him over Shabbos.

And so, the following June we were married at the Ohab Zedek Synagogue in New York, where my grandfather had been rabbi. We took off for Atlantic City, where the entire week cost us all of $100. Simmy had just finished Yeshiva College and should have been at the graduation. However, as my father, Dean Isaacs, solemnly announced at the exercises, "Sidney Klein is not with us today. He is on his honeymoon – with my daughter."

He started work at the Columbia University Engineering Center as an "engineering mechanician". There had never been such a title before and never since – but they came up with that to avoid problems with the union. The job started in September, just before the High Holidays. So for the entire first month, Simmy never worked a full week- Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Succoth – all were on week-days that year. He was not paid for those days and brought home several paychecks of $13! Finally, after Succoth, his boss confronted him, " I am just trying

to understand – you are working here part-time?" Simmy assured him that next week would be full-time.

He had a wonderful time at Columbia, making great friends and enjoying the work. One incident that stands out concerned the building they were in. It had been a milk bottling plant before the University took it over. So the boss asked Simmy to cut down a lot of overhead pipes they did not need. He went to work with enthusiasm and soon had the main pipe severed. That was when he realized that it had been an ammonia pipe – the fumes nearly overcame him and everyone else. Thinking quickly, he led the march out of the building, shouting, "Who's the stupid @#** who cut that pipe?"

The next two years were busy – we bought a house for the vast sum of $8500. It had four bedrooms and everyone wondered why we needed such a big house. Eventually we did fill it up with four children. Meanwhile, I finished Barnard College and Simmy earned his Master's at Hunter College. Our first son, Daniel, was born in 1953, followed two years later by twins, David and Jonathan. (No one believed Simmy when he said we had twins – he was known as such a joker). Finally in 1959 we had a daughter, Abigail.

The years flew by. We moved to a bigger house. The boys started school at the Yonkers Yeshiva, where we quickly became very active in trying to keep it alive. Finally, we saw it was a losing battle and transferred the children to public school. This meant that we had to put a greater effort into teaching *Yiddishkeit*. And Simmy was a wonderful teacher. From the time the boys were two years old, he told them Bible stories, with his own special twist.

One memorable tale concerned Avraham and how he was so hospitable to three strangers, even though he had just been circumcised. Or as Simmy put it, he had just had a minor operation. Some time later, three-year-old Danny was in Shul with Simmy and our Rabbi was delivering one of his thundering sermons. He was talking about Avraham and he roared, "He had just had a major operation!" Little Danny took his thumb out of his mouth and piped up clear as a bell, "It was a minor opewation."

As soon as the boys were old enough to walk to Shul, Simmy made it a special occasion, telling them stories on the 15-minute trip (it seemed much longer to the boys). They especially enjoyed his "future life" stories, about them as grownups. One classic was a story of how Abby would cure a herd of "enchanted" cows (in the original version, they were suffering from Eurasian crud), by kissing each of them on the nose, just above the wet part. One day, as they headed into a dicey neighborhood near Shul, there was a young man walking several paces ahead of them, carrying a rather large knife. The storytelling continued as usual all the way to Shul, but later Simmy observed to the boys, "Did you notice how my story got more and more incoherent as we went along?" Probably not – Daddy was always funny.

Over the years, Simmy held a number of different jobs. After Columbia he worked for Freed Electronics. This was a company on Canal and Hudson Streets in New York, a commute by bus and subway of over an hour. But he made sure that he learned a lot and had some fun too. One day he decided to do something about the lack of air-conditioning in his cubicle. He noticed that the room next to his was nice and cold. So he got in to work early the next day and diverted the pipes to send cool air into his space. When the rest of the staff came in, Simmy was as perplexed as anyone about how that room was warmer than usual. His big success at Freed was inventing an electronic flare and tracking mechanism that could be used to find downed planes in the ocean. He was able to fit the entire works into a sardine can and it actually worked. Got him some publicity too.

When Freed moved out to Long Island, which would have meant driving both ways with the sun in his eyes, Simmy saw it was time to move on. He found a job as head of mechanical engineering at Simmonds Precision Products. This was in Tarrytown, NY, a mere twenty minutes up the road, a big difference from the over an hour subway commute he was used to. Here he quickly learned that you never admit to not knowing something. When Mr. Simmonds asked him one day if he knew what LOX was, he stifled the impulse to reply, "It's great on a bagel with cream cheese" and instead just said yes. Great! "There is a conference on LOX in Washington tomorrow and you will

represent Simmonds." This gave Simmy a couple of hours to investigate (and this was before you could just log onto a computer) and find out that LOX was liquid oxygen. Much to his amazement, he soon realized that of the group assembled at the Pentagon to discuss LOX, he knew more than anyone else.

One morning, the big boss, Mr. Simmonds, summoned Simmy to his office. "I need you to go to England tomorrow morning. You have a ticket on the 10 a.m. flight." That sounded good – so Simmy called me and said, "Run over to the bank and get my passport out of the safe-deposit box – I'm going to England tomorrow."

"Fine," I replied. "There's just time to get there before they close at three o'clock." And then I had another thought. "Uh,oh. Today is Washington's Birthday – the bank is closed." What to do? After a few frantic minutes, Simmy came up with a plan. The manager of our bank was a neighbor. He called him and begged for help. Mr. O'Boyle was ready for action. "Be at the bank before eight a.m. and I'll get you your passport." Our hero.

Bright and early the next day, Simmy was at the bank. Mr. O'Boyle let him in and escorted him downstairs to the vault. A slight problem – the lock to the vault is on a timer and cannot be opened until eight a.m. Simmy and Mr. O'Boyle sat and chewed their fingers until the magic moment. Finally the vast door opened and Simmy gave Mr. O'Boyle his key, retrieved our box and removed his passport. Success. Now, what to do with the key? He didn't want to take it to England, so he thrust it at poor Mr. O'Boyle, who protested that he was not allowed to have that key. "Call my wife, she'll come to pick it up" shouted Simmy as he sprinted to the door. It was now about 8:15 a.m. and the Simmonds limo, complete with uniformed chauffeur, was parked at the curb, motor running. Simmy dashed out, jumped in the car and they roared off to the airport. Where were the police? How come nobody shouted, "Stop, thief"?

Anyway, a few minutes later I got a frantic call from poor Mr. O'Boyle. "Get right over here and take that key!" He was not very happy when I told him I had to get all the children dressed first, so it

would be a little while. But we all got through the incident with no one being arrested.

CHAPTER 4 – AROUND THE WORLD

Simmy traveled a lot for Simmonds. The aircraft industry was headquartered in the U.S., England, France, Germany and Holland. Simmy already spoke French and German fairly fluently, and added a smattering of Dutch. He made wonderful friends in Holland, getting himself "adopted" by a family. They were not Jewish, but quickly learned to accommodate the strange practices of an Orthodox Jew. They bought food from the kosher grocery, had candles ready to light on Friday night and walked him to Shul on Shabbos.

The family included twins – boy and girl – who were born when Simmy first went there and he watched them grow up until they were teenagers. He taught them some *Zemiros*, which they enthusiastically sang with him. This led to a great Shabbos in Yonkers – we invited the boy, Bas, to spend a few weeks with us when he was about thirteen. We took him to Shul on Shabbos and settled him with a *Siddur* that had a Dutch translation. Everyone assumed he was Jewish, of course. Simmy made it a point to introduce him after services, as a fine Dutch boy. The fun came in the afternoon at *Seudat Shelishit*. When it came time to sing, Simmy turned to Bas and asked, "What shall we sing?" And Bas casually replied, " How about *Mizmor l'Dovid*?" "Fine", says Simmy. "Which tune?"

Simmy believed in traveling light and could go off for two weeks with one small suitcase. He was not a shopper and rarely brought back anything bigger than some jewelry or a book. He was therefore incensed

when Mr. Simmonds asked him to pick up some monogrammed shirts and an overcoat he had ordered in London. He didn't have nerve enough to say no, but he had a plan. He picked up the boxes, took them through customs and delivered them to a very pleased Mr. Simmonds – along with the bill for customs charges. This did not make Mr. S. very happy. He had expected Simmy to claim the clothing as his own and avoid payment. Well, this would not have been truthful, would it? So he grudgingly paid the bill and never asked Simmy to pick up anything again. Mission accomplished.

I mentioned that Simmy liked to travel light. One trip was lighter than usual – he neglected to take his wallet. This meant he had no money, no driver's license, no credit cards. And he was going to Los Angeles. A challenge. He landed in L.A. and found a free shuttle bus to his hotel. The hotel room was reserved in his name – no problem. What to do about food? It was early in the afternoon, so he went to lounge at the pool. There he got into conversation with some lovely people, who invited him to join them for dinner. The next day, his buddy from Simmonds arrived and the rest of the trip went smoothly.

While at Simmonds, Simmy worked on designing fuel gauges for airplanes. These are installed in the wings with probes to measure the level of fuel. Since a plane in flight does not stay on an even keel, it is a challenge to place the probes accurately to allow for slosh. The mathematical calculations could take months. But Simmy had an idea. Could the then-new computer do the job? Yes, indeed. In those days, using a computer was not a simple matter of sitting down at your desk-top and typing away. It meant putting your program onto IBM punch-cards (and praying you didn't make a mistake), taking the cards to the Service Bureau in Manhattan and buying time on the room-sized computer at $600 an hour. But it worked. In a matter of hours the optimal placing of the probes was done. (Of course Simmy was a little nervous whenever he flew after that on one of "his" planes!) As far as we know, Simmy was the first to use computers for this type of calculation. It is so amazing that the little PC on my desk today is probably 100 times more powerful than that big IBM computer of the 1960's.

When it became apparent that vice-president of engineering was as far as he could go at Simmonds, Simmy started looking for greener pastures. An assortment of jobs followed, including QED, which he founded with a friend and named for the proof at the conclusion of a math problem. Eventually he became a consultant in the engineering field, including a stint working as the US representative of MBB, the German company. Whenever anyone asked what that stood for, we always said, "You don't want to know," because even we still winced at the words "Messerschmidt/Boelkow /Blohm". The very name conjured up visions of German Messerschmidts flying around dropping bombs during World War II. But at MBB, relations were very cordial and part of his work included projects with Israel. Simmy had his office in the Pan Am building near Grand Central Station in New York and all our children spent some time working there.

CHAPTER 5 – THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF CONSULTING

Eventually, that too came to an end and it was time to set up shop as a consultant out of our house. We fitted up the third floor as an office and Simmy now had the shortest commute of his career. We installed an intercom so I wouldn't have to shout up the stairs to him. That got off to a rocky start. We bought an intercom and duly installed it in the kitchen and the office. We checked that it worked and I went out shopping. When I returned, I thought "This is great. I'll just call on the intercom to tell Simmy I'm home." So I beeped him and sure enough a voice answered. But it was a female voice. I tried again. The same voice asked, "Who is it?" This is strange – either he's got a guest up there or something terrible has happened to him. At that point, Simmy came downstairs, in answer to my call, I thought. No, he had turned off the intercom because he was coming down. Then who was talking to me? It finally turned out that neighbors behind us had just installed the same intercom because they had a new baby. The mother heard my voice and was utterly terrified that there was a stranger after her baby. We had to get a different intercom, which is still working today.

Through his brother, Leo, Simmy was introduced to Marvin Zuckerman, a jeweler who was interested in making a gem-polishing machine that would be computerized and therefore fast and of course profitable. Simmy perfected the machine and was in contact with fascinating people from all over the world who were interested in it.

He made many trips to the heart of the gem world, Bangkok. He once asked me to go with him, so I asked what it was like there. He replied off-handedly, "It's about 100 degrees, 100 percent humidity and it smells terrible." For that I should sit on a plane for over 20 hours? No, thanks. In May of 1989 he wrote down some of his experiences with Gem Robotics:

"The latest regarding Gem Robotics: A set of faceting and polishing machines is up and cutting in Bangkok. As long as the rough is available, they get 40 cents (US) a finished stone and can make a living. The rough can come from anywhere in the world by mail from people who've acquired it one way or another, such as over the border at night from Burma. (I saw lots of lapis lazuli in Germany that came from Afghanistan. When I asked if it wasn't hard to get because of the war, it got a big laugh .) The guy from Oregon who bought an installation for use in the boondocks of India is going to Bangkok to get additional instructions. Last I heard, they're either building a water wheel or hooking up an extension cord from Calcutta. A guy from Sri Lanka whose name is Anil Ratwatte (no kidding) is also going to Bangkok prior to a purchase. He's been talking for a year now about buying. Things like murders, riots and such in Colombo seem to be interfering with his ability to get to the bank. Then there is this hayseed who talks to me from his sapphire mine in Montana who wants to set up there, especially because the State will pick up half the tab. Seems there are about four sapphire mines in Montana. Some of it even shines. You see, there's sapphire and there's sapphire. I get the impression that so far, the only real money made from those mines is by people who buy and sell the mines to each other.

"Oh, then there's the guy named Sustendal in Antwerp (one of the few goyim in Antwerp) who was hot for the machines and finally found a partner with money. (I hope he's a goy too, as you will soon see.) The agreement was to pay half now, half in a year. That was a couple of months ago. Now, Sustendal says his partnership is broken ('eet ees definitely divorce'), the other guy is a crook (a redundancy - he deals in stones) and wouldn't Marvin like to become his partner? Marvin says he already IS his partner; he still owed him for half the cost of the

machines. Meanwhile Kurt (Marvin's employee from Germany) is in Bangkok, showing customers and prospective ones how the machines work, looking for rough to cut at 40 cents and looking for additional engineering work to sustain himself. He made a connection with a guy who wants him to design an automated machine to make toothpicks. Talked to Kurt last night -- he says he lives in fear of breathing fresh air, should any accidentally waft his way. It could kill him. He can't stand the Thai food and has been living on cheese sandwiches. I asked him about all the wonderful Thai fruit, like durian – that's the stuff everyone in the Far East goes nuts over, saying it smells like an open sewer but tastes wonderful. I finally got up the guts to try it. That is an apt expression. When the locals say sewer, they don't mean your namby-pamby American sewer. I made a judgment call and decided not make a *bracha*. It TASTES like a sewer too. The only appropriate *bracha* would have been "*Dayan Ha'Emes*" – (which is usually said on hearing of a death). Kurt says any time he craves durian he saves time and money by just eating out of the toilet, instead of going to the fruit market. By the way, there are no check-out counters in these markets. We are talking sidewalk. Well, that's where people walk when it's not raining. Otherwise, it's where you bathe the kids."

I have no idea if the gem-cutting machines are still running. We kind of lost touch after a while. But there was always something new on the horizon. Through friends in Israel we heard about a small company that had perfected a drug-detecting system. They wanted to bring it to the U.S. and market it to the general public. Simmy plunged in with his usual enthusiasm.

This meant a lot of research – first to find out if anyone else was doing this (no), what to call the product, what to call the company, where to get packaging, how to launch the sales, etc. etc. Things gradually fell into place – the company would be Sher-Test (based on the name of the firm in California that had been marketing a commercial version), the product would be Drug Alert and he located vendors for packaging, labeling, etc.

The idea was terrific. There were sprays to detect the presence of minute quantities of marijuana, cocaine or heroin. A parent, for

instance, could spray a child's desk or book bag, check for a color change and know immediately if drugs were present. The kit could also be used by schools, police departments and the Coast Guard. Yes. a great idea! The press and media thought so too and as soon as the new office was up and running, we were besieged with reporters, literally from around the world. Newspapers like the New York Daily News ran a big article. NBC, CBS and ABC television networks all sent camera crews and reporters to do interviews. The phone was ringing so much that I was pressed into service to help the young secretary we had hired. There were TV appearances (complete with limo service door-to-door), there were trips around the country and radio interviews from California to Australia and everywhere in between. We supervised the making of a TV commercial, which concluded with an 800 number for people to order the kits. It was a heady time.

But – there were a few things we had not counted on. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) was violently opposed to the whole concept. They managed to pop up at a lot of interviews to protest that Drug Alert was an invasion of children's privacy. No matter how many times or in how many ways Simmy assured them and the world that, on the contrary, it was a parent's duty to protect their children in whatever way was necessary, the damage was done. The other big problem was denial. "My kid can't be on drugs." The standing joke in drug-prevention circles is "De Nile is not just a river in Egypt." Too true. In fact one woman called to ask if there could be false positive results from the spray. Not likely, Simmy told her. "Well", she continued, "I tested my son's room a month ago and found drugs. And he promised he would never do it again. And today I checked his waste basket and the test was positive. It must be a mistake."

Within a year we realized that the home market for drug testing was not going to succeed. We did better with police departments and the Coast Guard. But one highlight of the whole Drug Alert project was the time we saved the Super Bowl. It was the Friday before the big game in Miami and Simmy had a meeting in Manhattan, leaving no one in the office. I got a call at home from the FBI in Miami. Trying to sound as if such calls were totally routine in my life, I asked what I

could do for them. They wanted the complete drug testing kit, as well as our explosives detecting spray and they wanted it NOW. I assured them the package would be shipped forthwith. How? I had no idea.

Fortunately, Simmy had mentioned the name of the hotel where he would be meeting. I quickly called there and, praying silently, asked if they had a coffee shop. Yes. Would they please page Sidney Klein? After a moment – a miracle! Simmy picked up the phone. He gave me instructions as to where to find everything in the office and how to Fedex it to Miami. I dropped what I had been doing, raced over to the office, found the kits, packed them up and called Fedex. To save time I told them to pick it up at our house – and sped back there. As I entered the door, the phone was ringing. The FBI wanted to know if the package was on the way. At that moment the doorbell rang – it was Fedex. I handed them the package, while assuring the FBI that it was on the way. Those Fedex guys are speedy. And so the Super Bowl went off without a hitch. We eventually closed down the operation, but I still have videos and tapes to prove that it all happened.

Simmy moved his base back to our third floor and continued to do consulting on various projects. From time to time he wrote down his thoughts on a wide variety of subjects – from his travels to his work to his learning and everything in between. He especially chronicled his relationships with his grandchildren. But more of that later.

In 1983 David and Leah made *Aliyah* to Israel and settled in Rehovot. For some reason, which I don't recall now, there was money deposited to our account that we were supposed to use for them. It was a crazy story, and Simmy chose to report it to David and Leah in the form of a letter gently spoofing the form of letters we have seen. And so it went like this:

"Dear Dooit (may his candle shine and he should live and be well for a minimum of 120 years, amen) and Leah (may she have a candle of equal lumens and live and be well for 120 years at least, amen),

"Resorting to the mail (may the service have speedy and complete recovery) is discouraging because we haven't gotten a report as yet of any of our mail getting to either of your Rehovot addresses. Lest you think Israel (may it grow and prosper and be rid of its enemies from within

and without speedily and in our days) has a monopoly on foul-ups, let me tell you of the odyssey of the $7000 check. It went from you (may both your candles shine and illuminate each other in good health for 120 years) to Leah's (may she live and be well a real long time – 120 years at the least) parents (may they live and be well and enjoy lots of *nachas* from their children and grandchildren, those here and those yet to arrive) who deposited it to our account in the Brooklyn branch of our bank at our request. Then we wrote a check or two, drawing on it. Then we were told by our bank that your check had (the evil eye should have no dominion over us) bounced. Thus began a trace of the original $7000 from Vanguard, wired to Anchor Savings via Chemical Bank because Anchor has no wire service and Chemical Bank is their correspondent. It got to the central Anchor Bank (it should crumble like the walls of Jericho) where they replied to Vanguard's inquiry that it arrived. But then a 'Rich' (may he be covered with boils and know no joy for three years) didn't know what to do with it and so kept his thumb in his bum (where it should remain) and the $7000 on his desk from October 7 to 31, until the manager of your Anchor Branch, Mr. Facibene, called at my prodding.

"Meanwhile, our checks are (without the evil eye) bouncing but at least they call to find out what's wrong. 'Rich' (may his name be blotted out) promises to send Facibene (the jury is still out on him) the $7000 credit advice and our bank agrees to accept your (may you both be well and happy and live at least 120 years in continuous good health) check again for deposit, even though it can hardly be recognized because of what it's been through. All of Israel's enemies and Rich should be so stamped, punctured, stained and bent.

"An hour ago, Facibene called to say he received the credit advice from Rich (may his name and memory be blotted out), got it into your (may you both be blessed with happiness and prosperity for 120 years at the very least) account in time to honor the check we redeposited; and also wrote a letter of apology to our bank, clearing our name and accepting all the fault for the foul-up.

"We got Leah's (may she live and be well and have an easy delivery of a healthy and beautiful child) letter which we enjoyed very much.

Regarding the carpet and VTR, you (may you both be well and happy for at least 120 years) shouldn't have been surprised at what the agent said. Yossi asked Dooit (may his candle shine) categorically if he (may his candle shine) ever intended to import either commodity for yourselves (may you both grow old together gracefully and in good health and happiness for 120 years at least) and the answer was 'no'. By the way, I've been contacted by other Israelis asking if you (may you both be granted peace and happiness, together with all of Israel and live in good health for, oh, at least 120 years) ever intend to import...then there's a long list. The answer is always 'Yes!' and I don't give them your (may you have beautiful children and live in good health to see them grow in Torah) address.

"Right now Mommy (may she continue to be healthy, cheerful and patient for 120 years at least) is in Toronto at the convention of Women's Branch (I don't know which way to go on that one) and Frank (the altered one) –*ed. Note: the cat* – and I are taking care of the house. We both have plenty of food. In addition, Bia (she should continue to be the happy mother of beautiful children and be healthy and prosperous for 120 years at the very least) and Danny (may his candle shine and light the way of Torah for his children and grandchildren in good healthy happiness for 120 years at least, amen) and Steve (may his candle shine and highlight his handsome features in good health and happiness for at least 120 years and may he afford to support his family (may they live and be well) and Abby (may she live and give birth easily to a healthy, beautiful child and know only *nachas* from it and all the siblings to follow, please G-d, and brush all their curly heads for 120 years at least, in good health and happiness) and Mema (she should live in good health and happiness for at least 120 years and inherit the gates of all her fellow coop tenants) are feeding me well. Kindest regards, Daddy."

CHAPTER 6 – VISITING EUROPE

Traveling all over the world as an Orthodox Jew led to many adventures – Simmy always managed to make even the unpleasant experiences sound exciting. He never missed an opportunity to educate and inform his overseas friends, thereby bringing the light of Yiddishkeit to far corners of the earth. One country that was a challenge was Germany. Even though he spoke German quite well (thanks to intensive lessons from Berlitz) he hesitated to go there, wondering how the people would react and how he would feel in the land that his parents had fled and that he and his brother and fought against not that many years ago. He conquered his fears and eventually made many business trips to Germany, cultivated some good friends and we even hosted some of them in our home. In 1987 he wrote of one of his trips:

"Recently I was in Germany on business and had to stay for Shabbos before traveling on. So I arranged to be in nearby Frankfort where kosher food and a shul were available.

"The train arrived at the Hauptbanhof 8 minutes late. Ha! It was a 12-mark taxi ride to the Pelikan, a do-it-yourself hotel. Herr Slama, the owner: 'Here's the key to your room and here's the key to the front door. I leave at eleven. The shul is around the corner. The kosher butcher is 150 meters that way. I'm not Jewish, but weekends we have mostly Jewish guests. It's slow now. Everyone's on vacation. If you're back before eleven I'll see you. Otherwise, see you Sunday. Someone will be here tomorrow. Tchuess.'

"It's Friday noon, my last chance to stock up. Butcher shop is right out of Washington Heights. Or vice versa. 200 grams of fancy-looking cold cuts and some canned 'Lyonerworst', whatever that is, just in case. ('Just in case' happened later, in Taipei.) No time to socialize with the proprietor. He's about to close up. I'll see him again in shul, not in his store. Open Sunday? Shocked look. Sontag? Aber! Got fruit and bread next door, then back to the Pelikan. 'You can keep your food in the fridge here behind the bar. Take what you want to drink. We'll settle up when you leave. What? Sure my English is good. I used to run the Officer's Club for the 92nd Infantry just outside of Mainz.' And before that, Herr Slama?

"The beautifully built, domed structure contains the shul, school, Bes Midrash, mikveh and some apartments. Comfortable seating for more than 1000 or so Jews out of 6000 in town that are likely ever to enter, daily or yearly. Spaced about a meter apart all around the walls of the shul hang the brass Shabbos oil menorahs of the 1700s and 1800s. What a contrast to the otherwise modern décor. Are they the only survivors? The minyan gathers. From Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia. Where are the German Jews? 'They went to Washington Heights. A group comes usually every year to visit the graves.' A guy in his twenties recently arrived from Munkacz – now Mukchevo – and stepped right out of a Vishniac photo. I don't believe it. Where did he park his time capsule?

"Good Shabbos, good Shabbos. We've finished davening. Go to the Bes Midrash? Why: To make a minyan there. The *shtibel* davens later. Nineteen people, two minyanim. Nothing changes. The man in the *shtraimel* with a beard like Papo's spots me. 'Where are you staying?eating? Tomorrow you'll eat with me. Bronze plaques everywhere… 'In memory of those slaughtered..1933 to 1945'. I've seen too many similar signs, but here it is creepy.

"Since the 1100s Jews have had reasons to put up such plaques in this town. Decimated, then returned, built up, and decimated again. The city of Samson Raphael Hirsch, the great-great-great-great grandfather of my grandchildren. He built a fortress of Orthodox Judaism here and it's been exported all over the world. *Sh'ar Yashuv.* A remnant has

returned once more. But a mixed multitude. The word is that the Red Light District is run by Israelis. How has the faithful city become a harlot.

"Shabbos morning. The score is 50 – 30, favor of the Ashkenazi minyan. How is it possible that, all over the world, the same herring is served at *Kiddush* and *Shalashudis*?

"Sunday morning minyan. Time for photos and a shmoos with new-found friends. 'Too bad you don't have time to see the new Jewish Community Center. Beautiful. Cost 8 million. One and a half million was for the bulletproof windows and other security measures.'

"Packing. Can't shake the feeling that an oboe is playing in the background somewhere. Can't wait to get on that plane. Turn up the Armed Forces Radio, playing the top 40. 'This is Staff Sergeant Williams. Kein Angst, Baby. Bleib Cool.' Thanks, sarge.

"Herr Slama helped me into the taxi. I rolled down the window, waved and said, 'Tchuess!' He smiled and replied, 'Shalom!'"

Simmy spent a lot of time in Idar Oberstein, half-way between Frankfort and Luxembourg, in his Gem Robotics years. Idar is known for its natural deposits of precious and semi-precious gemstones, which are mined and polished there. He describes a meeting with a local resident:

"'See? There's a trail through the woods between Tiefenstein and Idar. I do it every day. Much healthier walk than along the main road with all the auto exhaust.'

"Danke sehr.

"I'm looking forward to this Shabbos afternoon's walk. But how do I get to the trail? After a hundred meters or so on the main road I ask directions.

"'Come through my property. I'll go with you a little.' Friendly guy. And not everyone has a peacock in his back yard.

"He opens the gate between his yard and the trail. 'Do you live near here?' 'No, in Yonkers. New York.' 'Ah, an American.'

"Pause.

"'I was in America for three years.' 'Really? When?' 'From 1943 to '46'.

"Then, just in case I'm slow, he added, 'Prisoner of war.' I flashed my best smile. 'Hope we didn't treat you too badly.' We both laughed.

"'No, no. Drove a tank in North Africa...drafted at 17, sent to Poland for basic training..awful..never thought I'd see my family again. Those were terrible days.'

"'You're telling me. Lost most of my relatives here. I'm a Jew.'

"His friendly manner got even friendlier. 'My grandmother was a Jew. That made my mother half a Jew and me, a quarter Jew. We all had to fill out a detailed history, you know, and that caused me lots of trouble. Till I got assigned to Rommel. He chucked all that paper. Said it was a lot of crap. Captured near Tobruk. I was only 19 when I got to America. Still, I thought, if Hitler would spend just three days in America he'd give up. What a country. Picked apples in Michigan, cut tobacco in Kentucky, and in Texas...bin ich einen Cotton Picker geworden.'

"We both laughed again and finally exchanged names while passing wild berry bushes along the path cushioned with multicolored leaves, the nearby brook rushing on ahead of us. 'Tell me, Herr Mueller, how did your grandmother fare?' 'She was lucky. Died before the real trouble began. It wasn't so bad in this town, actually. Lots of foreign businessmen came through here and we had a better view of what was brewing. Convinced a Jewish family friend to leave while he could. Drove him to the Swiss border. Can you imagine? We got him on the phone after the war. 'Come on back, Franz. All your stuff is waiting for you.' Oh, oh, my wife will be wondering where I've gone. Please stop in on your way back Wiedersehen!'

"I watched him return. Good Shabbos, Herr Mueller. Funny, you don't look like a 100 percent, cotton pickin' Jew."

In another report about Idar Oberstein, in 1987, Simmy described the hotel he often stayed in there, the Handelshof in Tiefenstein ("just a stein's throw from Idar"):

"I had a double room at the Handelshof because I wanted the bathtub. Beds take up most of the space. And the beds aren't big. There was a coat hook next to the mirror where I could hang my salami. I marked it cleverly to check if the maid took any. The way it looks, I'm

not surprised she stayed away from it. I've got one like it hanging in our kitchen that Chaim likes to nosh at. 'It tastes good but it wooks gwoss'. The kid speaks the truth. It's wrinkled like Grandma Moses and is hard as a Louisville Slugger.

"Dieter and Sonya own the hotel. I arrived in the AM on an overnight flight and Sonya just gave me the room key and told me to rest. I can check in later. (Never did. But I paid anyway.) That evening Dieter brought up a TV by Sonya's instructions. Great, but where'll we put it? Shoved the small fridge under the small table where I had already put my valise and propped the TV on the small stool. Glad I had it. Was able to see Miami Vice in German with unforgettable lines like 'Du bist in tief Schwierigkeiten, Momma.' (You're in big trouble, Momma). And 'Du tust das einmahl mehr und ich mache von dir Hackfleisch' (You do that once more and I'll make you chopmeat).

"Downstairs there's a dining room and a 'Stub'. That's another dining room, not as fancy, where you can drink your meals, play cards or just sit and write, like I'm doing. There's also a game that's played with three dice in a cup. Never did figure out the rules, but if you roll three ones, everyone shouts, 'Ach! Ein Chicago!' and that's good. No money. You play with cardboard coasters and the one with the most coasters at the end of the game is the loser. He buys the drinks. Another game: Each player lifts the dice cup off a coaster just enough to see what he's got, announces it, replaces the cup and hands everything to the next player. A gentlemen's game. Except if he's challenged and it's not what he said. I couldn't figure that one out either.

"Last night Kurt came running. "'Sidt! Komm ins Kueche! Siehe was Dieter macht!' (Come in the kitchen. See what Dieter is making). There's Dieter with a half full glass of water floating in the bar sink. The waitresses, Dagmar and Bobsie, are running back and forth with orders while Dieter, Kurt, Karl and I take turns adding water to the floating glass. It floats lower and lower until there is an incredible meniscus around the lip. Sonya comes by, sighs and says, 'In jeder Man schtickt ein klienes Kind' (In every man there's a little child). What does she know from fun? Here's an activity I can get into. The loser, of course,

sends the glass to the bottom. There's no name for this game, so I called it, 'Sink the Bismarck'.

"Kurt's wife, Rita, raises Boxers. There's a one-sided love affair between me and their four, each about 30 kilos. And by the time I think of what to say to them (in the informal form) it's too late. First, opening the door inwards means pushing 120 kilos of writhing dog. We won't even discuss the greetings once inside. They jump faster than I can say 'runter' and I get schnauffed from every angle. Sitting at the table, two push my feet, one has his/her head in my lap and the fourth's looking for a spot not covered. They don't mind if I step on an occasional ear. They realize it's crowded. When I sit on the couch, they become bookends against me. If I escape to the bathroom, guess who's waiting for me outside the door, scratching and schnauffing. They're so friendly. And so very ugly.

"Inez shows off when I go to see her eight puppies. She licks them in the most awful places with her doormat-sized tongue and otherwise displays maternal affection. Then when I leave so does she. Counted six pups the next day. Inez is low on milk, so a German shepherd down the road who only had two pups happily accepted two more. The pups are all sold, but one. They're keeping him and named him Chironimo."

In 1992 Simmy made a "heritage" trip to Eastern Europe and recorded his impressions. As he pointed out "if you're looking for tips on where to stay and what to see in these places, get Fodor's Travel Guide. This is more a record of what my kishkes saw."

"Eastern Europe is vastly different from the West. Comparing notes with people who have been there recently, we all have the same, one-word summary – gray. The heat wave during my travels was already six weeks old and helped set the stage for the general depression I felt. But it wasn't only the heat. The streets, buildings, trams, trains, people … all were rundown, gritty, neglected, dejected. Gray. Sure, kids are kids anywhere and street hawkers hustle and some new building is going on. And in Prague you see the tempo of a city stirring in freedom. But in Slovakia, away from the shopping bustle downtown, the people don't walk. They trudge. As if to say, 'Oh, hell. I have to go to work. Oh, hell. I have to go home.' The prisoners in this workers' paradise don't seem

to realize the jailer has left the door open. I was reminded of the Slovak workers in the 30's trudging past our house in Pottstown, PA after a day's work at the diecasting factory. But they were exhausted. In Presov, they seemed simply aimless. And after hours, public drunkenness is common.

"'Are you looking for the camps?' 'Will you look for the graves?' 'The cemetery in Prague is very famous.' 'Thousands are buried behind the Dohany Shul, killed by the Hungarians.' These were typical remarks from friends who heard I was heading for Hungary and Czechoslovakia. As my non-Jewish friend in Vienna said, 'Why should <u>you</u> visit Au schwitz? <u>We</u> should see it.'

"The air over Kosice is grayish green from the steel mill and the slag pile keeps growing, the rare sign of industry in Slovakia. The pretty countryside looks a lot like parts of Pennsylvania or upstate New York or West Germany. Except that the farmhouses and barns apparently have been neglected since my father looked on this scene. Crosses, statues and shrines are everywhere, in the small villages and along the roads between them, just as my parents described. The fields in the uninhabited areas are quiet and peaceful, just like a graveyard.

"The whole country is a graveyard. The Slovaks paid Germany 500 marks for every Jew they took from Slovakia. (The Romanians were comparative humanitarians, offering their Jews to the U.S. for $10 each. Their offer was not accepted.) The September 1992 issue of Stern (the German magazine) featured a detailed history of Slovakia, including a 1944 picture of Slovakian President Jozef Tiso in his priestly robes, standing between Hitler and Jodl, placidly studying a map. Of 70,000 Jews, fewer than 3000 survived.

"Four of them were first cousins that I met for the first time. Magda and Valerie survived Auschwitz. Marci made it out of another camp. He and Arpy fought with the partisans and Marci was captured. Arpy found his parents, my Aunt Yetti and her husband, and with his wife, Kitty and her parents, hid away in a mountainous cave until the war's end.

"Timing is everything. In 1963 I walked down the Reeperbahn in Hamburg, past the police station. A play called 'David's Wache' was

currently running in Hamburg's theater district. It means 'David's Guardhouse', the nickname of that police station during the '40's, and the play is about the Jews who were gathered there before being shipped off to be killed. Had I stopped into that station that night and asked for directions back to my hotel, I'm sure I'd have been treated with utmost courtesy. Might even have gotten a ride back.

"On the Altmarkt Square in Dresden, Ash Wednesday 1945, thousands of bodies were cremated to prevent an outbreak of disease. There wasn't enough manpower to bury the 135,000 Germans killed in the deadliest air raid in history. Not 100 kilometers away on that same February day, Magda and thousands of other women were being force-marched by the Germans through the snow from one slave camp to another to avoid the advancing Red Army. Magda was one of the few who made it.

"On that same Square on an Ash Wednesday 600 years earlier, Jews were burned at the stake, accused of causing the Black Plague. On August 19, 1992 I stood on the Altmarkt, watching a television crew film a ceremony, with speeches in German and Russian. That day, the Red Army officially left Dresden.

"My parents told me about the concerts they enjoyed in the park in Presov, reinstated shortly after the first World War. The park is downtown, five minutes away from the Shul. Those concerts continued every Saturday and Sunday, right up to 1939. In 1944, another surviving cousin, Paul, told us about hiding in that park at night. In 1992, I strolled through that park with Zuzanna, Magda's daughter, and had coffee at an outdoor café. Nobody seemed to notice my *kipah*. Except Zuzanna, who encouraged me to wear it.

"Magda told me that a couple of years ago, the son of Rav Lau, Presov's last rabbi, came from Israel to visit. The mayor and other city officials greeted him with warmth at a kosher banquet in his honor. Magda baked a huge challa for the occasion. This Rav Lau, now the Chief Rabbi of Netanya, (*ed. Note – later Chief Rabbi of Israel)* had escaped from Slovakia when he was five, on the shoulders of his older brother, Naftali Lavi (who was Israeli Consul General in New York a few years ago).

"There were 6000 Jews in Presov in 1939. Today, including those born since 1945, there are 92. The shul was refurbished in 1957 and though a bit musty is still beautiful. Davening is done in the Bes Medrash. On Shabbos, three men from Kosice come to make a *minyan*.

"Magda, who has much of my mother's sense of humor, knew how to make all the dishes my mother used to make: hishkoshes, trepanki, holoshkes, shlishkes and lekvar-filled pirogi. And she introduced me to a delicious pancake made of shlishke batter, called krumpli langosh. She was so hospitable and cheerful. You couldn't possibly sense what she'd been through.

"My mother's home town, Volova, isn't far from Presov, but it's in Ukraine now. And it made no sense to go there, because any Jews still alive from that Carpatho-Ruthenia region are in Prague. And I met them in the Alte Neu Shul. The president is from Chist, others are from Minkkacz and the *gabbai* is from Orshava. Not only did he know my uncle in Orshava, he's related to my uncle's wife.

"The two highlights of my trip focus on two shuls. The one in Presov, where my father davened, and the Alte Neu that my father spoke about so much. To daven in a 600-year-old shul, where the Maharal and the Noda B'Yehuda davened, just blew me away. And the davening... the sounds, the accents.. was pure home.

"The only sounds in the Presov shul were my footsteps as I explored every corner, wondering where my father and grandfather might have sat. There's no need for the little signs still on the wall, 'It is not permitted to speak during prayers.'

"Back home, people asked, 'Did you have a good trip?' There were two kinds of reactions when I answered, 'No.' Some were startled and backed away. Those who came from where I'd been, dropped their cheery note and turned quiet. Then they said, 'I could never go back there.'

"Neither can I."

CHAPTER 7 – AND ON TO THE FAR EAST

Simmy never did go back to Eastern Europe, but that did not mean his travels were over. His work for Gem Robotics took him to Bangkok several times and, with his frequent flyer miles he was able to go around the world in 1985– with the excuse that he was going to a cousin's Bar Mitzvah in Australia. Every trip was a new adventure and you never knew what interesting things might happen. He went to Australia via Italy and Bangkok and was "off to a good start –the hostess upgraded me to Ambassador Class, with a wide seat, leg rest, etc. It's eight hours just to Rome, so it's greatly appreciated. Sitting next to me is Francesca Persegati, who it turns out, restores great art works in Rome and who is the daughter of Walter Persegati, Secretary General of the Vatican Museums. She showed me a letter she was writing to her father and translated for me: 'Eet says, man-a has little-a capa. Must be Jewisha. Has a sweet face-a.' Why fight it? Arranged to meet her later in Rome.

"Checked my luggage and went off on a walking tour, armed with a hand-drawn map from Francesca. Ooo! This *Tuma* town! More *Minyhishkas* (nuns) than you can say 'Prego' to. *Zelems* (crosses) and *Yushkas* (Jesus statues) wherever you turn. And an occasional Caesar, busted Corinthian columns and everyone is doing an imitation of famous eye-talians. They sound as if they all just got off the boat. Sure wish I'd checked with Dan re 'Where's the toilet, please?' I finally

learned that 'pee-pee' does fine. Pantomime does fine too, but both get a laugh.

"Saw innumerable Piazzas and dodged cars on Via del Corso, Corso Vittorio Emanuele and looked for Luciano Restaurant, listed as Kosher, on Via Portico d'Ottavio. 'Whereza sixa teena' 'Eh?' "Ristorantay' 'Oh. Changea bossa. No Kosherah. Wasa. No mora. See stora? Sella Koshera. You cana eata. Closa now. Opena halfa owra.' 'Dissa Jewish area?' 'Yesa. See streeta therea?' 'Wherea?' 'Therea.' 'Oh, therea!' 'Yesa. Synagogua therea.' 'Nice-a. How olda your boya?' 'He has thirteena.' 'Arrivedertzh.' 'Bye-a'. No sweat learning Italian.

"Met Francesca on schedule at 5 p.m. and she showed me around for two hours until I had to get the bus back to the airport. Showed her all my pictures. 'Yoyounga! Nine-a grandachildren! Ah, so beautifulla!'

"Then off to Bangkok, with fuel stop in Athens. Arrived safely and met by Gem Robotics man, Surin, who whisked me off to his house. Met his wife and two little boys. It is 86 degrees and humid. Occasional downpour and lightning. Whole country smells like a high school gym.

"My room is fine – bed, desk, closets, TV, VCR with some American movies and bottled water. Bath too, which was number one on my agenda. Had Kashrut review session with Surin and his wife. Maid to make me meals as I instruct her. Plenty of foil here, kosher fish, canned tuna (they export to the U.S.) and a new pot to be used as I like (boiled eggs). And rice! It is cooked strictly alone in its designated pot with just water, not even salt added.. Look, you can always add it.

"Got to do some sight-seeing with Surin's brother-in-law, Virach. He drove me through Bangkok, seeing King's Palace, Thai Museum, Emerald Buddha and buddhas too numerous to mention. More than Rome has *minyishkas.* For lunch I had mango, coconut milk, pineapple, grapefruit, orange and a banana. Made 'Kiki' out of latter (*ed. – a trick learned in Holland, making a moving head on banana*). Big laughs. White boy clever.

"I am often asked 'Tell me about your religion'. So I gave the basic Kashruth laws (or as they say – *raws* –), Shabbat, Ten Commandments etc. Then I dwell on agricultural *mitzvahs* – they really relate because

Thailand is predominantly agricultural. They are very impressed with the idea of leaving the corners and dropped harvest for the poor to glean.

"Got to do some sightseeing too. We went to an area that gives an example of all the different Thai states – there are 72 of them! – on a large plot of land and water. The hill people are at one spot and we saw two girls do a Thai dance to the tune of a bamboo xylophone and drum. It is incredibly hot and humid, with an occasional shower. Then, on to the crocodile farm, which is really a zoo, heavy on crocodiles. Yuck. Turned down an offer to have my picture taken petting a tiger, who seemed bored. Went through the aquarium, which was primitive, dirty, dull and ill-lit.

"Shabbat in Bangkok meant moving to the Victory Hotel, which is near the Shul. A lady named Myra, who usually lives at the other end of Bangkok, comes in every Friday, armed with her homemade challahs, cakes and cookies for the Minyan. An English -speaking Thai mama cooks veggies, fish patties, etc. This all takes place in the Shul, which has a connecting kitchen. For a big $65 a week, they purchase all the food needed for three meals for all. There are a bunch of Iranians from Queens and London, all in the stone business. My room at the Victory costs $18 and includes 50 baht credit at the coffee shop. Myra tells me that Thais bargain for everything from taxis to brain surgery."

From Bangkok and business, Simmy flew on to New Zealand and Australia, where he attended a family Bar Mitzvah and did a lot of sightseeing. Then he visited Tahiti, and Moorea. He even tried snorkeling: "We went out on the Liki Tiki and dropped anchor at 26 feet of water, with coral things. As soon as you are under water, it is like a Jacques Cousteau replay. Amazing. The real reason for flippers is to protect against coral cuts. The best part was the sunny morning. It was cloudy with a brief shower in the afternoon, but who cares. Later I swam in the pool, then took a shower. Oy, have I been wet today! One just lives in a swim suit."

CHAPTER 8 – FAMILY TRAVELS

When Simmy traveled, he liked to make things interesting. So, if asked what he did, he came up with innovative answers. For instance, he once claimed to be a proctologist – not that he had much idea what such a doctor really does, but it sounded good. As long as the conversations were short, he was o.k. Another time he decided to be a bear trainer. Not just any bear trainer, but only for Russian white bears, which he claimed, were the easiest to train, although there could still be dangerous moments. Probably his best routine evolved with a little luck. He was, he said most charmingly, a mind reader.

This started on a cross-country flight. He always made it a point to talk to the stewardess (later known as the flight attendant). On this westward leg, he got real friendly with one attendant and found out that she lived in the Lower East Side of New York, was named Susan and she had a roommate named Joan. She also offered that she had grown up in Chicago. Simmy digested all this information, never knowing what he would do with it. On the return flight, a few days later, he again started a conversation with the stewardess, fitting in bits and pieces between her taking care of other passengers. When she asked the inevitable, "What do you do?", Simmy replied, "I'm a mind reader." "Really? Let's prove it. Where do I live?" Simmy pretended to think hard and finally ventured (knowing that most airline employees lived in a just a few places), "Jackson Heights." "Ha, ha," replied the attendant, "You know that a lot of us live there, but I don't." Simmy went into

deep thought again, "Oh, now I have it. The Lower East Side." That was it. He had the crazy idea that maybe this was Susan's roommate. It was worth a try. So he hazarded, "And you have a roommate" "Oh sure, we all have roommates." "But are they all named Susan?" This got her attention. "How did you guess that?" And so Simmy plunged blithely ahead, with all the details of Susan's life and whatever he could recall about Joan. The poor flight attendant is probably still shaking her head in wonderment.

As I mentioned earlier, I am not an enthusiastic flyer, so most of our vacations were by car – that's also a lot cheaper, with four children. We spent some summer weeks at Lake Taghkanic State Park, near Hudson, New York. One of the highlights of a stay there was the Great Bat Chase. We were in a cottage in the woods. Very secluded and cozy. Then one night I woke up and went to check on the children. And there, perched on the headboard of Danny's bed was a real live bat. As quietly as possible I went to get the man of the house, who came stumbling out clutching his pajama bottoms. He went into bat-chasing mode – which meant putting on a hat (legend has it that you must protect your head) and grabbing a broom. He started waving the broom at the bat, with one hand, while holding up his pajamas with the other. He managed to get the bat out of Danny's room and onto the screened-in porch. Job done? No, no. The porch is separated from our room by just a window. At my insistence, Simmy went into chase-mode again and finally got the bat out into the night. The kids never woke up until morning.

Even though I usually stayed home when Simmy traveled, there were two outstanding exceptions. In the summer of 1965 he had to go to San Francisco for some sort of convention. Did we all want to come along? Not if it meant flying. I rationalized this by saying that I didn't want to get on a plane in New York and get off in Los Angeles, never having seen what America looked like in between. And so the six of us crossed the country by train. And it was a fabulous trip. We had three bedrooms on the train, two of which opened up to accommodate all of us during the day. At night the kids loved the upper berths. The scenery was spectacular and even Simmy enjoyed the trip. We stayed first in Los Angeles and did all sorts of tourist things, the highlights being the

tour of the movie studios, where the boys "acted" in a fake snow scene and of course a day at Disney Land. San Francisco turned out to have a special extra – the St. Louis Cardinals baseball team was staying at our hotel. The boys managed to get a lot of autographs. In Seattle it was Sea Fair week and from our hotel we saw a lot of the hydroplane races. We toured the old World's Fair grounds and took a boat ride to Victoria, British Columbia. This trip also marked the first plane ride for me and the children. Our train was delayed and we missed the connection from Portland, Oregon to Seattle. "We are going to fly," Simmy announced grandly. I put up a good front, so as not to scare the kids. It was only an hour, a white-knuckle hour. "Should the plane be making that noise?" I whispered to Simmy. "Would you tell me if it weren't?" I added. Simmy, in take-charge mode, asked the stewardess for "cokes all around." "I'm sorry sir, but we are preparing to land." And so we did.

My next foray in the air was another major journey. In 1972, when Simmy had to go to Israel on business, we arranged, on very short notice, for all of us to go. This was no one-hour flight, but we all adjusted, with Jonathan managing to sleep on the floor between the seats. It was the month of Elul , time to blow the Shofar every morning. So Simmy asked the flight attendant after davening, if he could blow. She checked to see if everyone was awake and then Simmy gave a great performance. It was the first of many on that trip, the most notable perhaps was from the balcony of our hotel room in Tel Aviv, overlooking the Mediterranian. It really got the attention of the old folks exercising on the beach.

Simmy took this opportunity to teach the children how to behave in fancy hotels. Well, actually the only fancy one was the Dan in Tel Aviv. But we went nuts there – carpeted floors! Soft toilet paper! Hamburgers in the dining room! Simmy ordered for all of us with great panache and we all tried to act as if we always did this. Then we sailed out of the dining room, only to find the waiter running after us – "You forgot to sign the check". Simmy explained to the children that in such a circumstance, one suavely takes the pen and signs. "Suave" is the motto.

On the way home we had three days in England, where "Suave" stood us in good stead. We ate in kosher restaurants, even went to

theater. The play was "No Sex, Please, We're British", which the ticket agent assured us was suitable for teenagers. It was great – and sooo British. A wonderful conclusion to a memorable trip.

CHAPTER 9 – THE YESHIVA BOY

As the years went by, Simmy spent more and more time attending Shul services and learning Gemora. He always managed to find humor in whatever he did. For instance, for some years he attended early morning Minyan at Congregation Sons of Israel in Yonkers. The cast of characters there provided much merriment. Simmy wrote an account of one morning:

"In the Bes Medrash, after davening. Archie Green is removing herring from an 8-inch deep jar with a 4-inch fork. This means he must tilt it, allowing the juice to escape and chase Mechel's *tallis*, still on the table. Archie Gordon slows the flow with the cream cheese. This created rivulets which now surround the *tallis* instead of attacking with a frontal assault. Lennie sets the table. That is, he drops plastic forks, knives and spoons on the table from a height of eleven inches. This further slows the herring juice. Actually it seems confused. Some of it is soaked up by Archie Green's Sweet and Low packet, which he scrapes into his coffee. Sugar's no good for you.

"Yesterday, Lennie *benched goymel.* Something about a fire in his apartment. Maybe we'll get the story today. Yesterday everyone interrupted him to suggest how it happened. 'A lotta damage?' 'Naaa.' 'How about water damage?' 'Naa.' ' Insurance adjuster there yet?' 'Naa.' Berrel the Romanian mutters, 'Putz' and leaves.

" 'So what happened with the fire?' Lennie looks up at the questioner as he spreads cream cheese on the side of his index finger, completely

missing the cracker he's holding. 'The boiler froze,' says Mechel. 'This makes a fire?' 'No fire. The super's wife complained to me this morning. She got no heat.' 'Where she got no heat?' Archie Green holds up a paper plate of herring he managed to land and offers it to Archie Gordon. This gesture makes a pour spout in the plate and the juice bathes his thumb's cuticle before dribbling in Archie's lap. 'Want some herring?' 'No, it has sugar in it.'

"Mike: 'Boilers don't freeze. Water freezes.' Mechel: 'It shoulda been on automatic.' Mike: 'Let me tell you about automatic. In my shul we had…' Archie: 'What Shul?' Mike: "Far from here. You wouldn't know it.' Archie: 'What?' Mike: 'In the Bronx. Corlear Avenue.' 'What?' '230th Street!' 'The Van Cortlandt Park Shul on Corlear Avenue? My sister-in-law goes there.' 'What's her name?' 'You wouldn't know her.' 'Is she active?' 'Levine. Myra Levine.' Lennie: 'Levine. Her husband's Henry?' 'He's dead many years already.' Lennie: Henry Levine the Zionist?' 'No, the ante-semit.'

"Next morning: '70,000 Romanians got killed? How could it be so much?' 'So is 10,000 so bad?' Mechel: 'Simcha, Billy Martin, was he Jewish?"

Another "morning Minyan" story:

"Big morning at the Minyan. The coffee maker had been doing funny things lately, like making bad coffee. Also, it wasn't hot (literally) and this already cannot be tolerated. Even the hot plate had become a lukewarm plate. And when we poured water into its top, it just spilled out the sides as if to say, 'Uh uh. Enough already.' It might have something to do with the fact it's been used five times a week for a few years and never been cleaned. Hey, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. We wrench out the part that holds the grounds, but never have investigated the condition of its kishkes. So, I got a new coffee maker and we put it to use. I still used the old pyrex receptacle because it's got that nice patina that the new one may some day acquire, especially after I *tovel* it. While others opened the emergency sardines (ran out of herring of every variety and age) I watched the coffee drip through for the first time, nice and dark. Then I read the directions: 'Before making coffee for the first time, run through two cycles of coffee-making using only water, to clean out any

manufacturing residue. Also, thoroughly clean the filter holder before first use.' Nu, nobody complained. *Adaraba*, they loved it."

Another day, after Minyan, Simmy recalled:

"This morning's post-davening discussion was about miltz. I think that's the pancreas, but I'm afraid to look it up. (Only Shochtim and their guests used to eat it because the butchers couldn't sell it and that's how the shochtim were paid, along with liver and lungs. Then, some Ph.D. said it was healthy and the shochtim couldn't get it anymore. Later, another Ph.D. discovered cholesterol and suddenly it's available to shochtim again. But too late. They unionized and now they want money). But this morning was nostalgia time and over last *shalshudes's* tomato herring the discussion was a comparison of how it used to be prepared, stuffed and eaten. I tried not to listen, so the only part of the *machloykis* I remember is how it had to be koshered, whether only the inside or all of it was eaten and its color. (The majority held it was gray.) I asked, 'How about miltz from a herring?' and that was a show stopper. Eyes rolled towards the ceiling as everyone agreed, 'Ahh. THAT'S miltz."

Going to *Minyan* could give rise to all sorts of strange experiences. One time we were in Washington:

"6:45 a.m. Nancy answered on the first ring of our hotel-room phone. (She firmly believes that the 11th commandment is Thou Shalt Not Let a Phone Ring Twice.) She listened a moment, then turned to me. 'The Israeli negotiating team is davening at 7:15 at the Mayflower Hotel. You want to help make the *Minyan*?

"We'd been celebrating a cousin's wedding anniversary in Washington the day before, and one of them was calling. They're members of the Georgetown Shul where notables are commonplace. Evidently the negotiating team was davening in this morning and our hotel was only a ten-minute walk away.

"As I *minyan*-hunted on the deserted upper floor in the Mayflower, I wondered if my *tefillin* sufficed for a security ID. Anyone could be holding a velvet bag with who-knew-what in it. But it would be tough to forge my embroidered initials in Nancy's handwriting. Then again, who

around here would know her handwriting? Happily, all such complex problems disappeared when I located the only wide-open suite. Rushing past the room with the copier, the FAX, the laptop and Mr. Coffee, I got my *tefillin* on just as the head of the negotiating team began the opening *Brachot*. The Gabbai, another member of the team, quickly determined that I was a Cohen, so I was honored with an *Aliyah* that Monday morning. The team head read from a darling little Torah. Its Ark, with the symbol of Medinat Yisrael on it, was tucked in a safe corner.

"It was in the down elevator that I first noticed those guys with the funny wires behind their ears. Did one of them have *Shlishi*?

"As we parted in the lobby, I said, '*Hatzlacha*' to the head of the negotiating team. He replied, '*Todah*' and have a nice day.'

"The smoothly flowing Ashkenazi davening in Sefardi pronunciation had finished so quickly, it wasn't until much later that I thought about how pleasant it was to see once more that that is what it's all about. Through four thousand years of tragedy and triumph, world powers rising and crumbling, ten Jews who never met before matter-of-factly daven together as if they'd known each other all their lives."

Of course Simmy could also be very serious, especially when it came to things Jewish. In 1995 he wrote to a non-religious Israeli friend:

"We've hardly ever said a serious word between us, but I must let you know as clearly as possible my reaction to the Rabin assassination.

"Murder is horrible. And this horrible act was even worse than murder. Because the murderer, a yeshiva student, had the arrogance to believe he was acting in the name of Torah and God.

"Snip a little out of the Torah, quote it for your own purpose, and you have poison, not Torah. He perverted and betrayed the Torah and thereby committed the most unspeakable *Chillul Hashem*. By inviting people to ask, 'Is this how an Orthodox Jew should act?', knowing full well that the answer is a resounding 'No', that murderer has defamed God and destroyed the reputation of all Jews. And to have the murderer claim that he did God's work, is the ultimate *Chillul Hashem*.

"The Torah recognizes legitimate disagreement – right, left, government, anti-government, *dati, chiloni* – not, with the hatred and shouts of 'Nazi' from one side and '*Hamasnik*' from the other, but with

friendship and reason. Our models are Hillel and Shammai, not Croatia and Serbia.

"Every one of us, no matter what 'kind' of Jew we are, must stop and think: 'What's happening to us? What are our kids learning – in secular schools and yeshivas; in the streets; from us? We must relearn the basic, uncomplicated first principle of society: To respect each other, in spite of our differences. *V'ahavta l'rayecha kamocha* (Love your neighbor as yourself). That's not easy, but it's Torah.

"As Orthodox Jews we must relearn what a Torah-based society is, and live it. Yes, Israel has an anti-religious government. How does the Torah instruct us to relate to it? 'Anti-religious' was hardly the word for Pharaoh, the *Rosh Hamemshala* of Egypt. Yet, when God told Moshe and Aharon to go speak to him, Rashi emphasizes He told them to deal with Pharaoh 'honorably and with respect.'

"We must learn to treat each other at least as well."

Simmy loved to think about the history of the Jews as detailed in the Bible. He wondered how the various events might have come about, how our ancestors actually lived. One idea that fascinated him was how the Children of Israel came to be so numerous by the time they left Egypt. In a mind-boggling feat of arithmetic, he wrote "A Numerical Determination of Yotzai Mitzraim":

"'We're in luck today, folks. Edwards Air Force Base is coming up on our left. If you'll look out the left side of the cabin you might get a glimpse of the Space Shuttle that's about to land.' The captain of our flight out of Los Angeles rolled a few degrees to give us a better view and though we couldn't see the shuttle itself on that sparkling, clear day we saw its rooster tail....an enormously large cloud of sand and dust, lengthening straight as an arrow on the desert floor, marking the high speed landing and roll out. A few seconds later it was far behind us and we could hardly believe what we had seen.

"Settling back in my tourist seat, I began to imagine being in a time capsule, going back thousands of years to another cloud, another desert. Bnei Yisroel were coming out of Egypt. How might it have looked to an observer at 30,000 feet, many miles away! Under the Protective Cloud,

six hundred thousand pairs of men's feet were kicking up their own long trail of sand and dust, with lots of help from the women and kids.

"It's a sight hard to imagine. Just how big was that crowd? The Midrash gives us a round figure of 3,600,000. Is that possible? The population of Israel was 70 when they went down to Egypt. Let us try to calculate how many came out after 210 years, such that there were 600,000 males of the age of 20 or above.

"We will begin with those 70. We have information from the Torah and hints from the Midrash, and we make these additional assumptions:

1. Assume 210 years equals 10 generations.
2. Of the original 70, 67 were males and four of those were grandchildren of Yehudah and Asher. Assume they were minors.
3. Assume that the first 12 sons had no additional children in Egypt.
4. Exclude Gershon, Kehat and Merari from the computation because the Torah gives us the exact count of the males of Levi from the age of one month.
5. Assume the remaining 48 male adults married local women, producing Generation 1.
6. Assume Generation 2 also married local women, but thereafter, all marriages were between descendants.
7. The number of children per family averaged 6.
8. The average mix was 3 boys and 3 girls.
9. We will recall a Midrash that states 4/5 of the people perished during the plague of Darkness.
10. Assume at least the last three generations came out.

"Based on these assumptions, we get:

Generation Population

1. 288
2. 1,728
3. 5,184
4. 15,552
5. 46,656

6. 139,968
7. 419,904
8 1,259,712 1/5 = 251,942
9 3,779,136 1/5 = 755,827
10 11,337,408 1/5 = 2,267,482

"The sum of the last three generations is 16,376,256. One-fifth of this sum is 3,275,251. (This includes everyone but Levi). If one-tenth of the Tenth Generation was 20 or older, the total population aged 20 or more in Generations 8, 9, and 10 equals 1,234,517. If half were males, the total number of males 20 years or above would be 617,259. This is within 2.3% of the amount stated in Bamidbar, 603,500.

"As to the total population that came out of Egypt, we have already calculated 3,275,251. Adding the males of Levi (22,300) and the females (another 22,300), we get a grand total of 3,319,851.

"My son, David, points out that the Iyun Hatfillah, commentator in Otzar Hatfillot, was challenged by a line in the ever-popular *Yotzrot* of Shabbat Shekalim: *'Mi yuchal l'shaer kol kapikudim?* – Who can calculate precisely the number of all of Israel who came out of Egypt?' The only ones accurately counted were the 603,550 males 20 and above; the 22,000 males a month or older of the tribe of Levi (plus 300 more who were first-born); and the 22,273 first-born sons of all the other tribes, one month or older.

"The Iyun Hatfillah gave it a try. He assumed that the ratio of first-born to total population is the same for the other tribes as is recorded for Levi. And since the count for Levi and for all the first-born is from the same age, it is easy to calculate that the number of non-first-born males of all the other tribes from the age of one month and more, equals 1,633,353.

"Now he adds the first-born (22,273) plus Levi and its first-born (22,300) to get 1,677,926 total males. Assuming that there were at least an equal number of females, he gets a grand total of 3,355,852.

"Compare that with the 3,319,851 arrived at from an entirely different (longer and more precarious) direction, that is, from the original 70, and we find it is within 1% of the estimate calculated by Iyun Hatfillah.

"The payyetan's question, 'Who can calculate precisely...' may be a rhetorical one, but I think we got in the ballpark. Maybe even in the infield."

On another, very different, occasion, Simmy mixed the serious with the humorous. This was motivated by our great-nephew's Bar Mitzvah in the Chassidic town of Monroe (Kiryas Yoel) in New York State.

"Here's something I found from the Ksav Sopher: It is well-known that he who has 100 wants 200. The Ksav Sopher says that is the case when a person acquires wealth or possessions by what he perceives to be mazel or by dint of his own efforts. Together with such wealth, he acquires the hunger for yet more. However, if he recognizes that his so-called mazel is really a gift from *Hakadosh Baruch Hoo*, and that his successful efforts are backed by and are rewards from *Hakadosh Baruch Hoo*, then this wealth is attained without the 'natural' desire for yet more. *Hakadosh Baruch Hoo* gives an even more valuable gift, the absence of the continual desire for more.

"And that's why, in response to Esav's *'Yesh li rov'* (I have a lot), Yacov says, *'Ki chanani Hashem*...all my wealth came by *Hashem's* graciousness to me... and therefore *Yesh li kol*... even if I give you a whole lot, I still have everything.'

"It is now Sunday p.m. We got to the Bar Mitzvah last night in about 1.3 hours, following Uncle Leo's directions which included going slow when we get to Monroe. The locals should wear reflectors on the kapotas because there's little street lighting and they're all in black. Shaindy and her husband have a lovely home and there's lots of construction all over. There were loads of people at the dinner, which had been prepared and stored by Shaindy since Succoth. It was all very tasty. But I felt as if I were as far away from home as any place in the world I've ever been to and transported 100 years back to Volova. And as hospitable as they were, I was uncomfortable and depressed. I knew all the buzz words and the accents, so communication was no problem. It was unreal. The Bar Mitzvah boy, who was unrecognizable in his uniform, at one point stood, and after a few moments I realized he must be giving a *D'var Torah*. He *shukkled* between 90 and 50 degrees at a repetition rate of one per second, his *payis* flying. And he spoke in a steady, very rapid and

unintelligible stream. I was six feet from him and could discern only a Yiddish word here and there. Apparently he was saying something about Chanukah. After ten or fifteen minutes he sat down.

"Why am I telling you all this? I have been struggling to express to myself how the scene impressed me and thought that putting it in words might help me. And though I certainly would not mention this to anyone who'd be hurt by it, I think that to sweep the experience under the rug would be dishonest to myself.

"When I worked at Roosevelt Hospital I saw lots of Hare Krishnas and the similarity was frightening. It was mass, self hypnosis. They were all playing exactly the same role, all reading the same script. The very best I could rescue from the experience, as we drove out of 100 years ago was, 'Well, they're OUR Hare Krishnas.' And though it is *chutzpa* to try to define contentment for someone else, I couldn't help wondering, how many feel content and how many feel trapped?"

After Simmy more or less retired, he was able to spend more time learning, and he and his friend Nachman Horowitz spent a lot of time at the nearby Yeshiva of the Telshe Alumni. He finally achieved his ambition to be a "Yeshiva Bochur". He made some wonderful friends there and felt very much at home. He expressed his feelings:

"Usually it's a busy morning as Nachman and I enter the Bes Medresh at Telshe. Rabbi Kohn is picking out *seforim* for his group as they begin to gather by the bay window; here and there some of the Roshei Yeshiva are working with one or more of their students before classes start; other kids are sprinkled about, loudly learning on their own; there's Zeev in his corner, singing out a piece of Sanhedrin. The only interruptions are the smiles and 'good mornings' to break up the clamor. As we clear a space in our corner, we wonder how we're going to be able to study with all that noise. But as we plunge in, those sounds recede, as we add our share.

"That's why it was so eerie one morning when I arrived to find the place dark and empty. I knew Nachman was in Peru, but hadn't known that the kids were between semesters and the Roshei Yeshiva were out of town. Even the guy who sets up the hot water for coffee had vanished. Of course, the Bes Medresh was open. I turned on the lights

in our corner and, relishing the silence, opened my Gemara. After a few minutes the silence was too much, so I had to read it really loud. And since I'm used to arguing with myself, it was easy to do that loudly too. Ah, that's better.

"But when I paused and looked around, the silence returned. The place was empty and it made me uneasy. That's when my imagination kicked in. One half of me had to straighten out my other half. The conversation went like this:

"What's bothering you?

I'm all alone.

You mean there's nobody else here?

Very good. That's what 'all alone' means.

Chucham. Look in the *blatt*.

That's what I've been doing.

Take a good look. Now look around. Aha! Who just came in the door?

Wow. Rebbi Yehuda.

And right after him?

Reb Oshia. And Rava.

And look who's sitting over there.

Rav Ashi. And Rebbi Yochanan. And there's Resh Lakesh.

And who's that, just arrived from Bavel to clarify a point?

Rav Chiya! Boy has he got to have frequent flyer miles.

And who just came in from left field?

Reb Shimon, of course. He always comes in from left field.

It's getting crowded in here, isn't it?

You bet. And they're all looking at me.

You know why, don't you?

I guess they're all saying, did you come here to dream or to learn?

You got it, ace. Now get to work."

Simmy loved to discuss Gemara and such topics with his sons and son-in-law. In 1996 he was moved to write his thoughts to his son-in-law, Steve Leichman:

"We've of course had our share of frustration, rage and helplessness in light of the bombings in Israel. David and his family feel the same, and

there's simply no solution in sight. So you go back to work, to studies, riding the bus, planning birthday parties for the kids... there's no choice. It's very difficult for me to discuss it. I'd be repeating everything you've heard and expressed yourself.

"That's why it was such a tonic to get a call from David this morning. He's been writing patents and at times deals with German documents. On occasion he'll call me to help with the translation, and did so this morning when I was studying Gemara at my friend's home. David's always cheerful and it was a real boost to banter with him. He apologized for interrupting our study and made us promise to make up the time he took from us.

"Now, to respond briefly to questions in your e-mail the other day. This is going to be inadequate, because we really should do this in person, sipping orange juice and with references strewn about.

"I must begin with what you well know, that studying any text in translation can be a linguistic and semantic minefield. (I was once challenged to translate into any foreign language, 'That's the way the Mercedes Benz') Terms such as 'dominance', 'authority', 'master', evoke negative reactions in most of us. That's so, if the original is in English. When it's a translation, the potential for misunderstanding is enormous. As I peck out this note, I'm trying to use words that most accurately transmit what I mean, and can only hope I succeed.

"In Gen. 1:28, are humans meant to have dominance over all other creatures and creations in this world? Yes! Are we superior to all other animals? Yes! Does that mean we can do as we wish? Absolutely not! *V'kivshua* means 'conquer' or 'master it', as in 'mastering' the English language. Understanding this world to our utmost is the prerequisite to our custodianship. As a legal custodian must answer to the court, we must do the same. To be put in charge of the Earth, an infinitesimal part of His creation, is to carry an awesome responsibility. It all belongs to Him.

"As you surmised, there's no contradiction between the instructions given to Adam and to Noah. In both cases, they're told (as we are) to take care of His creations. By the way, here's a cardinal rule in Torah study: When you see something that seems contradictory, illogical

or simply makes no sense to you, take it as an invitation to dig. If it bothers you, it bothered untold thousands of scholars for thousands of years. We've developed an enormous literature of questions and answers that's still growing. If you work out your own answer, tell others, but dig anyhow.

"To equip us for our custodial responsibility, we were created with many more capabilities than animals. And with intellect, free will. We can choose to do wonderful or unspeakable acts. Free will means we are responsible for our actions. Before we proceed we should ask ourselves, would our Creator approve?

"Sometimes the answer is not difficult and yet it's not always clear. We must exercise judgment and often make difficult decisions such as a triage team must do in an emergency room. Man does not have a sterling record in this regard. Still, we must try.

"My lastest decision is to stop for now. Wow, this has taken me hours."

CHAPTER 10 – THE STORY OF BILAM

Simmy loved to tell "jazzed up" Bible stories to the children, from the time they were very little. He never wrote them down, so they were a little different with each telling. But he did write one story, in the form of a poem – "The Ballad of Bilam and Balak", which was one of his favorite tales.

"Now here is a story like you never heard
How Bilam gave Balak ben Zipor the bird.
He sent his hipsters to Bilam with glee,
'Come cuss the children of Israel for me.'
'Cool it,' said Bilam, ' and stay overnightly.
I'll put in some sack time and check with Almighty.'
The word he got gave Bilam no rest,
'Stay put, B.B., those people are bless't.'
At sunrise the messengers hurriedly split
Back to ben Zipor who near had a fit.
'Go back and say, if he comes, of a surety
He won't have to worry 'bout social security.'
The second word came -- 'Man, you are a pest.
Didn't I tell you those children are bless't?
If you want to go with them, take off like a bird,
But don't say a thing till I give you the word.'
At dawn bad Bilam hit the old mountain trail.
His ass saw the angel and started to quail.

'What ails you? Get movin'!' he hollered and screamed.
The ass moved – that's how Bilam's leg got creamed.
'That did it. I'm gonna flog you but good.'
Then the ass spoke up just like you knew he would.
'Will you kindly stop acting like you were El Cid?
I've hauled you around since you were a kid.'
'That's right,' said the angel – Bilam's eyes opened wide.
'He saved your life, yet you tanned his poor hide.
Now get off your face and get back in the saddle,
And mind what you say or your choppers will rattle.'
Balak ben Zipor laid the red carpet out.
'You're here, Bilam baby,' he said with a shout.
'Cool it,' said Bilam, ' and break out the herd.
I'll go up this mountain and wait for the word.'
It came real fast and sounded real good
But not to Balak, who donated the wood.
'I don't think you read me, Bilam, old seer,
I heard nary a cuss word, not even a leer.'
'I warned you the poetry would not be mine.
Don't 'spect me to edit a message divine.'
'Take five,' said the bullheaded son of Zipor,
'Then cuss those people that I have it in for.
Here is a spot from which you can see
And please don't forget that you're working for me.'
Still Bilam delivered a beautiful blessing
Like roast turkey, cranberry sauce and dressing.
Why, part of it you will remember of course,
Was quoted much later by Samuel F. Morse.
'Don't do me no favors, you broken-down prophet,
Just peel off and leave me. Don't say nothing'. Stop it.'
Balak was sorry his Ma met the stork.
'Just hear what I say when I really uncork.'
Groaned Bilam, whose heart was as heavy as lead,
'I needed this job like a hole in the head.
I'm loaded for bear and I can't stop shoutin'.

Hoist more bulls and rams to the top of the mountain.'
'Put a hex on 'em good. Lay it on 'em this time,'
Pleaded Balak, who turned white at Bilam's new rhyme.
'You gotta be kidding, you Moabite fool.
Ain't you clued that I'm helpless – I'm only a tool?'
Well, you know it, his last words were just like fine wine
Squeezed out of grapes from a vineyard divine.
(We quote him each dawn at the crow of the rooster.
Yes, our children now say it, like great- grandpa used-ter,
'Bout the tents and so forth – you know the whole bit.)
Oh, daddy, did Balak throw himself a fit!
'Back to your pad, Bilam, you'd better trundle.
I'm making for Poorsville – you cost me a bundle.
If there are any more folks that I want you to shoo,
Please don't call me, Charlie – I'll call you."

CHAPTER 11 – THE RUDNIKOVER RAV

Simmy's imagination extended to all sorts of different things. One day, I don't remember the circumstances, he invented the Rudnikover Rav. This was to be the ultimate strict Rav, who could easily decide that almost everything we were used to is forbidden or traife or absolutely not to be done. The whole family got involved in thinking up areas for the Rudnikover to rule. Ideas ranged from whether an ugly girl is allowed to wear makeup, to opening a catering hall (in Yonkers!) where a "closed circuit TV system ...will enable ladies and girls to enjoy the Chuppah as if they had actually been there!"

The gag took on a life of its own. We had stationery for the "Mesivta and Kollel "Beis Shammai" of Rudnikov, complete with officers: Horav Simcha Benyomin Hacohen Klein, Rudnikover Shammesh, Rosh Kollel and Mashgiach Ruchoni; Rabbi Sholom Reuven Rackovsky, Executive Vice-President; and the Board of Directors – Steven Leichman, Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum (Satmar Rebbe, deceased), Daniel Klein, esq. and Max Nozick. These need some explanation. Shalom (Shelly) Rackovsky is from Rochester and became our "adopted son", while spending a few days week in our home while working in New York. He became enamored of the Rudnikover and published a series of newsletters entitled "Beis Shammai Today, Programs and Personalities from Rudnikov Worldwide". The Max Nozick on the Board was an old family joke – Simmy had car-pooled to work with a friend who came from Utica,

NY. He used to tell him stories about the local butcher, Max Nozick, and we just loved the name.

Our son Danny was also the attorney for Rudnikov. This led to a series of letters between Danny and Simmy. The letterhead from Danny reads: "Dee, Klein and Fall. Tweedle Dee, Esq., Daniel Klein, Esq. and C.U. Nechet Fall, Esq.

The letter says:

"Dear Horav:

As counsel to the Mesivta and Kollel 'Beis Shammai' of Rudnikov, it is my duty to inform you of a dastardly hoax that is being perpetrated upon the entire Rudnikov community. Recently, a letter was sent out in the name of 'Rabbi Sholom Rackovsky; the self-styled 'Executive Vice-President' of the Mesivta and Kollel, announcing a purported program of seminars and courses to be taught by you under the aegis of something called the 'Siyag LaTorah Institute of Eternal Jewish Values.' As you well know, Rudnikov maintains no such community education entity, preferring to operate in the time-honored method of rumor and innuendo.

"Who is this so-called Rabbi Rackovsky? (Note that even he does not have the chutzpah to assume the title Horav.) My private investigator – who, for reasons of confidentiality must be identified only as Coby K. – informs me that this person is none other than Dr. Shellishkeit Rackovsky, the notorious mad scientist of Modern Orthodox proclivities. Apparently, not satisfied with conducting chemical and biological weapons testing in the Mesivta attic, Dr. R. has now branched out into racketeering and embezzlement.

"I would advise you to take immediate steps to thwart this fiendish scheme. However, it does not seem appropriate at this time to notify the press. Furthermore, it goes without saying, that the heroic medical measures that would be necessary to make Old Man Rudnikover aware of the situation are contraindicated for the present.

Yours in law,

Daniel A. Klein, Esq.

P.S. None of the above has yet compromised our Cayman Island operations. Will keep you informed."

Simmy, aka the Rudnikover Shammesh, replied:

"Dear Mr. Esq:

I was shocked, shocked to read the allegations in your letter regarding my trusted and highly recommended colleague of long standing, Reb Shulem. Is it possible your investigator was misinformed? I have always left the *gashmiyus* sector of our endeavor in Reb Shulem's hands, never dreaming that his hands might be into other activities. I shall post a few signs on the RumorNet and if all else fails, contact Reb Shulem directly for his side in this matter. Oy, that the Left (or the Attorney General) should hear of this.

"Meanwhile, our office has been deluged with calls and letters, registering for the seminars he's announced. And all include generous tithes. As legal counsel, if you insist these be returned, would it be permissible to indicate they resubmit same by check, made out to cash? My concerns are of the spirit, so forgive my humble suggestions for I know not of these earthly affairs.

"Would that these charges prove to be a hill of boondlech.

"Yours, etc.

Mashgiach Ruchoni

P.S. Roger your note re Cayman Islands."

And Danny duly replied:

"Worthy Horav:

I just had the most interesting conversation with your charming confederate, Reb Shulem. Turns out that he got his smicha in an entirely above-board manner from Horav Hagaon Reb Feivel Chnyuckowitz of Yeshivas Yemin Yemin Yemin Hashem (you can't get much more 'right' than that), one of the leading Torah institutions of the Cayman Islands. When I inquired as to the allegations of my private investigator (who, for reasons of confidentiality, must be known as Yankele Moishele K), Rabbi R good-naturedly exclaimed, 'Ah, you must be referring to my evil Doeppelganger, Dr. Shellishkeit Rackovsky! That farshtinkene paskudnyak has been shadowing me for years already!' Any lingering doubts on my part were irrevocably removed by the exceedingly generous emolument that he insisted on leaving with me. 'For your

favorite tzedokah,' I seem to recall him explaining as he nudged me in the ribs.

"In consideration of these latest developments, I see no legal objection to going full speed ahead with the Siyag LaTorah seminars. In fact, my esteemed fellow member of the Board, Mr. Max Nozick, has kindly offered to provide 613 pounds of chopped liver, at a discount rate, for use as between-shiur refreshments. I ask only that my business card be liberally distributed at strategic locations in the classrooms.

Ethically yours,

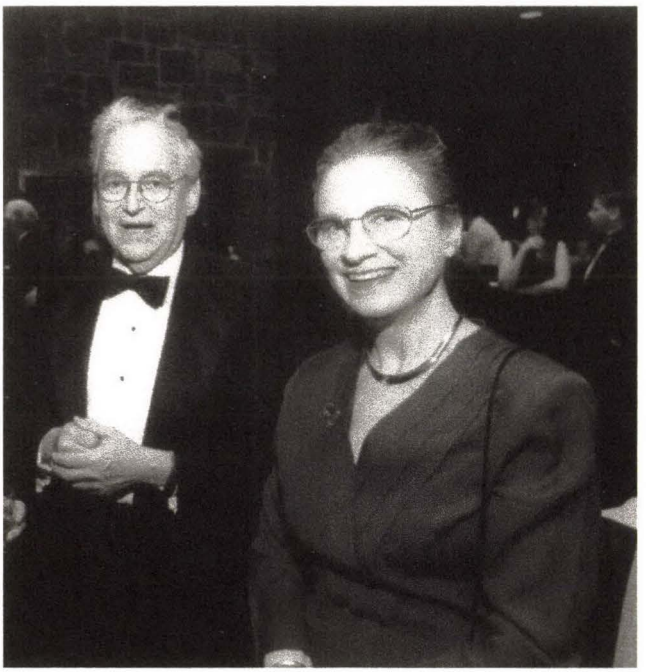
Daniel Klein, Esq."



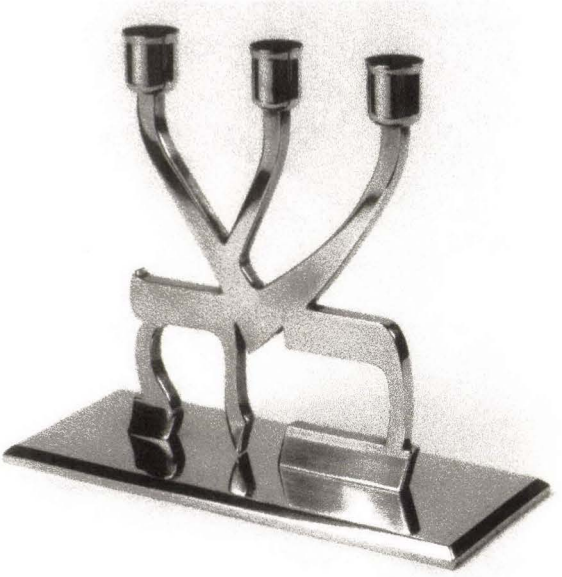
Simmy, about age 4, all dressed up.



Marine Private First Class, 1945



Simmy and Nancy, dressed for a ball, 1985.



The first of many brass candelabra made by Simmy "The candlestick-maker"—this one for our home.

CHAPTER 12 – THE COURT INTERPRETER

Occasionally Simmy managed to record some of the interesting day-to-day adventures that befell him. One that he just had to write about began with a call to me, looking for a Hebrew interpreter. I allowed that I wasn't the person they wanted, but helpfully offered my husband. This is what happened next:

"The scene at Telz at 11 last Tuesday morning was quite normal... learning with my *chavrusa*...when I was called to the phone: 'It's your wife.' And I am off on a new adventure.

"An official from the Yonkers Criminal Court called, looking for a Hebrew interpreter. An Israeli is under arrest and is to face the judge in less than an hour. Oy. I run home, jump into a suit, whip on a tie and drive to Court. The parking lot is the first hurdle: payment by computer, but a hot sun on the screen all but blots out the instructions that are a bit simpler than bypass surgery. Finally, it swallows all my change and I'm good for an hour. Through the metal detector, up the elevator, my head is spinning. The halls are crowded with cops, lawyers and the The Great Underbelly of Society.

"A buzz, I'm in the appointed door. A voice: 'This way, Mr. Klein!' It's Dorothy, the court official. 'Sign here, here, here and here. Keep this. Now sign here and here. Sorry for the short notice. We've never needed Hebrew before. Boy, are we glad you could come.' She misreads my blank stare as sophistication and says, 'They'll call her case soon.'

(Her? I need to conjugate feminine forms? I'm not in enough stress?) A woman standing next to the judge tucks some of her blouse back into her skirt again and yells, 'Number 93! Willie Morton!' From a side door a bailiff leads in the accused. Even in handcuffs he does a great pimp roll. The judge asks questions, Willie mumbles something, a lawyer is assigned. 'Any priors?' 'No, your honor.' 'No priors?' Papers are shuffled, Willie is escorted out. 'Number 62! Yasmin Merriwether!'

"Watching the drama of drugs, assaults, family feuds parading before me, it's hard to concentrate on what Dorothy gave me: 'Court Interpreter Manual'. Whoa. '*Eyfo haotobus l'Rehovot*'(where is the bus to Rehovot) isn't going to help me much. And my parking time is almost up. I scrounge a potfull of quarters and dart out to buy another hour. This time, the cops at the metal detector smile and wave me back in. Slithering through the crowd, I find the same courtroom after a couple of tries. A few more cases, and the judge says,

'We'll break for lunch and reconvene at 2.' I find Dorothy and finally come out of my daze enough to ask what the alleged Israeli's name is and what she's up for. 'I think there's a V in it but don't know how to say it. She was arrested for shoplifting – petty larceny.' Aha. Thus eminently more informed, I rush home and pore over the Alcalay dictionary, trying to keep the yogurt off it. *Genevah p'utah* is petty larceny and *genevat chanuyot* is shoplifting. I'm starting to see a pattern. But what's the feminine form of 'perpetrator?' And am I gonna remember?

"Back in court, I keep Alcalay hidden. I don't want to give anyone the impression this is my first time. As if this crowd cares. Finally, 'Number 76! Uh, um. Number 76! That girl.' She is brought in and the Hebrew to describe her is easy: *Miskainah* (wretched). Hair disheveled, tear-stained, trapped animal eyes not bad looking. I feel awful for her as I take up my position next to her. The judge begins by reading the statute number (no way am I gonna translate that multidigit alphanumeric), the statute definition of the charge, the specifics of why she's here, then tells me to explain all this to her. I plunge in: '*Hu omer sh'ganavt mashehu.*' (He says you stole something.) The judge, assuming I'm done, continues: 'Now have her answer all the questions on this sheet and have her sign

it.' It was titled, Adjournment in Contemplation of Dismissal. I stared at it and began, '*Hanyor hazeh...*' (this paper) The judge again: 'Take the ACD back there with her and come back when you're done.'

"'Back there' were the male and female holding cells. My *chachkele* (knickknack –derogatory term) has her cuffs removed and is returned to the cell. 'I gotta talk to her,' I protest to one of the several cops hanging out in the cramped but free space between cells. He waves a hand at her cell and says, 'So talk.' Through the bars, I see the tears have begun again and she starts to tell me it's all a terrible mistake, she was just holding some stuff for a friend....But having scanned the manual, I stop her and say '*Tiri. Ani lo yodaya klum mizeh, rak ma she'hashofet amar. Yesh li kann kama sh'elot v'tzarich la'anot al kulam, uz lirshom.*' (Look, I don't know anything about this, just what the judge said. Here I have a few questions you need to answer. Then sign here). -- I left out the umms. She nods. The first question is, Is this the first time you've been caught? *Zo hi hapaam harishona she'tafsu ohtach?' 'Eyfo, po b'America?' (*Where, here in America*?) 'Ken.' 'Ken.'* (Yes, yes). I almost lost it there. I struggled through the next five questions without incident. It was clear to her that '*Lo*' (No) speeded things up. The last was a long legal statement about agreeing not to do something if they let her go. There's no way I can say any of this in Hebrew, so I make an executive decision. This broad wants out ASAP. '*Lirshom po, b'vakasha.*' (Sign here, please).

"Back in the courtroom, an assigned lawyer looks over the ACD. He asks only, 'You're sure she understands this last question?' 'Oh, yeah.' Soon, she's brought back and we are in front of the judge. My attention is a bit diverted by his rug, which moves a tad while he says, 'Tell her that if she stays out of ANY trouble for 6 months, these charges will be dropped. '*B'seder* (O.K.), your honor.' Then to her, '*Att tz'richa l...*' (You have to...) The judge continues, 'But if she is back in court within that time, these charges will be renewed and severely enforced.' '*Hashofet omer...*' (the judge says....) The judge again: 'Does she understand that?' Clearly, he's overestimating me. I'm still trying to decide if *chadashim* (months) is masculine. 'Oh, yes, your honor, she understands perfectly.' 'Good. Take the cuffs off. She's free to go.' '*Att chafshiya.*' (You're free). She just stares at me. '*Chafshiya?*' 'Number 98! Qula Santos!' '*Ken,*

achshav.' (Yes, now.) *'Achshav?'* Doesn't this broad understand proper Hebrew? Should I say, *'Att n'kiyah?'* (You're clear). No way. Maybe I should try, *'Tazuzi et hatachat shelach.'* (move your butt). Instead I say, *'Chutza. N'daber shamah.'* (Outside. We'll talk there). Gotta make room for G'veret (Mrs.) Santos.

"In the hall, where the judge can't rattle me, I explain with gravity: *'Att tz'richa lelechet yashar yashar, l'chol hapachot, uh, b'meshech shisha chadashim.'* (You want to go straight, stay out of trouble for six months). I'm rolling now. She's nodding. *'Yoter m'ishisha, herei zeh m'shubach.'* (more than 6, even better). She's nodding vigorously. *'Aval, im hashofet tireh otach po b'toch, uh, lifnei, um..'* (But if the judge sees you here before...). She's shaking her head, *'he yaharog otach. Mevinah?'* (He'll kill you, understand?) A court official hands her a sealed envelope of her belongings and a telephone message. Her 'friends' who were too busy to help her out of jam are waiting for her at a given address. They'll pay the taxi fare. That was touching.

"'Att tzricha l'kachat mechonit...' 'Monit.' '...monit, liktovet kakatuv po.' 'Aich motzim monit?' (You need to take a cab...to this address. How do we find a cab?). OK, I head her down to the lobby. The guards who've seen me now several times, greet me like an old friend. 'Your case finally got called?' Then, with a look at my companion, 'Yeah, I see it did.' From her envelope she takes out her belt and shoelaces and finishes dressing while I phone for a cab. As we wait for it, I ask, *'Matai att tashuvi l'Aretz?'* (When are you going back to Israel?) *'Ud esrim yom.'* (In twenty days). *'Shalom u'vracha, u'nesiya tovah.'* (Goodby and have a good trip). *'Todah.'* (Thanks).

"My work here is done."

CHAPTER 12 – FINDING HUMOR EVERYWHERE

Simmy's struggle with finding the right gender of Hebrew words reminds me of another time the genders tripped him up. He was always willing to speak a foreign language, plunging ahead and not caring too much if his grammar was correct. One time he was in Jerusalem, having breakfast in the hotel dining room. The waitress was busily scurrying about serving all the patrons. To his horror, Simmy noticed a parade of ants marching up the table leg, across the top, through a dish of jam and down the other side. Surely, someone ought to do something about this. He tried to formulate the proper sentence in his mind before sounding the alert. How to say "ant" in Hebrew? Aha! There is a famous proverb about "look to the ant..." It's *nemalah.* Great, that's feminine, therefore the plural should be *nemalot.* He was ready. Catching the eye of the busy waitress, he called out *"Slichah, yaish nemalot al hashulchan."* Without breaking stride as she rushed by, the waitress leaned over and corrected: "*nemalim*". And thus Simmy learned that there are exceptions to the rules of grammar, even while the ants continued their merry march.

Another time that Simmy was called upon for services above and beyond happened right on our own block. He recorded his part in the drama:

"When the Con Ed trucks converged on the Flamer's house next door this morning and a platoon of hard hats disgorged, at first I said,

hey, not my problem. Then the doorbell. 'De guy crossastreet sez mebbe yougotta keyfer next door. Gotta gas leak. Gotta shut offa valve inna cella.' In a flash I knew today would become special. First, I look at the morass of keys hanging in the kitchen, mostly unmarked. One bunch with a Thunderbird on it must be the Ackermans. It has writing on it that could have been done only by their cat. My wife would know which one. 'When is she coming back? ' About 5 this afternoon. 'I gotta hole inna street already.' Here's one with 15 keys and an F on one of them. Let's give it a go.

"While trying the keys in the upper and lower locks, the Hard Hat says, 'Heas anudda lock wida green light ova heah.' So now I am *dlubbing* keys at random into three locks. The first two that work open the door. As I turn triumphantly to let in Hard Hat, The Bells of Hell go off.

"'GOTTA BEDA ONE WIDDA GREEN LIGHT. It's not easy to find the right key with your eardrums bleeding. DERE'S DA PHONE. Huh? PHONE'S RINGIN. YOU CAN HEAR A PHONE IN ALL THIS? I find the phone. The siren is aimed at it and the decibels knock it out of my hand. But I didn't hear it fall. Getting a good grip on it, I yell, HELLO? Mvvfufmmvf. LOUDER! THE SIREN'S IN MY FACE! I'M FROM NEXT DOOR. CON ED HAS TO SHUT OFF VALVE! GAS LEAK! (that has to be story number 153). Mvmffmname? KLEIN. CAN YOU SHUT OFF THIS ALARM? Bcmvvhhfmfcode? Mfmfpunchincofnfmv. So I hang up. Hard Hat: GOTT GETDE CELLA. Two more locks to *dluba* with. CAN YOU JUST GET ON WITH IT WHILE THE SIREN'S ON? HAFTA. DERE A SIDE DOOR? There is, with three slide bolts and one humongous padlock. No more *dlubbing.* USE THE FRONT DOOR. HEAH DE COPS. Two plainclothesmen at the open door, holding out their ID. If the letters were a foot high I couldn't hold my eyeballs steady enough to read it. I'm going to assume they're legit. No weapons are drawn and with a street full of Con Ed trucks and shovels, they get the picture. HOW DO YOU SHUT THIS OFF? I hand him all the keys I have. He picks one out, gives a little turn, the light goes from green to red and silence descends. The cops, Hard Hat and me in unison: JESUS.

OK, now to reset the alarm when they're done, you just go like this… Right, no problem."

Working from a home office obviously had many advantages, or were they sometimes disadvantages? But Simmy always managed to see the humor and perhaps embellish the story in the writing and telling. He "recorded" one telephone exchange with his friend Froike, who had lived in the US for some years before returning to Israel. They really loved each other, often masking their feelings with raucous exchanges. The following is a slightly edited version of their conversation:

"Work is piled high. Must finish in forty minutes, transmit results via my terminal, then run to Laguardia Airport. Nancy is putting the car keys, my wallet and overnight bag by the door. 'If anyone calls, I left already, honey!'

RING

'It's Froike!'

'Oh, darn…..Hello, Froike.'

'Simchele, what's doing?'

'Oh, nothing, just fooling around, hoping you'd call.'

'Couple of things.'

'Oh, darn.'

'What? Call an engineer named Ed at 604/532-1208 -- that's British Columbia – and tell him he's an asshole.'

'Got it. Next?'

'Two, I left my shoes to be repaired in Athens, Georgia. Or Macon. I can't remember where. Can you get them for me? Needed new heels. Or maybe soles.'

'What do they look like?'

'Kill me. I can't remember.'

'Color?'

'Haven't a clue. But you'll find them. Make sure the bastard doesn't charge more than $5. See if you can get them for $3.50.'

'No promises. What else?'

'Call Shmulik. The idiot sent me the wrong connector.'

'To what?'

'He'll know. Tell him he's a fool and to send me the right one airmail. And make sure he marks it a sample. Otherwise customs will tear my skin off.'

'Anything else? Actually I'm in a kind of hurry.'

'Just a minute.' (Pause, background conversation.)

'Oh, darn. Yoram just walked by. He sends his regards.'

'Good. And hello back to him. Well, I gotta run, Froikele.'

'Oh, and Reuven and Elly, too.'

'Great.'

'Simchele, I just had an idea. A friend of mine, Oren, is going to be in Detroit on Tuesday. I'll give you his girlfriend's number. Tell him on his way to JFK on Wednesday to stop in at Foto Electric and pick up my connector. But tell him to put it in his shaver kit.'

'No good, Froike. Shmulik's not there on Wednesdays. Unless Sol can handle it.'

'No! Sol's a bigger idiot than Shmulik! Tell you what. Call Oded and tell him to pick it up, then tell Oren to get it from Oded.'

'Um, uh, OK. Is that it?'

'And as long as Oren's in midtown, tell him to price the latest Sennheiser earphones at Harvey Radio. Unless you know anyone else who carries them. They're G-41's. Maybe not.'

'I'll try to arrange it, you mamzer.'

'How's Nancy and the kids?

''Just fine. Rina and the gang?'

'Pass regards. Any messages for David?'

'Yeah, tell him to come to your office and call us for half an hour or so.'

'I'll call him immediately. Anything else?'

'Uh, no, I guess not.'

'Simchele, I have to run. It's late here already. I'll call you again tomorrow. Bye.'"

CHAPTER 13 – ON BEING A FATHER

No matter what else was going in his life, the focus for Simmy was always his family. He enjoyed being a father and could be counted on for all the fun things in the kids' lives. He was the one who told them stories, made up strange characters and kept us all laughing. He could be a disciplinarian when necessary, but he was definitely the fun parent. In one of his serious moments he sat down and wrote his thoughts for his children to think about. It was in 1965, when Danny was almost twelve, David and Jonathan almost ten and Abby was just six. It was kind of heavy stuff for young children, but I think they understood. They knew it was serious as soon as they saw the salutation with no nicknames:

"Dear Daniel, David, Jonathan and Abigail:

You are four very intelligent children and I love all four of you equally. Yet it seems that I yell at you a lot. You must wonder why, and that's why I'm taking the time to write down my thoughts.

"First of all, each person in this world is different. Some are similar and some seem to be similar, but no two are alike. That's part of the wonder of creation. Therefore, knowing exactly how other people feel and what they think is impossible. The best we can do is try hard to imagine how other people feel and think.

"We can start with simple things. You can be pretty sure that after playing real hard, people feel sweaty and uncomfortable. After a bath, people feel relaxed and very comfortable. Most people like to be spoken

to nicely – like to be smiled at, and very few people like to be yelled at and frowned upon. These things are basic in Brooklyn or Bangkok.

"Now here's something else that's just as basic. The persons who yell the most at children -- are their parents. Why? Because they care how their children grow up. They love them. If you fall and cut yourself, I'm concerned because someone I love has been hurt. That's why parents all over the world yell after their kids, 'Careful! Watch where you're going! Don't run so fast!' (Some parents yell louder than others, but there we are back to each person being different.) You rarely find parents yelling at other people's children like that. Why? Because parents' first responsibilities are to their own children. Teachers often yell at their students for the same reason. They're responsible for their students' education.

"Similarly, parents are critical of their child's table manners. Why? Because as he grows older, he will be eating in restaurants and other people's homes. If he holds his fork so that the food falls off it and into his lap, the other people at the table may think (if they don't say), 'Look at that slob! You'd think he was brought up in a barn!' A remark like that, or just a look like that, can hurt worse than a cut – and a parent is concerned again, because someone they love has been hurt.

"Get the idea?

"Now, let's look at it the other way around. Who is most proud when a child gets a good report card, is complimented on his table manners, performs some good deed? His parents, of course. They think, 'well, what a fine young man he's growing up to be! He's a credit to his family. He's going to be a success in whatever he decides to be when he grows to manhood.' Why are we so proud? Because the parents love their child, and just as they are hurt when the child is hurt, they feel great when the child does well.

"There is another reason. When a child acts poorly, people say, 'He's just showing the poor training he's getting at home.' If he acts and speaks like a gentleman, people say, 'His parents are certainly bringing him up well.' So you see, a compliment to the child is a compliment to his parents.

"Now let's go back and take examples of everyone being different. Danny loves to study his 1822 atlas. Jonathan loves to play with his coin collection. David loves chemistry. Abby loves to play 'Baby' before going to bed.

"Here are some bigger differences. Danny loves blintzes but hates Swiss cheese. Jonathan loves Swiss cheese but hates milk. David loves milk but hates blintzes and Abby loves blintzes, but sometimes leaves them over. Daddy doesn't want to hear about problems until after he's eaten supper. Mommy hates leftovers.

"As we live and grow together, we all get to know each other's special differences. We can get along with each other better by understanding that each of us reacts to situations in a different way. Here is an example of different reactions (that is not meant as criticism): If Danny fidgets with his fingers, Daddy, David and Abby don't mind, but it bothers Mommy and drives Jonathan wild. Mommy has a normal reaction, and many people feel the same way.

"Solution: stop fidgeting. It will promote peace in the family and it's a good habit to get rid of, too. Also Jonathan should learn not to be so bothered by fidgeting fingers. At the very least, look away. Lots of people in this world fidget and we simply must get used to it.

" I hope that one example is enough to show that in order to get along with other members of the family, one should quickly discover what displeases them, then if possible, avoid doing it. The more you try to obey this rule, the more popular you will become; and in addition, others will try to please you. Then everyone will be happier.

"Finally, if we get into the habit of being considerate to other members of the family, it carries over into all your future relationships as you grow older: in school, at work and in marriage.

"Perhaps some day you will tell your great-grandchildren about your old father who wrote all this down when you were a little kid. They'll probably say in their high-pitched voices, 'Did people know how to write in those days, ole grandpa?' Hopefully, you'll say (also in a high-pitched voice), 'Of course. Shakespeare lived about the same time and he could write, couldn't he? ---- Well, thanks for the footstool. Good to see how well your parents are bringing you up.'

"All my love, Daddy."

Although Simmy rarely wrote seriously, there was another time he was moved to do so, in 1989. Then he wrote to David in Israel about going into the Israeli Army (Zahal):

"Dear Dooit:

While working, thinking, even during conversations, my mind keeps grinding in the background, about your impending entry into Zahal. There ought to be some weighty things a father should say to his son at such a time, but nothing that isn't terribly obvious comes to mind. And why say the obvious? I know you know what I am thinking. Still, I figure I'd start writing and see what comes out. I can hardly wait.

"There comes a time when every parent realizes that their kids will get into situations that are completely out of his control. Leah and you have already experienced this, of course. My earliest memory of that is when you were about two. Yoin flung a block without looking and as I watched helplessly and in horror as it went for your head, you bent down to grab for something and the block slammed into the wall. The next example that comes to mind is those nights of hockey practice.

"Then Yoin joined up for three years. Mommy and I simply had to decide that's too long a time to hold your breath. Whatever we did up to then to make him aware of taking care of himself and not do anything too stupid, were done. There was comfort in combining that with the knowledge that he cared for his tuches almost as much as we did. It helped too, knowing he was much more mature than I was when I joined the Marines. I was going to add, 'and much smarter', but that would be no great compliment to Yoin.

"And yet, look at how marvelously things turned out. Yoin enhanced his career, found Lisa, and put a lot of scum in Leavenworth. I found a lot of scum, survived and have a lot of sea stories. And I really, sincerely, think you'll do well. Winter or summer, there's no good time to go through basic training, and the first two weeks will be the toughest. After that, you just might begin to enjoy it, though it would be a cardinal sin to admit it, even if you get to drive an eighteen-wheeler. You'll probably meet some scum, but you'll also meet some fine people. You'll probably be a good influence on some, and that will be a *Kiddush*

Hashem. And just as HKBH watched/is watching over you up to now, so may He continue to do so.

"I love you, Daddy."

Since Simmy had a wonderful ear for languages, he was able to have some fun with Danny and David, who inherited that talent. One day Simmy had come home with four little Berlitz phrase books in different languages. He kind of tossed them to the children and Danny got Italian, David got Russian, Jonathan (poor child) got Japanese and Abby, I think, got French. Anyway, Danny and David immediately got to work and mastered their languages, going on to more study. The boys all took German in college, and since Simmy had taken an intensive Berlitz course in German, they had something in common. Danny once sent Simmy an Italian quiz, for which Simmy whipped out the answers (they appear in italics):

"Based on the book you have just read, Il nome della rosa , complete the following statements:

1. Whenever the name of the noted heretic, Fra Dolcino, was mentioned, everyone shuddered because *he always put maple syrup in the baptismal font.*
2. The monastery library was shaped like a *Magen David* in order to keep the monks from *making wine* there at night.
3. The Church was opposed, for political reasons, to the doctrine that Yoshke and his disciples were really *gay* because it was afraid that if people believed that, everybody would *lisp.*

"Translate the following paragraph:

Gli uomini di una volta erano belli e grandi (ora sono dei bambini e die nani) ma questo fatto e' solo uno dei tanti che testimoniano la sventura di un mondo che incanutisce. La gioventu' non vuole apprendere piu' nulla, la scienza e' in decadenza, il mondo intero cammina sulla testa,...la asino suona la lira, I buoi danzano...."

Translation: How preferable to apply a vanilla scoop with a one volt charge to the saintly nurse whose golden snoring wakes the saintly child, than my highly caloric but lonely search for its saintly aunt who, somewhere in this world, is singing her lungs out to the authorities about the Bambino Family. If they catch her in the men's room, she's

dead meat (literally – she will become like unto nothing), ancient or modern science notwithstanding. She will be heard saying, I didn't do it for the money, but I gotta dance, as her remains exit this world via the closet of water."

Of course, Simmy had to get back at Danny for this disaster of a translation, so he submitted a German test to fill in the blanks and translate. First, Danny had to decide whether the blanks had to be "das" or "dass" and then what did it all mean. Danny wrote:

"Geliebte Papa, I have checked out my German and I think I know my dass from my elbow. The only trouble is that Mr. Knudsen taught us to have a passive knowledge of the language, not really an active one. In other words, I know what looks grammatical, but I'm not sure what the words actually mean. Accordingly I will hazard the following translation of your paragraph."

"*Dass das* gelieferte fleisch nicht in dronung war, *das* wussten wir. *Dass das* besprochene geld, *das* schon vor eine woche bei uns wein sollte, *das* wussten wir nicht. *Dass das* fosen haben wird, *das* durfte ihnen klar sein.

"*That the grape-leaf-wrapped meat was not in order, that we knew. That the speaking gelding (Herr Ed?) which was pretty for a few weeks when it stayed at our house, that we didn't know. That the Folger's had turned weird (or weird)that should clearly have been an inny.*"

Danny had gotten a chance to use some of his languages when he went on a post-high school summer trip to Israel and Italy. In those pre-cellphone and pre-e-mail days, we all wrote letters. In one I informed him: "We miss you – Daddy's having his first taste of being the one at home. He now feels three weeks is too long for you to be away and every five minutes looks at the clock, does rapid calculations and announces things like 'it's now 2 a.m. in Israel and Danny is fast asleep.'" But he couldn't let the chance pass to have more linguistic fun and wrote to Danny in Italy this polyglot note: "Mio Caro Daniello, Esta vous 'aving mucho tempo buono? Koff nicht kein watches fun gringos of'n gasse. Az du sayst a kleine goy vus shtayt uff a balcony bahm Vatican, kish nicht zayne ringele.! Er iz der Roysh fun alle galuchim. Und az du falt in ah canal, trinkt nicht de vasser. Zay gezunt und shtark. Dayn Tate."

CHAPTER 14 – AND THEN A GRANDFATHER

Simmy had lots of fun with his children, but the advent of grandchildren brought out the best in him and he had ongoing jokes with all of them. For instance, he always told them not to walk on the ceiling. And on Pesach he called his end of the table The Cape of Good Horn, never acknowledging that it should be either The Cape of Good Hope or Cape Horn. In 1986 he wrote a story for the kids, entitled Fred and His Magic Strings:

"From deep inside Howe Caverns came a voice that could be heard for miles: 'Turn me loose! Get me out of here! Somebody help me!'

"The trouble was, the voice was speaking in Serbo-Croatian and nobody around understood Serbo-Croatian. They understood only English or Hungarian. So everyone thought it was some mysterious noise caused by alluvial formations deep in the cavern created by the dragging anchor of Noah's Ark. That's what Istvan Feher said, anyhow. He worked in the parking lot next to the cavern. His Uncle Ferencz once told him that and Istvan believed anything his beloved Ferencz Batchi told him.

"And every time that terrible sound came out of the depths (three times a day like clockwork) people would jump in fright and say, 'Holy cow! What's that?' One visitor was even heard to say, 'Goodness gracious, Cousin Ignatius! Whence comes that blood-curdling noise?' And good

old Istvan would say, 'Don't worry. That sound is as regular as Old Faithful and it's caused by....' And he would retell the Buhbe Myseh.

"One day, a cloud of dust was seen approaching. It was caused by a 1958 Buick, driven at high speed toward the cavern. Out jumped the Svensen family, as soon as they parked. There was Sven Svensen, his wife Ingrid, their daughter Bente and their little son, Fred. As they stretched and dusted themselves off, there came the cry from the cavern, right on schedule. 'Yumpin Yiminy!' yelled Sven, Ingrid, Bente and Fred. 'No problem,' said Istvan and told the story one more time. The Svensens looked at each other and said, 'What a strange and wonderful country this is.' You see, they were on vacation and had been in the United States only a week.

"After davening Mincha, they joined a tour and descended into the cavern. Yes, you guessed it. In no time at all, Fred took a different path and was separated from everyone. And once more came the cry, but this time it sounded as if it were just around the corner. Fred went around the corner and was amazed at what he saw. There was a man, as hairy as a Shetland pony, with his hand stuck in a hole in the wall. He had wild, staring eyes and a very sore throat. He was dressed in sweat pants on which was written, 'University of Split.' As soon as the man saw Fred, he said, 'Oh, please, little boy. Help me get my hand out of this hole in the wall.' Trouble is, he said it in Serbo-Croatian. So Fred could only look at him puzzled, and said in Swedish, ' I wish I could understand you.' 'What? You speak Swedish?' cried the man in Swedish. ' Yes, and a little English, Hungarian and Hebrew too.' 'Wonderful!' the man answered. 'I speak English also. But what good is English, fifteen kilometers from Dubrovnik?

"Fred was about to ask what Dubrovnik was, but since he was a smart little boy he understood that first, he should help free the man's hand. 'How did you get it stuck?' he asked. 'My name is Mendel the Magician. I can run marathons like you wouldn't believe. But I get lost without a compass. So my wife, Gittel, bought me a watch that has a compass and an alarm built in. One night, it seems so long ago, I ran at great speed until I fell down a big cave. My watch fell off and went into this little hole. I reached in and got it, but can't pull my hand out.

And I've been stuck ever since. If you could free me, I'd do anything for you.'

"Fred thought and thought. Suddenly his face lit up and he said, 'Mr. Mendel, let go of the watch!' 'Never!' answered Mendel. 'My wife Gittel....' 'I know, I know,' replied Fred. 'But the hole is smaller than your fist. If you let go for a minute you can get your hand out.' 'But how will I get the watch that my wife, Gittel....' 'Don't you see?' explained Fred. 'My hand is smaller than yours and I'll reach in and get it for you!' 'Brilliant!' cried Mendel, hoarsely. And so it was done.

"'Now for your reward,' Mendel said. 'I don't need anything,' Fred answered shyly. 'It was a *mitzvah*. 'Of course. And it's a *mitzvah* to keep my promise, too. Hmm. Is your shirt badly torn or are those *tzitzis* sticking out there?' 'They're *tzitzis*, all right,' replied Fred. 'I can't seem to keep them tucked in.' 'That's it,' said Mendel the Magician.

"From now on, your *tzitzis* will have special magical power. And now, if you will excuse me, I must find my way back to Dubrovnik. Boy, do I need a shower. Goodbye.' And off he raced out of sight.

"Fred found his way back to the tour just as it was over. Sven and Ingrid and Bente were so interested in the sights that they didn't notice he had been gone. 'Wasn't it interesting?' they asked Fred, as they reached the parking lot. 'It sure was,' answered Fred. But when they got into their 1958 Buick, Sven put his hands on his face. 'Oh, no. Out of gas.' Fred got an idea and jumped out of the car. He dangled his *tzitzis* near the gas cap and heard Sven say, 'What's this? Suddenly the gas tank is full!' And while he stared in amazement, Fred swung his *tzitzis* over the 1958 Buick and it became a 1986 Toyota van.

"Another swing of the *tzitizis* over Ingrid and she had a lovely dress for Shabbos. 'Maybe I can make Bente beautiful,' little Fred thought. This took ten swings. And down the road they went, listening to their stereo radio.

"Istvan stared and stared. 'Strange things have been happening today. First, the alluvial noise is gone, and that little boy! Wait till I tell Ferencz Batchi about Fred and his magic strings. Who knows what he's doing with them now!'"

Once when we were visiting Danny and family in Rochester, Simmy started a whole new *shtick* with the kids. Walking home from Shul, they were talking about the Sedra, which happened to about Serah bas Asher. There is a story that she was the one who broke the news to Yacov that Yoseph was still alive. Simmy told the kids that Serah came running in to Yacov, excitedly calling, "Joe is alive!" Yacov nearly fainted and Serah, fearing for his life, amended, "No, no, it's Moe! Moe is alive. Moe, the dry-cleaner, is alive!" And thus began a whole tale about Moe, who, it seems, was the one who kept Yoseph's coat of many colors nice and clean. In 1991, Simmy created the "Book of Moe" from which he sent Coby an excerpt:

"Dear Coby, I have great news. Part of the Book of Moe that's been worked open turns out to be a newly discovered Midrash Moe, slightly damaged. So far, one chapter that seems to be titled, 'Oh, Moe is me', has been partially translated. It will have scholars standing on their heads to figure it out. Here's an excerpt:

"...fish. And... getting late. Hurry to....family will...Widow st... ing (starving? Staring?) But how will you....Alright already...

"new paragraph:

"...armpit(s)...if only...lost...back. Shepherd...news. Down to two figs...no knife. How will...Shabbos? Cr..d and scr..bitterly. ...Moe... bare hands...feh (pheh?)...rancid kishkes...wha...second biggest... gall bladder (?)!

"new paragraph:

"...don't run! Curb! (Curve?) Sewer...ankles...slip. Cr..d and scr..d bitterly.

"That's all we have so far, Cobe. Can you help? Ask your sisters. Lots of love, Papa."

As the number of grandchildren grew, Simmy created Klein Confections, as he wrote, "A Totally New Line of Confections, Guaranteed to Excite the Palates of Any Age". It only included twelve grandchildren – unfortunately he never went back to add the new ones. But the list sounds as delicious as the children were, and are:

"COBY CABANA

Peeking out at you from the windows of his taffy home are a selection of twelve of this boy's 1000 faces, molded in white chocolate. Each is a heart-warmer. Included is his mother's selection of 'ugly punim'. Can you guess which one? You'll eat it up in a minute.

JESSIE JOYS

One face, many hairdos. Fit the side-braided version on for that Jessie look that'll drive you nuts. That's my favorite. Which is yours? In a presentation package.

LILIPOPS

A beautiful likeness in a hard candy flavor for every color in the rainbow, dressed for school, play or party. Just one leaves a tingle all day. You'll taste these right down to your shins.

KJ KOOKYS

Each cooky has a different texture, in the shape of your favorite cartoon characters, each imprinted with one of KJ's Kooky Kwotations. Write them down before eating. They're really bizarre.

ELAZAR DELIGHTS

From the mysterious Mid East comes a combination of smiles and sly looks fashioned from halvah. What's he thinking? And in what language? Each individually wrapped, ready to jump on your lap. Watch out.

MANDA MUNCHIES

Through the taffy tassels you can see her famous face, done in marzipan. This is serious munching, folks. Do it slowly and enjoy. Available in a smile at a slightly extra charge.

CHAYA SYRUP

To enliven any dessert, trickle a spoonful of this over it and get ready for your taste buds to get up and dance. No musical accompaniment is necessary. It's built right in.

BIVA BITS

A generous, 3 ounce box of eye and forehead miniatures, perfect for that mid-afternoon shot of energy or while watching TV. Warning: They'll make YOU melt.

CHOCOLATE JOEYS

It took Michelangelo to produce this exact likeness of Joey, assuming the position – left thumb and forefinger on bellybutton, right thumb in mouth. To be nibbled from the center out. So real, you'll swear you can hear him giggle. Available in switched positions.

ZACHY DOODLES

For a zesty, wake-up flavor, try these for breakfast, the earlier the better. This healthy, multi-vitamin confection is sprinkled with crispy kipot. Gobble up a bowl as is, or with plenty of spilled milk. Carry some in baggy or briefcase. You never know when you need a lift.

DIDI DAINTIES

Of course they're delicious, but they're for collecting and displaying. You wouldn't eat a Hummel, would you? Keep on mantel, dresser, in a lighted sideboard, or anywhere you want to say, 'Yoy!' Shelf life is stamped on tushy.

BECKY BELLIES

Not for your formal parties. But for a kick-off-your-shoes-and- how's-it-going evening, pour these in four or five candy dishes, placed around the room. Don't expect a coherent conversation, with all the crude noise interruptions. I don't know about you, but I save the navel for last."

Some years later, Simmy composed a *gramman* about the American grandchildren, with lots of dum, dums and boom, booms. It was based on the theme song from one of his favorite TV shows – "Homicide – Life on the Street".

"Ba dum, dum, de dum, dum…..
"Oh, Joey had some homework, but he didn't do it all.
His teacher heard his story, that was very long and tall:
You see, KJ put his shoes on and jumped right on to his chest …
Joey tried to roll away and well I guess you know the rest.

And it's boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom all night long.
Then KJ got so hungry, looking for a bite to eat...
He saw a lump of candy looking like it was so sweet.
Didn't know it was Elana who snuggled in her bed,
KJ ate up her left foot and started chewing on her head.
(And it's boom, boom, etc.)
Well, Elana got real mad and ran into her parents' room.
Lucky Abba felt the pain – oh how could morning come so soon.
He tried to push Elana off onto her Ema's side –
Ema yelled, 'You touch me and I'm gonna tan your hide.'
(And it's boom, boom, etc.)
Ole Papa's horizontal, sleeping in his big red chair.
It takes just a little noise to change him to a nasty bear.
The kids are shooting baskets while he lets his brain go rot.
KJ jumps on Papa's lap to block Joey's three-point shot.
(And it's boom, boom, etc.)
Jessie gets on the train, another day at school.
She studies on the way, 'cause hey, she aint' no fool.
Learning Torah and lots of stuff – just like she should,
Then at 6 o'clock she's back in the neighborhood.
(So it's boom, boom, etc.)
Now Amanda's always talking –just can't stop that girl.
She dresses like a slob, but you can't hide that pearl.
She loves to hear me say that she's such an ugly mess,
Papa always loves to shock her, with his machine-gun kiss.
(So its boom, boom, etc.)
Ole Zacky goes to *minyan* very early every day,
And it's so late at night when he finally hits the hay.
So in between there's time for him to do a million things.
When the 'Z' plays short stop the crowd will make your eardrums ring.
(So it's boom, boom, etc.)
Of course our lovely Becky, she's the one who lives to eat.
She grabs away the food while giving you a smile so sweet.

She'd listen to her parents, but she doesn't own an ear,
So she gets away with murder just because she's such a dear.
(So it's boom, boom, etc.)
Sabrina has so many sisters, she doesn't know which way to turn.
And the Z man's always there to show her something else to learn.
The possibilities are endless, hey they're almost out of sight.
And yet she is unique because she is so very bright.
(So it's boom, boom, etc.)
Ole Coby lives to study, can't tear him away from school.
And if you ackshully believe me, hey you are some kind of fool.
Whenever you see him, he's got a mouse in his fist.
Can you believe he asked his Rebbi for a jock scholarship.
(And it's boom, boom, etc.)
Lili baby-sits all night and in the day she counts her loot,
'Cause she wants to buy her Abba a nifty Hickey-Freeman suit.
Oh, what color should it be, maybe dayglo with wide stripes of red.
Before everyone throws up, let's get Ema a black dress instead.
(Oh, it's boom, boom, etc.)
Biva's eyes are falling out, but she keeps a death grip on her book.
She devours anything in print, with just a single look.
If you tell her for the tenth time that she has to go to bed,
She'll look up and give you her thousand yard stare instead.
(And it's boom, boom etc.)
Didi grows like a weed, 'cause that's the only thing she'll eat.
A stalk of celery and carrot sticks and a little cream of wheat.
If you asked her if she'd like a nice big plate of lungen stew,
At first she'll holler 'huh', then deliver a real long 'Y-yewwww'.
(And it's boom, boom, etc.)
We can't forget our Jasper, the smartest doggie on the block.
His overactive thyroid causes everyone some shock.
He loves to have Coby toss his fav'rit tennis ball.
Oh, it makes him feel so good to smack his head against the wall.
(And it's boom, boom, boom, etc.)"

Because the Leichman grandchildren lived the closest, Simmy had the opportunity to interact with them the most. And they were a lively crew. KJ and Joey were curious as well as active. We once nearly froze until we realized that KJ had turned off the furnace. So Simmy posted a checklist for our house after the boys left:

"BASEMENT:

Machine tools – off	Hand tools – in place
Furnace switch – off	Hot water tank – check settings
Old refrigerator door – open	Freezer door – closed
Telephones – on hook	Wood glue – on high shelf
Stool – away from high shelf	Dust brush, shovel – in place

FIRST FLOOR:

Telephones – on hook	Answering machine – reset
Typewriter – off	Busy box – unplugged
Shower – off	Cookie jars – lids on
TV, living room – reset color, volume	TV, kitchen –reset contrast, intensity, antenna
Toaster oven – off, check settings, check for foreign objects	Toaster, blender, food processor, oven - same as for toaster oven
Dust buster – in place	Coffee pot – check for suds
Refrigerator – contents vertical	

SECOND FLOOR:

Telephones – on hook	Wastebaskets – upright
Cosmetics, esp. nail polish – upright	Tooth brushes – in place
Clock radio – settings, volume	

THIRD FLOOR:

Telephones – on hook	Computer – off
Printer – check settings	FAX – check settings
Dust buster – in place	Typewriter – off

Biplane mobile – still up	Stapler – loaded
Desk, file drawers – inspect for disturbances, foreign objects	Doorknobs, all keyboards – check for jelly

OUTSIDE:

Garbage cans – closed	Toys – off steps, front and back
Cars – check lights, directional signals, locked doors	Neighbor's cat – alive"

This list was serious. Each of the items mentioned, with the exception of the cat, actually happened at one time or another. If there were lots of things to get into in our house, just imagine what they could do in TV store! Simmy chronicled the adventure:

"I've seen your Disneyland. I've seen your Disneyworld. I've seen your Six Flags over Texas. If you want to REALLY make your kids go bananas, take them to a TV,HiFi and electrical appliance store. Abigail, Mommy and I took Joey and KJ to Radiorama, across the street from the library. We wanted to buy something, I forget what. Anyway, behind the counter were three guys in torn T-shirts and gold chains. To converse, you had to read lips, in Spanish, because of the 120 dB blare coming from various speakers outside and inside the store. Latin and hard rock. One wall, ten feet high and fifteen feet wide, was solid TV's, all on the same channel from Neptune. Awash with cartoon colors, blasting a heavy beat. Aisles were marked off with speaker boxes three feet high and no grill cloths, so you can see the five or six different sizes of speaker cones and switches for crossover networks.

"Into this pulsating Hog Heaven strode KJ and Joey.

"The tempo of the story picks up at this point. I made sure that one of the clerks recognized me (when we managed eye contact...not a pretty sight) so the price would be right. He knows I'm a buddy of Nat, one of the owners. Nat jumps a *kedusha* sometimes at *mincha*. In the middle of the transaction, I race for KJ who has already found out how to open the compartment to get at the fine adjustments on one of the TV's on the floor. Before I can get to him, yell 'no' (which I can hardly

hear) and shut the compartment lid, we've got twenty-five diagonal inches of multicolored snow. KJ moves on. So much to do. So little time. Joey is bouncing and stomping his left foot at his standard 1.5 seconds out of sync rate. But with so many conflicting beats, he's got to be right somewhere. He grins and screams in joy as he opens the same compartment lid, shakes his head 'no' while poking at the controls and slams the lid shut. Then he runs to a glass counter full of watches and calculators, bounces off it to pick up momentum and rushes, hands outstretched, into another twenty-five inch TV. That glass is strong. It also carries a lot of snot. KJ has snowed three TV's and now is pushing every red-tipped button on every speaker down the aisle and turning every knob he can reach on all the tuners, amplifiers, and VCR's. It flashes through my mind that they are both trained for this by the 'busy box' I made a generation ago.

"While Joey is screaming in joy, caroming from counters to appliances and pausing to grin at me and stomp to the nearest beat, KJ is exploring the far recesses of the store, because, it turns out, he has to pee. Here's Abby's plan – She'll take him to the library and leave me to watch Joey and get the merchandise that's being wrapped up. Joey is now trying to poke all the red buttons KJ already poked. But he's not as accurate and often hits the speaker cones instead. That's o.k., as long as he's busy. If he realizes Ab's gone, that store is going to get loud.

"Then he found The Switch. It was almost invisible, painted the same color as the wall, but I figure that from Joe's perspective, he saw it outlined against the ceiling. On tiptoes, he yanked it down and the whole ten by fifteen foot wall of TV's blacked out. With my 49th 'NO!' I pushed the switch back up. The colors slowly reappeared but the sound was gone. I have three theories why the counter guys didn't seem to mind: First, it's not their store. Two, the noise just dropped to about 115dBs. Three, their eardrums had burned out long ago. But theories aside, it was time to leave.

"Outside, the flashing lights and window displays kept Joey's enthusiasm at high pitch. He grinned and screamed. When he heard his own echo bounce off the three walls of windows, he screamed again

and again. Passersby smiled. Here's a happy kid. Soon as the traffic cleared, I carried him to the library.

"Radiorama. The price is right."

A few years later, Simmy recorded another "Afternoon with KJ and Joey."

"After visiting with Abby, Steve and family in Teaneck, we bring the boys back with us so Abby and Elana can get some R and R. As we get off the parkway onto Riverdale Avenue, KJ tells us they had not had lunch and if he's not mistaken there's a Carvel store somewhere along here. Sure enough, it's still there. 'I'd like to have a soft strawberry ice cream cone, please.' 'We're out of soft strawberry.' 'Um, o.k., I'll have a strawberry thick shake.' Joey cow-eyes the chick behind the counter and asks solemnly, 'What do you have for me?' She melts. 'Anything you want.' Well, he's only 3.9 years old, so he asks for a coffee ice cream in a cup.

"KJ earlier had shown me his purse with a few bucks in it. Still, I was surprised when he said, 'I'll pay for mine and Joey will pay for his.' Then he added to me, 'Give me the money.' That's when I learned he meant he's the middle man. His purse remained intact.

"As we approach the house, they list the agenda: 'You know, if there's a video store nearby we could rent a tape. Wouldn't that be fun?' Joey: 'I want to make a maze on the computer and then play with the mouse.' We do the drive-in-bank instead of the video store and after their brief flirtation with the teller to the tune of honking horns, arrive home. They make for the stairs after washing their hands and rush to the machine. While Joey stretches for the switch, KJ has already run off to try to open the security cabinet. He succeeds only in making sure I'll never open it, then chins himself on the FAX machine. 'I want to type a letter to Ema and Abba and send it to them with this.' So he begins a letter and chins himself on the plastic tray of the copier while Joey punches in the dimensions of the maze he wants printed out. KJ joins him and after a few mazes, it's time to play Trap. That's real fun for twenty minutes of fiendish looks every time they succeed in trapping the computer's number.

"KJ slides off my lap and goes back, unsupervised, to the office. Joey wants to play with the mouse while KJ spots the tape recorder and begins a solid half hour of song and patter. It's time for Joey to write a letter now, so we're all in my office: I'm spelling for Joey, KJ is singing and the phone rings just as Joey wants to know the next letter and KJ asks me if I have any requests. They ask several times. Not satisfied with a whispered 'wait a minute' KJ climbs on a chair and tries to put his finger on the phone hook. I tell the guy I'll call back later and say 'L' and '*Shir Hamalos*'. They reply, 'What next?' and 'No, something from Peter Pan.' The intercom crackles: Time for supper. Something with syrup on it. Including the underside of the stool KJ pulled closer to the table.

"Now to the after-dinner entertainment. 'Tell you, um, what. I'll play Go Fish with Mama and Joey will play Old Maid with you.' Sounds good, until I ask Joey the rules. 'I'll show you,' he says with a straight face. All the cards are laid out on the carpet, mostly face down. He takes a card and examines it. He takes another, shows them both to me and says, 'They don't match.' 'Now it's my turn, right?' "No, I hafta take annuder card cause the first one didn't match.' In this manner, he accumulates eight or ten cards, then triumphantly shows me a match. 'My turn now, right?' 'No! I got a match, so I go now.' He continues selecting cards, now with a smile on his face. As I register more protests, he picks them all and says, 'I win! Wanna play again?' 'O.K., but I start this time.' 'Oh, no. I won the last game, so I start.' Now he's picking them up with little examination and a little giggle. The second game goes faster. He's 2 for 2. My protests and his giggles get louder through the third game and KJ is doubled over with laughter, listening to the action. I'm really angry now. 'I don't even have one card yet!' Joey flips through his pile and hands me one. 'O.K., you got one...let's see it. It's the Old Maid! You lose!"

Although KJ, Joey and Elana all grew up to be exceptionally independent and self-confident adults, as small children they were, each in turn, totally attached to their Ema. It would be hard to say which one was the worst, but Simmy had the most experience with Elana. She could be a handful. One baby-sitting job went like this:

"Ever play Hungry Hippos? A fun game that requires only one-finger dexterity and love of noise. Push that button and your plastic hippo opens his mouth to catch the little plastic balls running all over the one-square-foot playing field. If you play like Elana, you need thumb and forefinger dexterity. She yanks open the hippo's mouth and force-feeds him the little balls.

"So there we were, Elana and I, merrily feeding hippos while Ab and Steve eased out of the house for the evening. 'We'll be back by ten.' It's 6:05. After five minutes, Elana grows weary and crawls under the covers of Mimi's (Abby's) bed. Luckily, before she gets too exasperated, I catch on to her sounds and gestures indicating I should do likewise in Abba's bed. Lying flat on my back has always come easy to me, and I was thinking that this assignment so far is a piece of cake, I tune in to Elana's pleasant recitation of names: Abba, Mimi, Bapa, Mimi, Abba, Mimi, Mimi…' this was a converging series whose limit was Mimi. And the tone was changing from recitation to where the hell is…

"Next thing I know, she's screaming into the pillow, rivers of tears and snot covering her face. Hey, it's time for supper.

"KJ has made pancakes. I nuke them while he hauls Elana downstairs. As she covers him in tears and snot, he tries to get her on her chair. Unquestionably she does not care for this. KJ is hugging her like a bowling ball. His eyes wide, he strains, 'I can't get her high enough!' This, from someone who can lift the back of a Chevy. I help grip her and get her into the chair. Now she's really getting loud. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to tell she's not going to like the fare. Sure enough, she backhands the offered pancake into the far corner while KJ looks on, admiring the shot. Joey catches the action too, in the midst of syrup-writing 'Operation Desert Storm' in the vicinity of his plate. 'Maybe she'll like some vegetables,' he offers. They land in another corner. 'Here are three slices of orange,' KJ suggests. Wham. One piece isn't found until much later. Anything to drink? She dismisses her bottle as if it were, well, me.

"This must be the emergency Steve mentioned might occur. Where's that paper on which Abby wrote what to do in case of same? It had been on the couch, but it's gone! 'KJ, Joey, where's the paper?' They can't

hear me because Elana's jamming all the audio within twenty yards. I gesture. Joey finds it on the floor. There's Richie's phone number. Now, how the heck do you work this 1990's phone? KJ begins to explain all its nifty features, like automatic redial. 'I just wanna call Richie!' I scream. By now, the shock waves from Elana threaten to knock the phone out of my hand. Mary answers. 'Would you like us to come over?' 'Yes!'

"In two minutes, the rain-soaked neighbors are over and get to work. Mary tries to console Elana, which is like shoveling excreta against the tide. Richie is playing steal the hanky with Joey, using gestures, because they can't hear each other. KJ turns up the TV.

"The TV! Yes!

"'KJ, put the tape on... the Captain Hook tape.' Even in calm moments, I can't get names right, but after several 'What's' and 'You know, that yo ho stuff's' KJ feeds Peter Pan into the VCR as I gesture for Mary to put Elana in position. I stay out of sight but yell for KJ to fast-forward past the FBI warning and all that up-front stuff and whip the volume up as far as she'll go. Mary plunks her in front of the tube and Tinker Bell does her thing. I can tell Elana is hooked because suddenly Richie, Mary and I can hear each other. And we're all saying, 'Jesus.'

'Soon, she's slumped down, asleep from exhaustion, in spite of yo ho's as thunderous as a 747 buzzing Cedarhurst. Over KJ's objections I sneak the volume down to loud.

"It's 7:30. The emergency is over."

Simmy had a special relationship with each of his grandchildren. They had their private jokes, their individual studies and fun times together. He noted that he could see a lot of himself in Joey, particularly. First, Simmy noted that he and Joey shared a lot of attributes (not necessarily good ones!) A = Joey, B= Simmy:

"Compare these attributes:

1. Sports. Enjoys, but doesn't get emotional.
   A. Huddles with opposing side.
   B. Runs to pitcher instead of to 2nd base. As adult: leaves Shea at bottom of 9th inning of playoff game.
2. Attention. Sometimes 100%, sometimes nobody home.

No illustrations needed

3. Slob.
    A. Calmly opens mouth when full of liquid
    B. Snot-paints on windows
4. Admits errors readily – not if he can help it.
    A. Smiles and says, 'Who, me?'
    B. Smiles and says, 'Who, me?'
5. Never in a rush.
    A. Misses school bus
    B. Misses flights
6. Musical

No illustrations needed

7. Irreverent.
    A. There's a ton of other stuff, but I'm sleepy
    B. *Avinu Malkenu* or *Al Chet*? Um, I said them both.
8. Numbers.
    A. Facile with and fascinated by them.
    B. Fascinated.
9. Directions
    A. Forget it
    B. Forget it.
10. Adorable
    A. What a black eye I gave you. Take me home for *Shabbos*
    B. Cut my meat. Peel my orange.
11. Whoppers
    A. My mom teaches rocket science in college. I sometimes sit in.
    B. I'm a bear trainer."

Then he analyzed Joey:

"You want to stare at Joey intently. There's an art to it. Enjoy him a bit at a time. I started this from the first moment I saw him in the hospital: Eyes, lips, cheeks, chin, chin. At a few months it was chin, chin, chin. I knew he had a neck somewhere in there and sure enough it appeared much later. Such a close study should be done while he's asleep so as not to spook him. But one can enjoy the wrinkles in his ear, his forearms, his toes, when he's busy at, say, the dining room table.

"A great way to study Joey is to photograph him. None of those formal shots. One of the best sessions I ever had used the neighbor's cat for a prop. Joey was a few months old, sitting in our driveway, eating pebbles. Then the cat sauntered over and Joey managed to get a good grip on his tail, examining with great curiosity its structure, material and how firmly it was attached. The look on his face was intense, serious interest. I fired off a whole roll of film, reveling in the opportunity to preserve that look as he investigated the tail tufts coming up between his fingers. The cat could have moved on at any time, but chose not to.

"Joey never lost that kind of curiosity. He silently examines details that are often unnoticed by others. Such as, a *pasuk* in *Chumash* or *Mishnayot*. You might be misled by the seeming blank look on his face. If you haven't been studying him for years, you might think his thousand-foot stare means he's day-dreaming. Well, sometimes that's true. But more likely, he's preparing a question or statement that will knock your socks off when he does speak. And at times his response is lightning quick, revealing the depth of his understanding. That sort of concentration is one of his most precious attributes. Those who know not the ways of Joey see only a very good-looking guy, occasionally unaware of his surroundings. Don't believe it. His mind is processing at high speed. Watch out."

When the children got a little older, baby-sitting got a little easier, if not as funny. One session, when KJ was about ten, Joey eight and Elana about four, went like this:

"It was a piece of cake, with lots of icing on it.

"We kind of hung out until pizza time. Joey wanted spinach, KJ wanted plain. With no fuss, the pizza people agreed to make it half and half. Not too crowded. Elana climbed the railings under KJ's

supervision. As I went to get more napkins, Elana called me back loudly, and as I turned, she said, 'I just want to tell you, I love you!'

"We discussed the fact that Mommy, Elana and I are the babies of our families. KJ proudly pointed out that he was the *bechor*, with all its ad- and disadvantages, and Elana said, 'Joey's the middle child.' Joey, with his nose in his second slice, added his two cents: 'Boy, this is good.'

"I took the boys to the movies and Mama strolled home with Elana, who is gaining admiration for her. (Ed. Note: When Elana was about two and we were all leaving her house, she bade farewell by name to everyone but me. And I jokingly said, 'What am I, chopped liver? As the door closed, we heard this little voice cheerfully add, 'Goodbye, chopped liver.') Mama found her dipe and anything else misplaced around the house in no time. Mama put her to bed, selected her socks in the morning... all with the Elana's smiling approval.

"The movie was great and the best part was observing the guys during the action.

"Bedtime was smooth, except for about twenty seconds of wrestling with Joey. He had strewn the 'bricks' all over, so I hid a few under his covers and when he came up from the bathroom, he took a running belly flop onto his bed. Like a Three Stooges scene. His face was a conflict between surprise, annoyance and admiration.

"Morning, no problemo. KJ was available for any questions. Joey got up by himself, lower lip out just a bit, completely silent, going through the motions. (You could read 'What a hangover!' from his gorgeous *punim*.) I had him pick the cereal the night before, so Mommy just poured it out while Joey watched. As Mommy went for the milk, Joey added cereal to mountain height. Everyone dressed, brushed, packed and ready in plenty of time. Mommy stripped the beds, washed the sheets and replaced them. I had a peek at the Wall Street Journal. Elana helped me make coffee.

"When last seen this morning, Elana was hugging Shlomit hello and we disappeared into the sunrise."

A few years later Simmy had the chance to be chief baby-sitter (I was probably in Israel). And he recorded his adventures for Steve and Abby:

"This a.m. I awoke after a sound sleep, saw it was 6:25 and shot up in a panic. I remembered Ab had written, 'Get Joey up at 6:05.' I struggled up to the third floor (luckily you have a banister). Joey is out. 'Joey,Joey, I'm so sorry! Should have gotten you up sooner! It's late!' Joey stirs, mumbles. I go down, dress like a fireman, brush my teeth and dash back to the third floor with an iron grip on the banister. This is not the time to bust my rear. Joey's still in the sack! Oh, no! I rouse him again. 'Joey, Joey.' He peers at his clock and quietly informs me, 'I got 18 minutes yet.' 'OO. Sorry.' Back down to the dining room. Lemme see that note. '6:55' I'm greatly relieved and very wide awake.

"The rest of the morning was a piece of cake, having gotten such a head start. Joey left on time, fully equipped and with no hard feelings. KJ – on time into the bathroom, downstairs and out the door like clockwork. Lansi had stirred a bit earlier and I told her I'd get her up when KJ gets out of the bathroom (as it is written). She adds sleepily, 'Get me after the FIRST time he leaves the bathroom' and flops back down. Did. I'm rolling now. I suggest Honey Grahams. OK. But maybe I could whack up some Ovaltine to warm her up? Sure. She tells me: her cup, milk, 120 seconds, 3 teaspoons. Quick as a flash I'm ready to add the Ovaltine when she peers into the cup. 'Is that water?" 'Yes.' With an indulgent smile and a tilt of the head she says, 'Milk, Popsies. I'll do it.' 'No, got it this time.' And I did. With her coat cooking on the radiator I had a few leisurely moments to talk with her and stare at her *punim* while she finished her cereal. 'Let's do this again soon, Lansi.' 'Yes, it's such fun. But not right after Pesach. Remember? There was such a crowd at Noah's Ark last year because everyone wanted to eat *chametz*.' 'Oh, yeah, I remember.'

"Did you put my lunch in my backpack?

'Take a look, Lans.' 'Very good.' Bus arrives precisely on time and whisks her off. My work here is done."

And Elana did indeed grow up. Simmy was privileged to speak at her *siyum* for *Pirkei Avot*:

"'One hour of repentance and good deeds in *Olam Hazeh* is worth more than all eternity in *Olam Habah*.'

"Yet one hour of spiritual happiness in *Olam Habah* is worth more than one's entire life in *Olam Hazeh*.'

"Each world has its unique purpose and value, that can't be found in both worlds.

"*Olam Hezeh* is the 'entrance hall' where we must work to prepare ourselves physically, morally and spiritually to enter the 'banquet hall', looking as good as we possibly can. Once we are in the banquet hall, it is too late to do any more preparation.

"Recently, Mama and I rushed off to the Yonkers General Hospital dinner after Shabbos. It was held at the swanky Mamaroneck Beach Club, where your parents were married. Before leaving home, we dressed up well, but when we got there, we first combed our hair in the entrance hall and made sure we still looked good. And we did. Then when we entered the large dining room, everyone was very impressed – with Mama anyway. Without all that preparation, people might have said, 'Hey. Look what the cat dragged in.' And it would have been too late then to comb our hair and get the ketchup stains off my lapels.

"So, even just one hour that each of us spends preparing in *Olam Hazeh*, pays off big time in *Olam Habah*. And once in *Olam Habah*, the spiritual satisfaction and pleasure we get in as little as one hour there, is far greater than all the pleasure we can possibly experience in our entire lives in *Olam Hazeh*."

Then there were the Bar Mitzvah speeches. Unfortunately, Simmy did not write out the words he spoke at the number one Bar Mitzvah for Coby in Rochester. To our great regret, he did not live to be at Yakov's Bar Mitzvah. But we do have the speeches for the other four grandsons. First came KJ – Chaim Yonah Leichman:

"I wish I had met the original Chaim Yonah. All I know is that he was a great inspiration to Steve who loved and respected his grandfather and that he was, among other things, very perceptive. I picture him in his favorite chair, taking in the scene at family gatherings, not saying much. But when he did speak, it was quotable. I have the impression that KJ is headed that way.

"When first asked to write this, several scenes flashed in my mind. Most were of KJ under three, usually naked, saying or singing hilarious things I've always enjoyed quoting. But not for now.

"This morning I remembered having written something about him almost six years ago and located it immediately. Reading it today, I found it to describe KJ in his 'later' years, already indicative of the direction he had taken then. That evidence has since become stronger and *im mertz hashem* will so continue. And also, since it describes accurately how I felt then and still feel about him, here it is:

"Sunday morning, February 10, 1991.

'Chaim's an old hand at this by now. 'Um, Papa, do you want to hear me *daven* out of my new seedur?' And in his steady confident voice he proceeds through several pages, delayed only by digging his *tzeetzeet* out of his tight jeans. 'Now, do you want to say some *T'heelim* with me? You stand up for *T'heelilm*.' We take turns reading *p'sukim*. Now and then, without taking his eyes off the page, he must shake the siddur as if to remind me it's my turn. He's too intent on reading to notice that I'm all choked up.

"Suddenly it is thirty or so years ago. Danny is sitting in our Succah at Saratoga Avenue, his big serious eyes on the *Chumash*. He's about to review for me what he learned at the beginning of the new term at the Yonkers Yeshiva. In his clear, high voice he begins, *Bereshis bara*.... And I become an instant puddle of tears.

"While he finished that first *pasuk*, I saw the flash and crackle of the welding torch, forming another link. And I said, almost out loud, 'Here we go again.' It was the first of similar magic moments – epochs – with Davey, Yoin and Abby. No words, no language can describe that sensation.

"This morning, I heard the torch weld the next link.

"And today, at KJ's Bar Mitzvah, the 'original' Chaim Yonah heard it too."

Just a few weeks later it was off to Israel for Elazar's Bar Mitzvah. It was to be Simmy's last trip to Israel and we had a wonderful time. He was thrilled to be able to deliver this speech to Elazar, as he noted, "from his loving Papa":

"It's fortunate to be happy with one's name. That's why Mama and I gave such thought to naming our children. Your father has mentioned many times how pleased he is with 'David'. And I know no one prouder of his name than my father, of blessed memory, Elazar ben Aryeh Hacohen, and for reasons too obvious to discuss at length. He had profound respect for his father and was delighted that he'd named him Elazar. Carrying that name was not just a proud badge, awarded at birth. He was quite aware that it involved carrying a heavy responsibility. If you take your name seriously, there exists always in the back of your mind the duty to emulate your namesake. My father would want his great-grandson to do just that – not because he carries his name, but that of the original Elazar.

"And our Elazar has done just that. He's already distinguished himself in Torah study and though he has barely gotten 'off the ground', he is already emulating the original. We have from Rashi a description of how Moshe went about teaching the Torah. In what order did Moshe teach each detail? Having learned it himself, he reviewed it with his brother Aaron. Aaron then moved to Moshe's left and made room for his sons, Elazar and Itamar to review it. Then Elazar moved to Moshe's right and Itamar to Aaron's left. And so on. The main point is that in this manner, the people heard the Torah explained once; the Elders, twice; Elazar and Itamar, three times; and Aaron, four times. And so we see that if it was necessary for people of such stature to review it so many times, how much more so are we. And then the Torah tells us that Moshe did not stop talking until the people understood what was being studied.

"It is significant that your name is also Chaim, after your mother's maternal grandmother. It adds balance to your name. Studying Torah is of course continuous throughout life, as exemplified by Papo and by your grandfather who is so proud of you today. It was full time and intensive in their Yeshivas, and continued through their tough lives and then on as they married and struggled to make a living. That too, is a sacred duty. As you continue to learn, never forget that 'Mann muss machen a leben' – man must make a living. Don't depend on humans

and miracles. It's a delicate balance, but that's what 'Chaim' – life, - is all about, Elazar. L'Chaim, Elazar – keep the name alive."

Less than two years later, it was Joey's turn and Simmy rose to the occasion:

"Part of my checkered past has involved the design of computer-controlled gem cutting machines. It involved getting acquainted with many different kinds of stones, shapes and beautiful colors. We all know of diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires. But there are so many others. Tourmeline, citrine, amethyst...

"Each of these stones, while in the rough, would not attract your attention. It takes careful cutting and polishing to bring out their beauty. And each stone is cut a special way to do so. They have different angles of diffraction and just the right angles capture light to maximize their unique brilliance.

"Nancy and I think of all our grandchildren as individual jewels. The nineteenth is being polished *im mertz hashem* as we speak.

"Setting different stones into one piece of jewelry demands an additional skill. Done well, each stone's beauty accentuates the others, so that the total effect will just blow you away. The Leichman necklace is a good example. And it carries a *Bracha* with it.

"Steve and Abby are expert jewelers. KJ is their first precious stone. But as great a job as they did in shaping and polishing him, he added – and is adding still – his own uniqueness that we recognize and admire. And in doing so, he became the model to be emulated by Joey and Elana.

"They are obviously similar, but certainly not carbon copies. Joey and Elana are adding their special personalities and skills.

"There's an expression in the *Gemarah* that's used even today. *'LeHosif nofech mishelo'*. It means, 'to add something special of your own.' This is demonstrated by the stones in the High Priest's breastplate, representing the uniqueness of each tribe that made and contributed their best stone for the *Choshen. Nofech* is the fourth stone, representing Yehuda. *'VeHatur HaSheni, Nofech, Sapir v'Yahalom'*. Bezalel, the craftsman par excellence, was from Yehudah. He personally cut and polished that

emerald, that *Nofech*, putting his heart as well as his skill into it. The twelve stones combined, dazzled with a synergetic brilliance.

"Joey was cut and polished by Steve and Abby, several facets were added by KJ, and both KJ and Joey added facets to Elana. And Elana is doing her own thing. And there you have it: the Leichman necklace.

"Today, we are focused on Joey. No one can deny that Joey *Hasaf Nofech Mishelo*. It was noticed early on. Someone said that before Joey was born, they broke the mold. Put it any way you like, he combines the looks, goofiness and brilliance we all love. Don't ever change, Yussel."

Then in June, 1999, when he was already quite ill, he was delighted to be at Zach's Bar Mitzvah and delivered this tribute:

"Mr. Z on his Bar Mitzvah – It is always tough to try to encapsulate a description of anyone, and Zach is no exception. Yet, the word that comes to mind is his Positive Attitude. Just about every time I see him, he's got an eager look and a smile on his face. Surrounded by sisters, however lovely, that might not always be so easy. Maybe he and Coby have commiserated about this.

"Still, he seems to keep his eye on what's truly important, not letting petty annoyances set him back much. That's an attribute that will grow in value his whole life, to 120.

"In *Mesechta Succah* there's a discussion about how one should drink wine. Wine is associated with making *kiddush* –not knocking back a few with the guys. It's for *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*, at the *Seder*, a *Bris*, a *Pidyon Haben* – always related to a Mitzvah. There are those who say one should sip, savor the wine, especially if you don't have much of it, to enjoy its flavor the most.

"And yet Rava used to make *kiddush* and finish the whole cup in one shot. Is it possible that he could have enjoyed the wine more this way? There are two components involved in drinking *kiddush* – the taste of the wine per se, and the 'taste', the awareness of the mitzvah associated with it. By making an appropriate *bracha* beforehand, we thank Hashem for providing us the wine in the first place, and for giving us the opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah special to the occasion.

"Rava was more focused on the mitzvah component of the wine. Rashi explains that by downing it in one shot he illustrated to his

students – that is, you and me – that it is not the taste but the *chivuv mitzvah* the love of doing the mitzvah – that should be enjoyed the most. He had the right attitude.

"Zach owes a lot in developing this attitude to his teachers, to his sisters and enormously to his parents. But the bottom line is that he integrated all this input and he is his own man.

"And it shows. He has charm – *chayn*. But *chayn* means more. It means grace. That's a tough word to define. The dictionary has many definitions. The two most appropriate here are: 'The condition of being in G-d's favor' and 'The influence of G-d operating in man to strengthen him.' And on that same *daf* is written 'Whoever is endowed with grace is without doubt a person who has the deepest respect for Hashem.'

"It is written, 'G-d's special grace is forever upon those who respect Him.' Zach, you got it."

As often as possible we took the six or seven hour drive to Rochester. We always tried to be there for the Grandparents' Day at Hillel School. The kids just loved our being there and Papa was the hit of the whole school. He would make it point to sit and talk to any children who did not have grandparents attending. And the most memorable part for all the children was his performance of "Kiki Banana", which involved a special cut at the top of banana, making it a moving head to go with any verbal nonsense Simmy came up with. We went to graduations and plays, did some baby-sitting weekends and made just-because visits.

At one time Simmy had a learning program going with the Leichman kids. They would come over from Teaneck, armed with notebooks, and spend some individual time with Papa on various Jewish studies. Then he would give them "homework" for the next time. Of course, this was the most beloved homework. In the beginning Elana was too young for much written work, but as she got older she was included. One of her quizzes remains, complete with large heart crayoned on the bottom. This was "Korach Elevator Quiz", spawned by Simmy's jazzed-up version of the story of Korach and his followers being swallowed up in the earth. The questions and Elana's answers went as follows:

1. When was the elevator last inspected? <u>When they fell into it.</u>

2. How many passengers could it hold safely? A lot.
3. Was it local or express? Express
4. How many steps did it have? One.
5. How many buttons did it have? One.
6. What were their labels? Down.
7. Who was the elevator operator? (first name) Ha (last) Shem
8. What did he say before the passengers got off?

Please listen: Buckle up your seatbelts and have a deadly trip.

9. What was the sign put up by the Surgeon General? You will drop dead."

CHAPTER 15 – IN RETIREMENT

Just as Simmy never quite decided what he was going to be when he grew up, he never quite decided what he would do in retirement. He always had visions of spending the morning reading The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times, then having a leisurely lunch, followed by some work in the cellar until supper time. But the advent of the computer changed this idea a bit – there was always something to research or check out on the computer, as well as correspondence with friends and games to play with the grandchildren. Every now and then there was a consulting job which kept him busy.

But basically, retirement meant two things – time to enjoy the grandchildren and time to work in his basement shop, with his lathe, drill press, miller and assorted saws. Over the years he had designed and crafted many menorahs, starting with the beautiful Shabbos *lachter* he made for me, as well as our Pesach Seder plate. (The latter was made from stainless steel, not an easy metal to work with, engraved with the names of the necessary parts of the Seder and encircled by a satin curtain made by me. I put incredible care into that project, because we were not yet married and I was in awe of his mother's sewing skills.) So when he finally had more time to devote to metal work, he became The Candlestick Maker, with business cards and stationery duly printed. He made dozens of one-of-a-kind Chanukah menorahs as wedding presents. One was crafted for our friends Marge and Bob to give as a

gift. They fell in love with it and kept it, naming it Moishe. And Moishe never forgot his beginnings and even wrote a letter to Simmy.

And so in 1996, just before Chanukah, Simmy answered:

"My dear Moshe,

I never told you this, but you have more siblings than I can count... in New Zealand, Los Angeles, Singapore, Miami, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Riverdale, Boston...I shower then with such loving care from inception to maturity, and then there is that emotional moment of goodbye, as off they go to find their places in the world.

"And until today, no one has ever bothered to call or write. Moishele, you are the first and only. They should only know how much I worry. Do they have a good home? Are they well cared for? No screwdriver marks?

"You have no idea how pleased I am to learn your foster parents decided to adopt you as their own. I've known them for many years. It's just like them not to ship you off to an unfamiliar, perhaps unfeeling household. You needn't ever be concerned about being taken for granted, ignored or tarnished. They'll keep you spiffy, clean behind your ears and keep the wax out of them.

"Some day I do hope to visit you all. Have a bright and happy Chanukah in your new home, Tatale."

And it was signed, "Papa".

The last five years of Simmy's life were not easy, after the diagnosis of advanced prostate cancer. He faced this disease with the same determination, faith and good spirits that were the hallmark of his life. Whatever the doctors told him to do, he did it – and promptly. He rarely talked about the ordeal, but he did sometimes write to our niece, Julie in Israel about his treatments, probably because she had her own medical problems. In 1999 he wrote:

"One of the most annoying side effects I'm currently having is that I periodically lose my sense of taste. It's not as bad as intestinal difficulties, but still, it's annoying not to be able to taste salt. Coffee is awful. And I suspect the orange juice is bad, when it's not. Nancy has prepared some things for me that actually get through the barrier of my taste buds, like gazpacho, a cold soup with many vegetables chopped up in it. I try to

eat nutritious stuff, even though it's like eating medicine. On the days when my taste returns, it's a real simcha."

A few weeks later, he noted, "I'm pleased to report that my severe side effects are slowly, but definitely on the wane. Of course, that probably means I'll soon be ready for another chemo round. At least it won't be compounded by radiation after-effects, which my doctor claims was 90% of the culprit. But beginning yesterday I went back to the Bes Midrash to study there rather than at home with my *chavrusa*. Still the best reason for my improvement is the presence of Nancy. Wow, do I love that woman."

In October, just eight months before his death, he cheerfully wrote,

"I thought I'd tell you a bit about my every-three-weeks routine. I go to the Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in the Bronx, to have the chemo administered, because my medical insurance doesn't cover the specific stuff (Taxotere) prescribed and it costs a fortune. The VA does it at no charge. The nurses are all very attentive and efficient, and the MD is a pleasant, competent guy who stays in touch with my regular doctor so that everyone is 'reading from the same page'. Actually I like the arrangement because I get examined twice, just about identically. Then I'm off to get the infusion in a room that's loaded with equipment, the most important being a lounge chair with an IV pole. The pharmacist who mixes up the stuff and brings it to the room is Vietnamese with a name too long to fit on an ID tag, so everyone calls her Julie! I told her it's my wife's middle name, my favorite niece's name and my all-time favorite name. She has a very big, friendly smile and we always hug, to the amusement of others around, who usually say, 'Hey, what's going on?' and sometimes, 'Do I need a yarmulke to get the same treatment?' Julie always explains, 'His wife's name is Julie.' She's so short, the standard lab coat reaches her sneakers.

"Then there's 'Vith'. A Cambodian nurse who often does the infusion. Her lab coat is *tzniusdik* too. It takes about 1.5 hours including the pre-meds. During that time she told me some of her history, which includes walking barefoot through the jungle when she was seven years old to get to a refugee camp in Thailand. A long, amazing story. And

sometimes I'm attended by an Irish nurse, Mary, from New Jersey. They're all great.

"I bring the Times to read during the infusion, which is not even uncomfortable. And when it's about noon, brown bags of lunch are brought in for any patients being treated or waiting, an unexpected benefit. I explained I keep kosher, so they called on the phone and soon I had a sealed, kosher hot meal. I was overwhelmed. But from then on, I knew to bring a sandwich of my own and they supply juice for me. So between shmoosing with the nurses, reading the paper, eating lunch and chatting with others in treatment, the infusion goes by rather quickly.

"Afterwards, I usually go down to the little *Shekem* on the premises to look for bargains, then look for my car in the huge parking lot and go on home.

"The side effects don't start for a couple of days, and I'm pleased to report that this last time I had the least amount of unpleasantness. After about a week, my taste begins to return and when my doctor and I agree I'm in good shape again, it's three weeks and time to go back to the VAMC. How long does this go on? I don't know, but tests indicate all this nonsense is helping me. Well, that's quite enough for now."

For most of those years he was able to go to Shul, work in his shop and enjoy the grandchildren. And he never lost his sense of humor.

Towards the end, there was much to bear as the disease ravaged his bones and pain-killers did little to help. He endured chemotherapy, radiation and assorted medicines. He had pneumonia, he had a fractured hip. There were several trips to the emergency room, with hospitalizations. It was getting harder for me to care for him alone at home and the hospital suggested visiting nurses for when he could be discharged. I went along with every suggestion, only getting nervous when the nursing service called to say that, although he was supposed to go home on Wednesday, they couldn't get anyone to help until at least Thursday or Friday. How on earth could I manage, when it was taking two nurses just to turn him in bed? Fortunately, one of the hospital nurses took me aside and said, "If you take him home, it will be the worst mistake of your life. He needs you to be his wife, not his nurse. He needs to go to Calvary Hospital."

We talked it over with Simmy and his doctors. Calvary, we knew, was the only hospital in the country to cater only to advanced cancer patients. They accepted him and his two and a half months there were a blessing. The first thing they did was to remove the cross hanging on the wall in his room. They are dedicated to keeping patients out of pain and as comfortable as possible. They go out of their way to provide whatever foods the patient fancies. So I was able to visit every day and be the "wife".

To the end, Simmy knew what he wanted. Just before he went to Calvary, he decided to refuse all further treatment, other than pain-killers. All he wanted to do, he said, was to "slide out of here peacefully." In preparation he asked our Rabbi to come and say *Viddui*, the final confession of faith, with him. The Rabbi was startled, but complied. It was a most moving experience for both of them. And Simmy was at peace.

He died on June 14, 2000, the 11th of Sivan. The funeral was held in our Shul, since his last wish was to be in Shul one more time. And it allowed all our *Cohanim* to be present and participate. His legacy to the congregation is permanent – one of the last Menorahs he made was a large one that stands on the windowsill of the Shul. There is a plaque in his memory on the wall and in 2007 we dedicated a Sefer Torah in his memory.

CHAPTER 16 - RECOLLECTIONS

We received many beautiful and touching notes from friends who recalled Simmy with love and respect. One letter, from an old friend Bill Bandy, reminisced about their time together:

"It was after my discharge from the Air Force in 1952 that I went to work for Simmonds and met Sid.

"Although I worked out of the Glendale office while Sid was based in Tarrytown, our rapport was instantaneous and in the days before e-mail it inspired some outrageous interoffice memos. I always knew that a memo from Sid had arrived because I could hear the girl who opened the mail giggling before she came to deliver it.

"Actually, in the ten years I was with Simmonds, I never knew what Sid's official function was supposed to be, since he seemed to be involved with everything. I finally concluded that since he was clearly the most intelligent fellow in Tarrytown, his role had become that of a one-man think tank and PR emissary.

"Although I was aware of Sid's religion, it was not a subject that we ever discussed, until one Friday afternoon while attending an engineering meeting at Lockheed. Such meetings are always dull, but this one was excruciatingly so. I was half asleep and trying to look awake, but Sid appeared agitated and kept looking at his watch. Very un-Sidlike behavior. When I finally inquired into the problem, he explained the importance of a religious requirement to find a sanctuary before the Sabbath, which required him to be at a certain address very

soon. I interrupted the meeting, pleading a need to catch an airplane, and we hastily departed, followed by envious looks from many of the conference participants.

"We were fortunate in escaping just before the shift change and with Sid reading the map, scuttled swiftly down the byways and back alleys of Burbank to the house he had to reach. As he ran up the steps, the door opened and Sid dashed inside. I paused for a moment, half expecting to see a glass slipper, before driving away.

"While Sid must have had moments of concern or even depression, like all of us, I picture him as always smiling and in good humor. The only times that he was unsmiling and serious were in ordinary restaurants when he was faced with the struggle to find something on the menu that conformed to kosher requirements, but also had some flavor and interest. In Los Angeles, whenever possible, we would go to Hartmann's on Fairfax, where this was not a problem. I recall our first visit. Sid slipped on his yarmulka as we entered and a waiter seated us in a booth. As we were looking at our menus, the proprietor approached, stopped dead in his tracks whe he saw Sid and exclaimed in mock astonishment, 'Hey, we got genuine Yid here tonight!' Sid responded in kind, the fellow sat down with us and the subsequent banter between the two made me wish for a tape recorder.

"Well, Nancy, I presume that this is traditionally supposed to be a condolence letter, something that is really not possible to convey. It appears that I have turned it into a trip down memory lane, which I guess is my way of saying goodbye to Sid, a much-valued friend of long standing, who I would like to think is now traveling on Celestial Airlines and still charming flight attendants and fellow travelers, which he did so well.

"Sid isn't really gone. He will live in our memories forever."

Most important of all, almost all his grandchildren were old enough to have known and loved him and each one had a special relationship with him. It is fitting to end this story with the memories that each of us wrote at the time of his death.

His first-born, Daniel Abraham, recalled:

"When I think of the many gifts that Papa, *alav ha-shalom,* has left to us, I find that the most important ones can be arranged into two categories: a sense of beauty and a sense of *simchah,* joy.

"Papa's taste for the beautiful things in life could be seen in the classical music he loved to listen to. Although he was not a trained musician, he knew what he liked, and what he liked was the best: Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Tchaikovsky – full, rich music that you could sink your teeth into. To this day, when I hear certain compositions, I can't help being sharply reminded of Papa and I thank him for instilling in me a love and appreciation for this music.

"Papa put his sense of beauty into practice by creating beautiful things. He believed strongly in the concept of *hiddur mitzvah,* that a religious obligation is carried out best if it is done beautifully, with style and – one of his favorite words – panache. The many menorahs that he designed and crafted share the qualities of simple elegance and originality; no two are alike. Anyone who is lucky enough to possess one of these works of art will have a reminder of Papa's sense of beauty for years to come.

"Papa's Hebrew name was Simchah, "joy", and no one ever better personified the expression *ki-shemo ken hu,* as his name is, so is he. His sense of *simchah* showed itself in many ways. As all of you are well aware, Papa had a wicked, wicked sense of humor. He taught us to laugh at the ridiculous, and to laugh at ourselves. Another facet of his *simchah* was the joy that he took in his family, even right up to the end. In what turned out to be my last visit with him, he smiled beautifully as Jonathan and I showed him pictures of the grandchildren and caught him up on their latest doings. He had not lost his sense of humor either: somehow, the name of his mother's home region, Maramorosh, came up in the conversation, and he had each of us repeat the name again and again until we pronounced it to his satisfaction, with just the right Hungarian lilt.

"When I searched for the most appropriate verse from *Tanach* containing the word *simchah*, I kept coming back to the same place, Psalms 100, verse 2: *Ivdu es Hashem be-simchah* – serve the Lord with gladness. This seemingly simple phrase raises some questions that need

to be answered: what does it mean to 'serve' God, and how do you serve with gladness? For the answers, I turned to the commentary of a family member, R. Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, and what I found was so astonishingly perfect for the name and for the occasion that I will repeat it without any further explanation:

Ivdu es Hasehm be-simchah: It is regrettable that the concept of 'Divine Service' is understood to consist primarily of the ritual of prayer and sacrifice in the temple and synagogues. This is not in accordance with the Jewish idea of *avodas Hashem,* serving the Lord. This, the true 'service of the Lord', is primarily and most truly performed in the process of day-to-day living. 'To serve God' means to devote all one's energy, all the means and talents at one's disposal and every moment of one's life to the execution of God's will, and he whose entire life is devoted to the service of the Lord in this spirit is called *eved Hashem.* ...At the same time, however, mankind is called upon to dedicate itself to this life of solemn Divine service with rejoicing and to complete it with joy. For it is such a life, and such a life, only, that can give us true *simchah*, the feeling of steady and constant spiritual and moral 'growth', the continuous growth of all that is truly human in us, a blissful joy of life that is not subject to change in any manner by the outward circumstances which life may bring.

Thank you, Papa, and goodbye.

Daniel Klein"

David wrote from Israel, devastated that he could not get here for the funeral. But he had made a visit just a few months earlier and spent some quality time with his father.

"Here are the few words that I could manage to write out of sorrow:

"It is extremely difficult for me to write a *hesped* for my beloved father. It is not only because I am writing this while crying and it is difficult to see the paper with tears streaming down my cheeks, but more importantly, it is because I am extremely afraid that I am not

doing a sufficient job of a *hesped.* My father had an uncanny ability of befriending people such that anyone who knew him felt that he had a special relationship with him. Indeed he did have a special relationship with each one, and I am sure that all those present can attest to this. A special part of us is now in *olam ha'emes* the true world, and the pain of missing this special part makes me cry uncontrollably.

"But none of you here can really know and appreciate the loss that my dear mother is feeling – the husband with exceptional attributes. My mother was privileged to be married to this wonderful and marvelous human being for nearly 49 years (minus two days by the Hebrew date) and they had a superb marriage. Just the fact that this long, happy and wonderful marriage is now over and that my mother will spend her birthday while sitting shiva is also ample reason to cry.

"May my father be a *melitz yosher*, a messenger, for my mother and the whole family and all Israel. I ask my father for forgiveness for not being at the funeral. Of course my father understands that I cannot come – he always understood the problems of others and will not mind. I further ask for forgiveness if I wrote an insufficient *hesped.* I cannot write any more because I can see my father being buried next to my beloved grandfather and I cannot continue out of grief. I love them both.

David Klein"

Next comes Jonathan.

"I know that Papa would want his *hespedim* to be short, sweet and to the point. I will do the best I can, but there is so much to say.

"I feel bad today for *Hashem – Hakodesh Baruch Hu,* as Papa always lovingly and reverently referred to Him. It says in Psalms, 'Difficult in the eyes of *Hashem* is the death of his devout ones.' I am also jealous of *Hashem* today, because he has Papa now and we do not. But I am not angry at *Hashem* for taking him from us, because I can't blame Him for wanting exclusive possession of such a fine soul of his own creation and to have him in a better place than this world.

"As I gathered my thoughts for this day, which I had hoped would never come, it occurred to me that anything I say about what my father did for us throughout his life, about the way in which my father raised us, applies equally to my mother, who has been our rock-steady anchor in the storm of the last six years. Together, they were the consummate, most successful parents imaginable in a period of time in history – particularly American Jewish History – when most parents' efforts at raising *frum* children in the suburbs failed miserably or, even more often, were simply written off as irrelevant and not even attempted.

"My father would want to be remembered more than anything else as the most wonderful, loving husband – which he was for three days shy of 49 years – and as the most wonderful, loving father and grandfather, son and brother. Why? Because at the end of the day – at the end of life – that is all that matters. That is what Papa leaves behind as his legacy and, at the same time, that is what Papa takes with him when he makes his reckoning with *Hashem* and assumes the place he has earned and so richly deserves in *Olam HaBah*, the next world.

"I can tell you that he would not want to be remembered as a courageous fighter against cancer – although he certainly was that – or as someone who maintained a sunny disposition, a smile, had kind words for others and a positive outlook in the face of an adversity that no one should ever have to endure – although he certainly was that too. He would not want to be, and should not be, remembered that way because he refused to allow his final illness to define him, as so many people stricken by this illness are wont to do these days. His life was defined, instead, from start to finish, by his love of Torah, by *shemiras ha Mitzvos*, keeping the commandments, by his legendary sense of humor, by his healthy attitude toward the vicissitudes of life, and by his family, perhaps most by his grandchildren, all 19 of them. In fact, his grandchildren literally defined him, as they called him 'Papa,' the name by which even Danny, Davey, Abby and I all called him for the last 19 years. He loved all his grandchildren so much; they were his pride and joy, including the two youngest in Israel whom he never got the chance to meet. The *nachas* he reaped from his grandchildren was boundless, as was their love and admiration for him.

"I have to share with you something else about Papa that was very important. Papa was, by nature and deed, a patriot, enlisting in the Marine Corps in 1945, straight out of high school at the age of 17, precisely at the same time, it turned out, that all of his aunts, uncles and cousins in Hungary were being transported to their demise in concentration camps or were fleeing for their lives into hiding places in the forests and caves of the countryside. Papa's patriotism was unique, however, as it transcended nationality. He was a lover of Israel, of the State of Israel and the people of Israel in his own quiet way, and with a seriousness of purpose that few realized.

"This brings me finally to the special bond that I alone shared with Papa and will always treasure. I grew up listening to Papa recount, with his special brand of irreverent humor, the many stories of his 14-month career as a Marine, from his Beetle Bailey-like existence on Parris Island, South Carolina to the touching stories of maintaining a religious lifestyle, all alone and under the most challenging of circumstances. Without a doubt, those stories played a tremendous role in inspiring me to embark upon my own military career. He had more stories from 14 months of active duty than I could tell you from my 27 years in uniform. We shared stories, thoughts and experiences that only the two of us could possibly understand and appreciate. We also maintained a friendly inter-service rivalry. After all, it really is true: once a Marine, always a Marine. When I told Papa a few years ago that I had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in the Army, he put it in perspective for me by informing me that that was almost equivalent to his status as a Private First Class in the Marine Corps.

"He had a certain disdain for General Douglas MacArthur, whose sanitized and choreographed return to the Philippines Papa felt was made on the backs of thousands of real heroes in the Marine Corps. Papa would take great satisfaction in knowing that in the end, he proved MacArthur wrong. MacArthur said, 'Old soldiers never die; they just fade away.' Papa has died, but he will never, ever fade from our hearts and minds.

"We Jews believe that the departed can hear the words spoken in their *hespedim*. That being the case, I would like to think that Papa has been listening and saying, point by point, *'Ot azoy.'*

"And so Papa, I have to say goodbye now. Semper fi, Papa. *Lech b'Shalom. L'Hitraot.* –Go in peace, farewell."

And then Abby, the youngest child and only daughter said:

"Most of you are aware of what an incredible person my father was. Usually it is his sense of humor that comes to mind first, and of course that was a very prominent aspect of his personality. Even his name, Simcha, means joy, and my name, Avigail, means my father is joy. But when I thought about trying to summarize what it was that he taught me in life, it wasn't just how to find the humor in every situation, although that is a useful skill. It was the idea that each day is filled with opportunities. And he tried not to miss *any* of them. The best example is that he never missed an opportunity to let us know how much he loved us. Every phone conversation with him ended with 'Love you!' and very often that was prefaced by 'Ooh, I am looking at Mommy right now and let me tell you, I am crazy about that woman!' He was crazy about all of us and we were crazy about him too. He grabbed every opportunity to spend time with his grandchildren because he understood how short life is and he wanted literally to drink them in every chance he got.

"He took every opportunity to learn more Torah, more *Gemara*. When he became ill about six years ago, that pursuit took on an added urgency for him. When he was able to, he spent mornings learning at the Telz Yeshiva in Riverdale. And almost up to the very end, he learned with his friend, Mr. Horowitz, and with Rabbi Cohen. Just last Sunday he asked me to tell him about a sermon I had heard in Shul in Shavuos. He wasn't about to miss even that opportunity. And as many of you know so well, he never missed an opportunity to make people feel great. With a sweet smile and a compliment for everyone he came in contact with, he made friends in literally every corner of the earth, in Israel, in Holland, in Hong Kong and Hawaii. The health professionals who cared for him throughout these six years, from orderlies to surgeons, had a special place in their hearts for him and he always made a point of telling them how wonderful they were.

"He just loved people, and they couldn't help loving him back. We were the lucky ones he loved the most."

Even his children-in-law adored him and his first daughter-in-law, Bia Klein paid tribute:

"Today the world has lost a true Tzaddik. Papa was God's example to the world on how man should behave towards others. Papa loved people. He didn't care where they came from, the color of their skin, what language they spoke or how they worshipped God. He just loved people. To him, everybody had something wonderful to offer and he wanted a taste. His ability to make everyone he ever met (and a few non-persons as well) feel like his best friend was truly a gift from God.

"But even more amazing was his way with children. It went beyond making faces at kids in restaurants or doing Kiki Banana on Chinese buses. He never talked down to a child. Instead he became a child's peer.

"The Torah teaches us to educate each child *al pi darko* – each in his own way. We are instructed to use each child's own attributes – be they positive or not – to help shape them into productive members of society, both Jewishly and otherwise. Papa was a master (and Mama alongside him). You can see the results for yourselves in his own children. But the grandchildren are still works in progress.

"I think many grandparents go out of their way to treat every child alike so they should not be seen as playing favorites. Not so Papa. So who was his favorite? It was Coby – no, Jessica – no, Liora – no, KJ and so on down the line. He had nineteen favorite grandchildren. And it was because each child had a different personality and different attributes that needed to be nurtured and guided *al pi darko.*

"I believe Papa's way with people stemmed from his own basically child-like view of the world. To him, every day was a new day filled with adventure and wonder, a day to be enjoyed for what it was and lived with gusto and a jar of peanut butter. Plainly and simply, he loved to have fun and he felt everyone should join him in experiencing life's joy – and *Hakodesh Baruch Hu's* world was the perfect playground. It is his legacy to us all.

"And Mama, I think you were wrong when you said he never figured out what he wanted to be when he grew up. I think he did, but he couldn't accomplish it until he was free from his responsibilities. Papa became the ultimate Jewish child – a Yeshiva *bochur*.

"So, Papa, wherever you are, don't go walking on the ceiling. Eat a nectarine, for you certainly have brought honor to the name of Klein!"

Next some of the grandchildren shared memories. Liora, Danny's oldest daughter, who was seventeen at the time, wrote:

"Because Papa's way was never to beat around the bush, I think it's best to get straight to the point. Papa was truly one-of-a-kind, impossible not to like and one of the greatest influences on my life. I have hundreds of memories that make it easy to understand why.

"For example, all through elementary school one of the highlights each year was Grandparents' Day. Having Mama and Papa come to Rochester for the occasion was a treat in and of itself, but once the program began, Papa was guaranteed to be in his element. Whether designing 'kiki bananas' or finding an inconspicuous way to make the kids without visitors feel special, Papa was always a crowd-pleaser. Everyone knew that we had the sweetest, funniest grandfather.

"But funny doesn't even scratch the surface. From as far back as I can remember, Papa was constantly cracking us up and challenging <u>us</u> to make <u>him</u> laugh. 'Walking on the ceiling' was a tried and true gag and no visit to Yonkers was complete without a round of the Taco game. Later, when I was old enough to create new, off-the-wall personas (as Papa was famous for), I became Lucille, caretaker of crazy old Uncle Fred, whose serious issues with olives could only be forgotten with liberal doses of peanut butter.

"Of course, Papa's charm didn't lie in his sense of humor alone. It was in his 'bullet kisses', the way he always offered his freshly shaved cheeks to be mushed, always sent me around the 'Cape of Good Horn' to wash first for the Seder, and countless other things.

"Most of all, I love Papa for the lessons he exemplified: First, when you have a question, no matter how unimportant it may seem, search as hard and as long as it takes to find an answer that satisfies you. Second,

as Papa demonstrated at my eighth grade graduation by wearing and then severing his ugliest tie, don't take yourself too seriously. And above all else … be a *mentsch*."

Amanda was sixteen when Papa died, and had many memories:

"It's 5:45 a.m. and Daddy just told me that Papa had passed away. I want to write down memories of him now as it is freshest.

1. He called me 'ugly' but he said it with the sweetest smile so I knew he meant 'beautiful'. So I always responded with 'thank you', which sent him rolling.
2. Once I was pretending to laugh with an evil laugh and he loved it. The next few times we got together he'd ask me to laugh so he could catch it in a jar and then open it to let my laugh out to scare someone.
3. Mommy and Daddy left us in Yonkers one weekend in the winter and on Sunday Papa took us to a hardware store and bought us all little red snow shovels.
4. Papa was always joking around and having fun. One time when Mama was in Israel, Papa came to us for Shabbos. Saturday night Mommy and Daddy went out and Papa babysat. We were up until midnight laughing. He told us about his dog Wimpy, and how she ate chicken heads. He was the best babysitter we ever had.
5. Papa had the smoothest hands which felt great when he rubbed my cheek.
6. When we would come in, he would smile and say our names in a low, fun-loving voice. And when we left, he would frown.
7. Papa made us lots of things – including a Menorah, and songs about us kids. And he loved working in the cellar.
8. When Jessica and I had to stay late at school for Production rehearsals, we would go to Yonkers for the night. The first time we totally messed up because we didn't know where to get off the bus. We got off too soon and found a phone to call, but there was no answer. So we walked in the freezing cold. Meanwhile Papa had been waiting for us and when

he finally came home he was very upset. This was the only time I ever saw Papa angry. For the future he made a map for us of all the bus stops and locations of phones. The next time all went well and he took us for ice cream.

9. He gave the longest most loving kisses on your cheek.
10. The only time I saw him cry was at Zak's Bar Mitzvah.
11. Even in the hospital in his last few weeks, he showed us how much he loved us and wanted to see us.

I loved Papa so much and I'll miss him even more. I'll miss the way he loved to say a *Bracha* or how he would prove to me that a teacher gave me her opinion and not what was in the Gemara. I could go on and on. I know, however, that he is no longer in pain and that *Hashem* put him high up in Gan Eden. The hardest thing was to say goodbye after Yom Tov – always a 'Jewish goodbye' and this one was even worse.

Papa, I love and will miss you."

Danny's daughter, Aviva, was fifteen when her Papa died – her memories are:

"Whenever I think of Papa, it's the little things that come to mind. The time he cut my toast into rhombuses. The way he would call me Biva-Chaviva or Beevles, or Champeen. The day I introduced him to the heavenly combination of peanut butter and chocolate spread. The always familiar sight of him settled in the recliner with a newspaper. The time I climbed into his lap at the Seder, to be asked that famous question: 'Who hit Nelly in the belly with a barracuda?'

"The way he would sing the *Law and Order* theme song with such fervor. His big swirly silver belt buckle. Endless fun – the Taco Game, the No Game, Twenty Questions and, my favorite, *Maakah* (Plague). The Round Tuit he gave to Didi and me the night we actually said the *Mah Nishtanah*. The time he made me teach him how to make a turban out of a towel, when he saw me after a shower. His special tunes for *duchening* and the *Shir Ha-Maalos* on Pesach. The way he ate off paper towels, the source of the term, 'Papa's finest china.'

"The way Papa touched my life was the dozens of little attentions he paid, the way he was always up for a good laugh. He was the type of person you always returned to for more –another wacky travel story,

another peanut butter sandwich, another hug. Papa taught me that laughter is medicine, and that everyone deserves individual notice, whether it's a personalized Menorah or an Afikomen certificate for a bizarre prize. He made everyone love him, he could make everyone laugh. We'll never forget the place he holds in our hearts."

Simmy had managed to make it to Zak's Bar Mitzvah in Bridgeport and was looking forward to having Zak live with us while attending high school in New York, but that was not to be. Zak had wonderful memories of Papa:

"Papa was a true *tzaddik.* His whole life was a demonstration of how a person should conduct his/her life. Papa showed me, along with all my sisters and cousins, how to have *Yiras Hashem*, how to make a *Kiddush Hashem* and how to treat other people. Ever since I could remember, each and every time we went for a visit we would have, in a way, a routine. We would arrive at the house (usually late) and go up to the door. Mama would be right there waiting for us. I would walk in, hug Mama and then Papa would exclaim, 'Zako!' and give me a nice big hug and kiss. Papa and Mama didn't have to be there waiting for us like that, but they did. Why? Because that is what *tsaddikim* do.

"*Tsaddikim* like Mama and Papa surely know how to fulfill the mitzvah of greeting people – *B'sever panim yafot,* which Artscroll translates as 'with a cheerful face.' Never once can I remember going to visit Papa and Mama and not seeing a smile on their faces. Every Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we go to Yonkers. Due to Papa's poor health in recent years he did not make it to Shul. But before that, he did go and I would sit next to him, and he made sure I was following in the right place. I remember last year, my sisters Becky and Sabrina stayed home with him on Yom Kippur afternoon. The girls told us that they said *Avinu Malkeinu* out loud with Papa. They told he us he began to cry, crying from happiness because he was yet again *shepping nachas* from his granddaughters.

"Papa always encouraged them to learn – whether with him, with another person, or alone – as long as they learned. I am sorry that I only had a few chances to learn with Papa, but those were the best times of my life. I will never forget them.

"*Succos* will always be one of my favorite holidays. That is because *Succos* is the time I get to use my *esrog* container that I made with Papa a few years ago. At my Bar Mitzvah last June, Papa had the first *aliyah.* I was very nervous and the hand holding the *yad* was shaking, so Papa put his hand on mine to stop the shaking. Then, after his *aliyah* he said to me, 'Way to go, Zako. Mazal Tov.' Yet another example of Papa's righteousness.

"In Papa's last days, although very weak and confused, he never forgot about *Hashem*. Papa would make the correct blessing before eating, always asked, 'Is it Shabbos?' before answering the phone or making his bed go up and down. And when Rabbi Cohen went to the hospital to learn with him, (for which I thank him very much for making Papa's last days very meaningful to him and to me) Papa was able to grasp the topics pretty well.

"Papa was confused about what day of the week it was, so I gave him my watch which displayed the days of the week. I am happy to have had the *zechus* of Papa wearing my watch and remembering me to his last day.

"Back in January, I had my interview at Yeshiva Ohavei Torah, which I will be attending next year. After the interview, my father and I went to Papa's house to tell him how it went. First, Papa and Mama told me that there is a room in their house waiting for me to dorm in, and then Papa asked, 'What kind of questions were you asked on the *Gemora*. How did you answer?' Again, Papa making sure that I am learning. Then about two weeks later, when I received a letter saying that I was accepted to the Yeshiva, we told Papa. He was so excited. He told me that when I get home from Yeshiva, we should learn together. We were both looking forward to this very much. Unfortunately, this did not get to happen. But when I am learning in Yeshiva, at home, at shul or anywhere else, it will be *zecher l'nishmas Simcha Binyamin ben R'Elazar Hacohen."*

Didi (Yehudit) Klein from Rochester entitled her tribute:

"The Light That Was Papa

No words in the world

Can completely express the joy that was Papa.

His easy jokes set off peals of laughter.
His happiness of life caught like a brush fire.
Flames of joy licking at the people around him,
Igniting our hearts.
Except for the dreaded *Mah Nishtanah,*
Pesach was the time I most looked forward to.
What's Your Favorite *Makkah*?
Puppet four sons,
And the infamous whoopee cushion
Which he always knew was there
(And even taught us how to blow).
Everyone says if you love someone,
They never leave you
Without leaving their mark on you.
Well, Papa,
Your footprints are on the roof of my heart and soul,
Wherever I go."

Elana Leichman, who was privileged to spend a lot of time with her Papa wrote:

"I got to spend a lot of fun times with my grandfather, Papa. I think that's what I will remember most about him. Once, about four years ago, Mama and Papa took my brothers and me to the park and a dollhouse museum. In the park we had a picnic lunch and Papa had this *shtick* that ended up having one of us squirting water out of our mouths. Another time Papa took us to Noah's Ark restaurant and kept making doggie faces at the waitress because we kept on asking where our food was and she kept saying, 'five more minutes.' He also kept making scary faces at the kids that poked their heads up from the booth in front of us. We went there again, also with Papa, and guess what? We had the same waitress! Of course she remembered him.

"When I was in third grade, every week we had a parent come in to read to our class in the library. My parents were away, so Papa came to babysit. That day happened to be our library day. So he volunteered to read to my class. After we came back to the classroom, the majority of the kids came up to me and said that I had a cool grandfather.

"All of the memories with Papa won't die out, they will get even stronger."

Sabrina Klein from Bridgeport was only nine-and-a-half when her Papa died, but she knew him well:

"Things I Remember About Papa

1. His sense of humor
2. His soft, smushy cheeks
3. His 'NO' game
4. He liked airplanes
5. His impression of Alfred Hitchcock (it was funny)
6. His very comfortable leather chair
7. His funny Marine stories
8. His song about the whole family (BOOM, BOOM)
9. His trips all over the world
10. The top hat he wore to his wedding
11. The picture of the cute owl in his office
12. His love for salt
13. His stories about his dog, Wimpy
14. How he called Zak, Zako
15. His kindness

"I know everyone remembers these things I wrote about Papa and I hope everyone remembers these things and never forgets them."

It is a great source of comfort to the entire family that Simmy made such an indelible impression on all his grandchildren. Hardly a day goes by that someone doesn't recall a story, an episode or remark from "Papa".

Three great-grandsons bear his name, Simcha Binyamin. Already we can see glimmers of the humor and friendliness of their great-grandfather shining forth in these little boys. They, as well as all the others in the new generation, are being raised on stories of Papa, so that his memory will be part of their lives, as it is for his children and grandchildren.

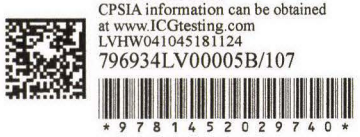
GLOSSARY

Achshav	now
Adaraba	on the contrary
Alav Hashalom	May he rest in peace
Bechor	first-born
Bench Goymel	prayer after being in danger
Bes Medrash	study hall
Blatt	pages
B'Nei Yisroel	Children of Israel
Boondlech	Beans
B'Seder	O.K.
Bubbe Mayseh	old wives' tale
Chachkele	literally, knickknack, an uncomplimentary term
Chas Veshulem	God forbid
Chavrusa	Study partner
Chazzar	pig meat
Chazzan	Cantor
Chiloni	secular
Chillul Hashem	desecration of God's name
Chucham	wise man
Dati	religious
Daven	pray

Dlubbe/ dlubbing	digging around
D'var Torah	Words of Torah, sermon
Frum	religious
Gabbai	sexton
Gashniyus	materiality
Gemora	portion of the Talmud
Gramman	a song
Hakodesh Boruch Hu	the Lord
Hatzlachah	success, good luck
Hesped	eulogy
Im Mertz Hashem	God willing
Kapota	long black coat
Ken	yes
Kiddush	blessing on wine
Kiddush Hashem	blessing for God
Kidusha	part of prayer service
Kipah	man's cap, head covering
Kishkes	intestines
Lo	no
Machloykis	disagreement
Mamzer	bastard
Mashehu	something
Mazal	luck
Midrash	rabbinic embellishment of Biblical story
Minyan	prayer quorum of ten
Mitzraim	Egypt
Mizmor l'Dovid	Psalm of David
Mohel	circumcisor
Nachas	pleasure
Olam Habah	the next world
Olam Hazeh	this world
Pasak/pesakim	sentences
Payis	sideburns
Payyetan	liturgical poet

Pirkei Avot	Ethics of the Fathers
Punim	face
Rav	Rabbi
Rosh Hamemshula	Prime Minister
Roshai Yeshiva	heads of Yeshiva
Seforim	books
Seudat shlishit	third meal on the Sabbath
Shalshudis	Yiddish for third meal
Shlishi	third
Shochet	ritual slaughterer
Shtibel	small synagogue
Shtreimel	fur hat
Shtick	trick
Shukkler	swayer
Siddur	prayer book
Siyum	party
Tallis	prayer shawl
Tefillin	phylacteries
Teheelim/Tehillim	Psalms
Tisha B'Av	9th of Av, fast day
Todah	thank you
Tovel	ritually purify
Traife	not kosher
Tuches	rear end
Tzniusdik	modest
Yahrzeit	yearly memorial
Yashar	straight
Yeshiva bochor	student
Yotzai	obligated
Yotzrot	extra holiday prayers
Zahal	Israeli army
Zemiros	Sabbath songs

Printed in the USA
CPSIA information can be obtained
at www.ICGtesting.com
LVHW041045181124
796934LV00005B/107



Sidney B. Klein

A machinist, a Marine, a father, grandfather, husband and orthodox Jew — Sidney B. Klein embraced all the aspects of his life with joy and integrity, humor and intelligence. He recorded many of his exploits in the Marines and in his extensive travels, as well as his interactions with his children and grandchildren. His wife has interwoven these tales with the details of his life, in a funny and touching book.

NANCY ISAACS KLEIN is a community volunteer, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. She is also the author of "Heritage of Faith", the biographies of her father and grandfather. Married to Sidney Klein for forty-nine years, she shared his zest for life.

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ISBN 978-1-4520-2974-0
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