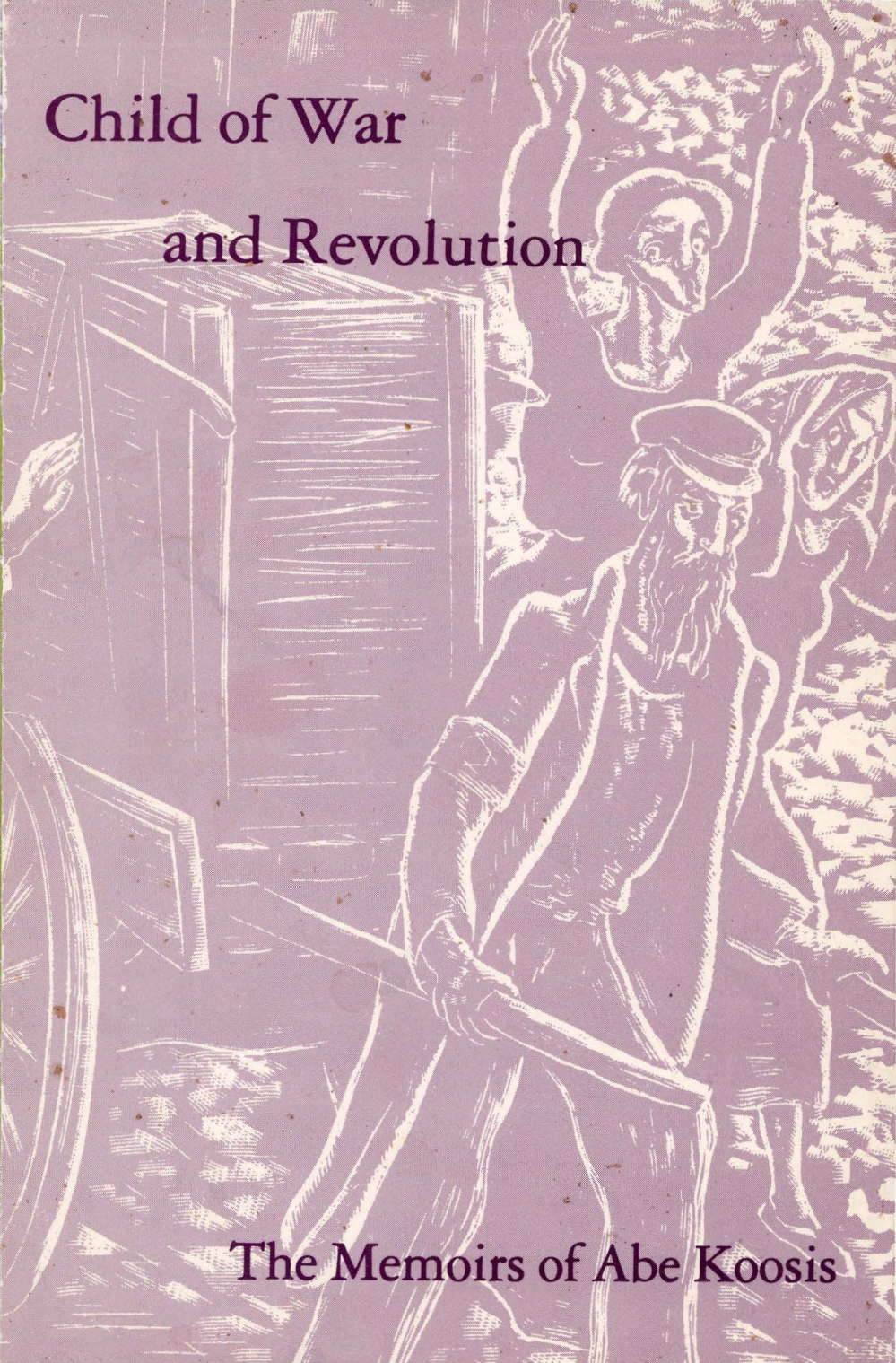


# Child of War and Revolution



The Memoirs of Abe Koosis



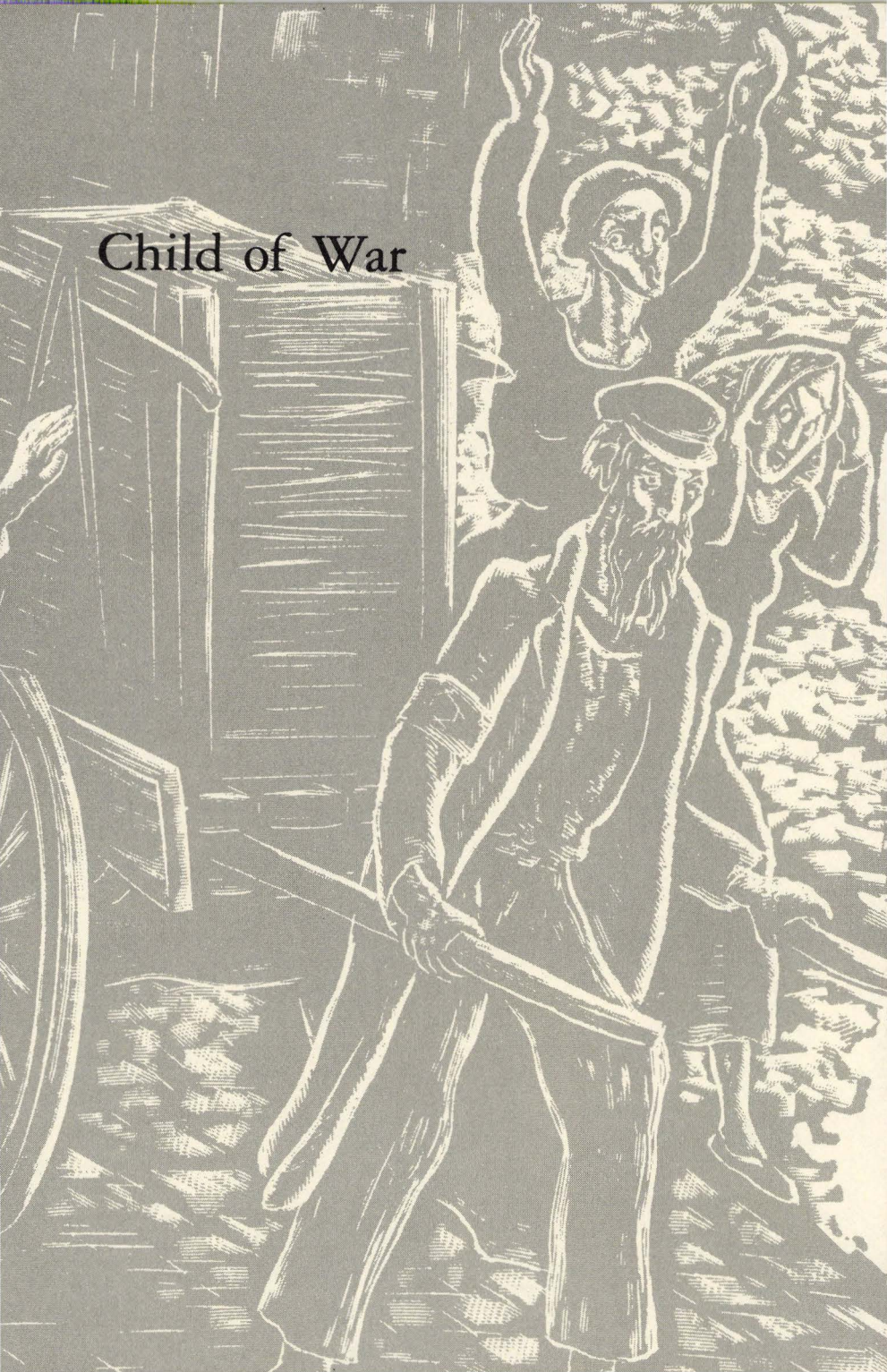








# Child of War

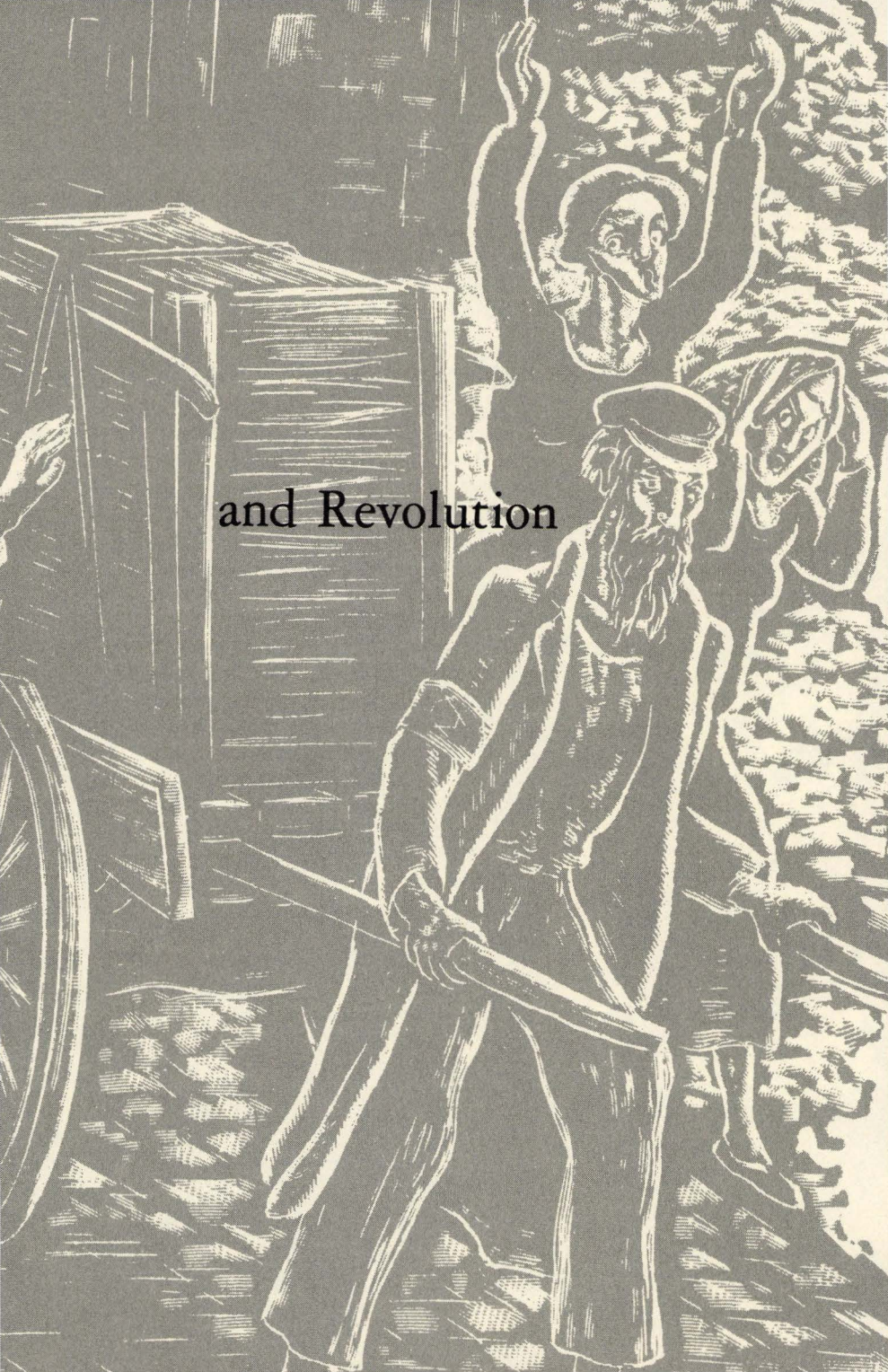








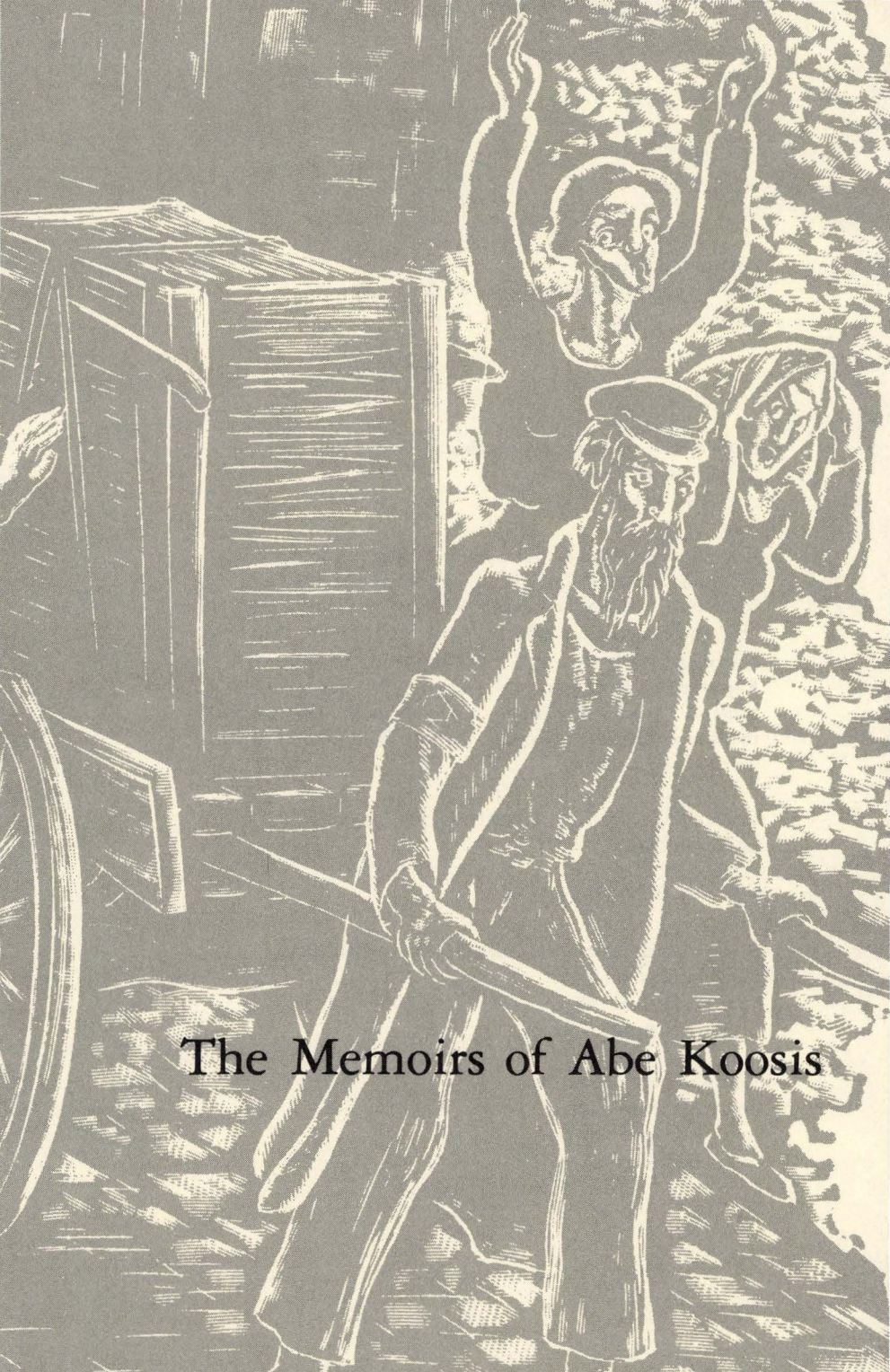
and Revolution











## The Memoirs of Abe Koosis



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*I am very thankful to Eileen Ostrow for her encouragement  
and constant help.*

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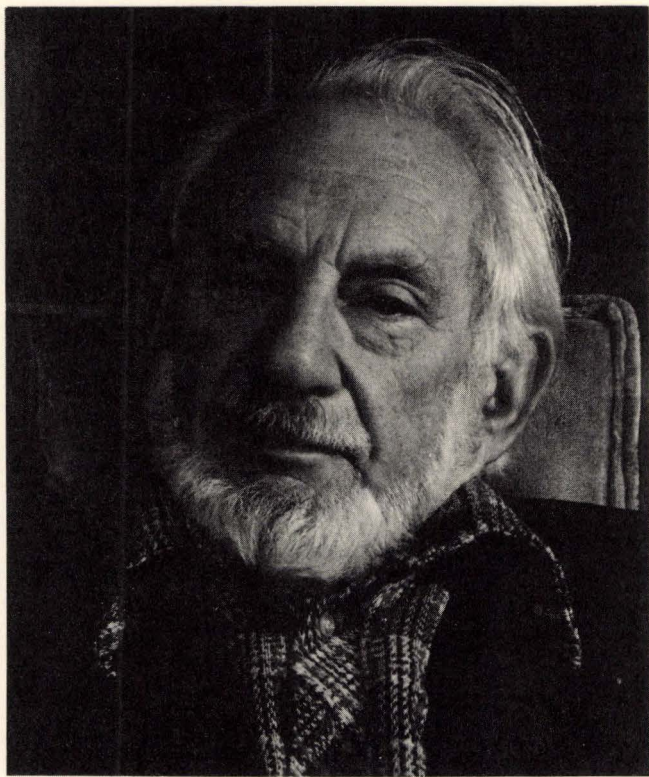


Photo by George Hoehn, 1977.



## INTRODUCTION

How vivid are the memories of my childhood. My youth was turbulent and extraordinary, not through any efforts of my own, but because of time, place, and parentage. I was born in Russia on March 27, 1904 and grew up in a world of trouble—of War and Revolution. Also, I am a Jew. Thus, my childhood was far from typical, although I didn't realize it nor remember resenting it at the time, for I had no other model with which to compare it.

I want the future generations who read this to see what an ordinary person can live through and survive. I am leaving this record of my childhood-youth-manhood for my children and their children who, I hope, will live in more favorable circumstances. I want them to learn something about me, hence about their background, their heritage. This is the reason I am putting these remembrances on paper.

Abe Koosis

\* \* \*





My father died very young from pneumonia and my mother, who was only about thirty, was left with six children. I was the only boy and three years old when my father died. Later, when I was about six or seven, it was decided that I go and live with my father's parents in the city of Proskuroff—in the Ukraine, southwestern Russia—about sixty miles from the town of Ostropol, my mother's birthplace, where we moved after my father's death. Proskuroff offered more educational opportunities, and it was felt that I would benefit by having more male companionship. I realize now that without a breadwinner, with mother having to struggle and make ends meet, and with the whole brood on her hands, one less mouth to feed must have been some help. In addition, a boy was a big responsibility. A boy in Jewish tradition needed schooling and discipline to grow up properly. A young widow with all those children couldn't possibly do a proper job, especially with so little money.

The distance to Proskuroff, as I mentioned, was about fifty to sixty miles, but to go there was no light undertaking. One had to hire a driver with a horse and wagon to get to the town of Staro Kostantinov, about twenty miles away, and from there take the train to Proskuroff. I was about seven years old, and my sister, who accompanied and supervised me, was about eleven. My mother, of course, had to stay home with the rest of the children. It was no easy task for a couple of children to do all that traveling, to find food, and to buy tickets. But, I remember having a sense of adventure.

The train was a thrilling experience—so powerful, so huge, and so noisy. I remember I could hardly settle down for the excitement of the thing. After several hours of chugging and puffing, the train stopped with a blast and a jerk. Yes, we were in the city of Proskuroff. We gathered our bundles and entered into what seemed to me a huge building. Were we there? I asked my sister. Is this where I was going to live? No—this was the station. We had to find a way to get to our uncle (father's brother).

I can't remember now how we got to my uncle's house, but I remember that our arrival was greeted not too joyfully. My uncle had a wife and five small girls. He lived in a small house and earned a meager living as a teacher and insurance agent. The same day my sister and I

were taken to our paternal grandparents. They were quite old and very orthodox in their religion. I was homesick and wanted to go home. Fortunately, after a few days it was decided that I was too young to be away from mother and that I must wait till I was a bit older to come back.

Compared to our little town of Ostropol, Proskuroff was a metropolis, with horse-drawn streetcars, theaters, and even a movie house. In the center of the city was a park where children were playing soccer and other games. Peddlers with ice cream carts would yell, "*Morozhenoe, morozhenoe*" (ice cream). There were pastry shops run by Greeks.

I was taken places and my cousins gave me all kinds of treats. My aunt took me to a hat shop and insisted on buying me a straw hat with a wide brim and ribbon. I remember feeling very hurt because I didn't want to look like a little boy. I wanted a cap like older boys wore. Everything was so fascinating in Proskuroff, but still I was glad to return home to Mother.

Our household in the small town of Ostropol consisted of mother, grandfather, and six, sometimes five of us children. It was rumored that my grandmother was really in love with another man and didn't want to marry grandfather. But her father insisted that she marry grandfather because he was very well educated in Russian, in book-keeping, as well as in the Talmud. My grandmother's parents felt that he would be a great asset to their business. He married into their wealthy family. According to rumor, my grandmother was very beautiful but unhappy.

Grandmother died rather young, and none of her grandchildren got to know her. My grandfather then decided to part with all material things. He gave his properties to his sons and daughters, and one house to my mother. He then came to live with us. I adored him. He was rather impractical and a dreamer. He spent his time doing "social work," such as settling disputes among Jews, fighting against tax levies, and writing petitions. He had quite a few gentile friends who visited him and whom he visited in turn. I remember the tales he would tell us when I was very young, tales of all kinds of supernatural creatures—good and bad—long, rambling stories that would never end but go on and on. He would stop in the middle, and no matter



how much we begged him, he'd say, "No, maybe tomorrow."

While he was alive, our house was always in a turmoil. First, there were the litigants, men and women shouting and gesticulating about inheritance, damages, or hurts of all kinds. I remember one woman in particular who was fighting with her relatives over a will. She grabbed my grandfather's handsome, white beard and held on to keep his attention on her and not on the others. Grandfather had been "elected" to settle disputes among the Jews (they had no confidence in the Russian courts), and was bullied and threatened by tax collectors because he didn't assess enough taxes on the town.

Many peasants found their way to our house for grandfather to write all kinds of petitions and letters to the authorities, especially to the military to exempt their sons from army conscription. I remember one man by the name of Fedka or Khvedka, who learned the trade of shoemaking from a Jew and who lived with a Jewish family. He spoke Yiddish like a Jew and felt disdain towards the "ordinary" gentile peasants. He never learned to write, so my grandfather kept writing petitions to the army to release his son because Khedka was getting old and needed his son to help him. Of course, it didn't do any good. After the revolution and the Bolshevik coup d'état, Khvedka's son showed up as the "limping commissar." He was very arrogant and overbearing with everybody. Somewhere he acquired a limping foot and an autocratic manner. Of course, my grandfather and Khvedka were not alive by then. Khvedka's son became the Big Power in our town.

My grandfather was a quiet and gentle man. I never heard him raise his voice. My oldest sister, though, had some conflicts with him. She was pretty and had many boyfriends, and my grandfather was a bit watchful. When she closed the door to her room with a boy visitor, my grandfather would open the door a bit and tell her boyfriend, "Why don't you go and see another girl for a change?" My sister naturally resented it. Of course, she was not even sixteen.

Grandfather had a couple of chickens and a rooster. Every morning he would cut tiny cubes of bread, which we kids were wasting, to feed what he termed his "flock." In the winter, when it got very cold, he would take his "flock" into our living quarters. My oldest sister objected strenuously, but he would tell her, "It's more important for

the chickens to be in the warm house than for you. You can wear a warm coat, but they can't!" One day my sister in anger threw something at the rooster. Poor rooster got frightened, flew up with a shriek, banged against my favorite picture on the wall, and broke the glass into tiny pieces. That event made such a big impression on me that it has always been with me. It seemed like an insult to my grandfather whom I loved, and violence to the painting which meant so much to me.

There were two paintings in very vivid red and gold colors of the Spanish Inquisition. One painting was of a Seder in a secret cellar. At the head of the table was a cardinal or bishop with a long white beard, white hair, and dressed in a luxuriant red robe. Among the guests were a beautiful girl in a white bridal gown and her groom, stealthily throwing a piece of *matzo* under the table. The second painting showed an *auto de fe*, the bride in flames and the cardinal, still in his brilliant robe, standing with an indescribable expression of horror on his face. The groom is there with some other young people, smiling and appearing very happy. Those two paintings made me understand and feel the Spanish Inquisition. Fascinated, I used to look at them when going to bed and waking up in the morning.

One day my grandfather took sick, and he never recovered. It was inconceivable to me that grandfather wouldn't be well again. One morning I went to school as usual, but in about an hour the teacher dismissed us. On the way home I saw a big procession and I noticed that the stores were closed as on a holiday. I hurried home to ask mother the reason for all that. But before entering the house, I noticed some strangers and saw that the floor was wet and that mother was crying. I then saw that grandfather's bed was empty. He had died early that morning. According to Jewish custom, his body was washed and immediately taken to the cemetery and buried. My biggest sorrow, my most painful time was when my grandfather died. He left a big void in my life.

\* \* \*



I have many memories of love and adventure of our shtetl life. I especially remember the summers with longing. The air was perfumed with the fragrance of lilac. The woods and orchards around us were beautiful. We kids used to go in the woods and pick wild strawberries that grew in the tall grass beneath big trees. We used to go and pick cherries, plums, and peaches and carry them home, where mother would make preserves in big copper kettles. We'd go frolicking in the river which was behind our house, to the disgust of the people trying to fish. Up the river there was a dam which was used by the flour mill people. We used to go and "take showers" in the water spilling over the dam. Every now and then somebody would open the flood gates and let the dammed water rush out, then watch us boys scramble and run for our lives.

In the winter the slopes were covered with snow, and we engaged in all kinds of sport—

The fragrant pines,  
The expanse of endless white,  
The droves of skates, cutting  
Ribbons into icy river.

The sleighs careening down  
The snowy slopes.  
The roar of laughter and exaltation  
Of red-cheeked youngsters, of shiny eyes.

The flocks of quarreling wild geese  
That darken the blue sky.  
The whiffs of delectable goodies  
Escaping from within the homes.

Oh, sweet memories of my vanished Shtetl.

I was rather small but fast. I had a friend who was much larger, fat, and slow. I used to tease him a lot. Sometimes he would get very angry at me and would threaten to thrash me, but he could never catch me.

Once he rigged up some kind of a whip with a knot at the end. He kept chasing me and swinging the whip. The distance between me and the end of the whip gradually shortened, and I almost got a big thrashing. Fortunately for me, my two big cousins appeared and grabbed my pursuer. Then we made peace—a forced peace.

My two “big cousins” were a couple of years older than I. They were sons of my grandfather’s brother. My uncle, Chaim Leib was a most interesting and colorful man. He was the black sheep of the family. Instead of engaging in scholarly pursuits he became a distiller of vodka. He also loved animals and raised horses. He and his wife had a very large family, something like eight or nine children. Often he would forget some of their names. He would say, “You are Yosel, no? Oh, forgive me, you are Motel. Now I’ll remember.” But he never did remember. When the government decided to monopolize the manufacture of alcoholic beverages, my uncle didn’t pay any attention. He continued distilling and selling vodka. One day the police came, dismantled his distillery, and hauled him off to jail. With the help of a bit of a bribe, he was out fairly soon. He then concentrated on raising and grooming his beloved horses, which he traded every now and then for some food and other necessities. Many years later he and his wife came to America with the help of his sons, who had preceded him there by several years.

Memories of my childhood! How meaningful everyday, ordinary incidents have become. I remember one elderly couple in particular, our next-door neighbors in our shtetl of Ostropol. Bas Sheva was an ancient, wrinkled woman, practically blind; her husband, Isruel, was an old man whose thick, stuttering voice always reminded me of a wagon wheel that badly needed some greasing. Bas Sheva’s great hope, her entire purpose for living, was to be able to see, to touch, and to feel once more her only son who was in the tzar’s army. My dear grandfather, who was living with us and whom we adored, had spent many hours writing endless petitions to the tzar and everybody else he could think of. They usually began something like: “Your Great and Illustrious Excellency! I am a mother, old and blind. I am only living for the sake of seeing and feeling my only son once more. Please, Your Excellency, give this, my pleading, your noble attention.” She kept



coming and begging my grandfather to write more and more petitions. My grandfather so wanted to skip away from her with just a "yes, yes," but Bas Sheva was too clever for that. She would take hold of my grandfather's wonderful beard, and she wouldn't let go until he listened to her entire story. She considered my grandfather her direct line of communication to the Powers. We children were very annoyed with Bas Sheva because she took our Grandfather's attention away from us so often.

Bas Sheva's husband, an old gnarled man, gruff and short on speech, but with a "heart of gold" (as Bas Sheva assured everybody), was running a small general store, selling everything from pins and needles to pickels and herring. His little store was directly across the street from their little house. Because of her poor vision, Bas Sheva couldn't walk up or down the stairs or cross the street, so she communicated with Isruel verbally, shouting clear across the street. We children thought it very funny. Now and then Bas Sheva would walk to the front of the porch and shout, "Isruel, Isruel," until he would answer in a rough stutter, "*Noo, noo?* (What is it?)" Then she would shout for all to hear, "*Klub ois a guten, fatten herring far insere teiere shcheinim. Nu, vestis toon?* (Pick out a good, fat herring from the barell for our dear neighbors. Well, will you do it?)" "*Yo, yo.* (Yes, yes)," he would grunt. One of us would then be dispatched to bring the herring home. How funny it all seemed to us children, and we laughed a lot.

One day Bas Sheva died, without ever having seen her son again. We then missed her terribly, and the tragedy of her life was dimly perceived by us. As for Isruel, he didn't last long after Bas Sheva's death. He died in his sleep a few weeks later. Their son was never seen or heard from again by anybody in our shtetl. Some thought he went to America, others that he was taken prisoner by the Germans during the war.

\* \* \*

Sometime after my return to Ostropol, during the time before the First World War, there was great dissatisfaction, and revolts were

brewing all over Russia. Both the government and the economic structure were corrupt and extremely inefficient. The system was bankrupt. A very small class of landowners and entrepreneurs were fabulously rich, but the overwhelming majority were living in misery. About seventy percent or more were illiterate. Most of the peasants were landless and very poor. The new class of workers toiling in the newly established factories and workshops were even worse off than the peasants; they lived in barracks, worked twelve to fifteen hours a day, and were forbidden to organize into unions. Organizers and "agitators" were severely punished and imprisoned. Many Jews joined the Revolutionary movement, and some became its leaders. Most of the Jews were opposed to the autocracy—they were dreaming of a new day, a democratic system of government where there would be no discrimination.

The situation worsened for the Jews. The Jews in Russia lived separately from the Christians in towns and villages in the "pale of settlement." They were surrounded by an ocean of gentiles, most of whom at that time were illiterate and superstitious. Their "leaders" were their city and village priests, who had been telling their people for generations that the Jews were "Christ Killers" and deserved to be punished.

The Russian Church was, of course, an adjunct of the ruling class, the "establishment," with the czar being the head and "protector" of the church. It was convenient to use the Jews as scapegoats and to direct any anger and suspicion towards them instead of towards the autocracy. It was not hard for the priests to convince the populace that the Jews were conspiring against the Christians, that the Jews caused the misery of the "Great Russian People."

There was a popular little street song sung by some anti-Semites before the Revolution:

*Rossee'ia, Rossee'ia, jhal' ti menye'  
Jeedi' bogoobee' lee oo' chast' tvoyoo'!*

*Rossee'ia, Rossee'ia, jhal' ti menye'  
Gorka' i obee'dna oo' chast' tvoya'!*



Oh, Russia, Russia how I pity you.  
The Jews have wrecked your destiny!

Oh, Russia, Russia how I pity you.  
Bitter and humiliated is your lot!

(The word "*Jeed*" is derogatory slang for "Jew" in Russian. The Bolsheviks, in the early days of the Revolution, banned anti-Semitic expression.)

Soon our whole town became steeped in gloom and fear—verging on panic. All one could hear was anguished talk, arguments, whispers about the latest development in Kiev—the Baylis trial—a crude and primitive invention of the autocracy to "prove" to the Russian people that the Jews were murdering young, innocent Christians and using their blood to bake matzos for Passover.

It was felt that the entire Jewish community of Russia was in extreme danger. The mood of despair and terror which permeated our community because of the Baylis trial, its course, and its probable consequences (if Baylis were to be found guilty) affected us children too. I could feel the agitation and gloom. I am sure that if I had been older instead of about eight years old, I too would have joined the revolutionaries.

\* \* \*

When my oldest sister was about fifteen, she was beginning to flirt with revolutionary activities. I remember mysterious young men flitting in and out of our house. The police were looking for them, and they changed their domiciles almost daily so as not to be caught. In those days, if you circulated an "illegal" newspaper or pamphlet, or were even caught possessing or reading it, you were a criminal and were liable to be sent away for five or ten years.

Shortly before the First World War broke out in Europe, my sister took off to America. She was only about sixteen. In those days it meant to go to some West European port, and there to try and land on a ship

sailing to some American port, preferably New York. I don't believe she had a passport or more than maybe fifty roubles. It's hard to understand now how a young sixteen-year-old girl could embark on such a long journey by herself. But at sixteen one had already lived a lifetime in Russia if one were poor and Jewish. One had already experienced all the discrimination and persecution by the Russian officialdom to last a lifetime. So it was not really so surprising to see young teenagers get up and leave the country. Many went to Western Europe or to South America, but most went to the United States—"the Golden Country."

\* \* \*

Soon thereafter it was felt that I had "matured" enough to leave and live with my grandparents in the city of Proskuroff, to acquire an education. I lived with my grandparents for several years, but I was never happy there. There was a cold atmosphere in their house. There was nobody but me and the two old, very religious, somewhat humorless people. They never showed any warmth towards me. It was all routine and duty: get up, go to school, eat frugally and as little as possible, go to synagogue and pray, do your homework, and go to bed—on a narrow, uncomfortable couch. I cannot say that I have any fond memories of my sojourn with my grandparents.

In August 1914 the First World War broke out. The city of Proskuroff was only about thirty or so miles from the Austrian border. We became inundated with soldiers, hundreds of thousands of them, crossing the border into Austria. Day and night, on wagons, on horseback, in trains, in a few trucks, soldiers were streaming west towards Vienna. However, several months later, the Russians met their first defeat. Many troops were surrounded, and others began to retreat. Like a lava flow, they surged back to the east. They were bedraggled and a pitiful sight to behold. Some kind of a stalemate developed around our section of the front, but with the daily bombardment of big guns, one could hear the "enemy" fairly close by. Pretty soon airplanes appeared in the sky, and we heard thuds of



bombs every now and then.

My life with my grandparents was very unsatisfactory. I was never physically punished or abused, but the atmosphere in the house was frigid. My grandparents were both ultra orthodox. About two or three times a day they went to the synagogue to pray. The rest of the time they behaved "other worldly." There was no fun or diversion of any kind. It was always: Prepare to meet thy Maker.

Food was scarce. Either they couldn't afford to feed me properly or they were plain stingy. Later, as the war progressed, food became even scarcer. Bread was mixed with straw and other impurities. Other edibles became very expensive and very hard to get. My grandparents didn't seem to mind. They were mostly interested in prayer. My grandmother was more fanatical than my grandfather.

Having such a bare and frugal home life, I was naturally attracted more and more to things outside the "home." I began to enjoy school and companionship there. I had little trouble learning, so I had an easy time, unlike some other kids who found it very hard to keep up with schoolwork. School attendance was not compulsory; in fact, it was considered a privilege to attend school. Children were easily dismissed for failure to keep up with studies, misbehavior, or tardiness. There were always more boys clamoring to enroll than there were places in school. The teachers and principal were usually strict.

We all had to wear uniforms, be neat and courteous, and keep up with our schoolwork. The teachers wore semi-military uniforms with buttons and insignia. I found most teachers there to be very good and considerate. The school was a *gosudarsvenoye* (state/government) *Yev-reskoye* (Jewish) *oochilische* (school)—a state highschool for Jewish boys. All the teachers were Jews. They were overqualified. It was very hard for a Jewish teacher to find a job in a Russian school no matter how qualified or how good he was. So Jews with all kinds of university degrees were happy to get work where they could. In our school we had an exceptionally well qualified group of teachers. I was rather happy there. Since it was easy for me to keep up with assignments, I was allowed to go at my own pace and read all kinds of books. And, I did learn quite a bit, including Russian, arithmetic, and history.

Things outside school were also very exciting. The war was



Photograph of me in *gymnasia* (school) uniform standing with my eldest sister, Rachel. Proskuroff, 1913.



practically in our back yard. Masses of troops moving and returning, daily bombardments, planes overhead, . . . talk, speculation, prophecies among adults as well as children. Of course, adults were worried and fearful. But I was only a young boy and probably too foolish to worry. To me it was exciting. All that overcompensated for the dull and frigid home life.

My thirteenth birthday was approaching, and my grandfather sent me to Hebrew school to prepare me for Bar Mitzvah. I was then expected to pray and observe the rules of conduct laid down by the Jewish rabbis and sages of many centuries past. Prayers were supposed to be said twice daily, at morning and at sunset. Blessings were supposed to be made before and after every meal. Also prayers were to be uttered daily before going to bed and upon arising in the morning. It was quite a chore to even try and observe some of the rules. Nevertheless, I got into the spirit of the thing, and I actually became very religious—even pious. I got a big emotional uplift from praying. I didn't stop to analyze why or to whom I was praying, it was just one big emotional catharsis—as long as it lasted. But, it lasted only a short time and was replaced by skepticism and doubt.

My Bar Mitzvah ceremony was solemn rather than ostentatious. We went to our little synagogue where the daily prayer meetings took place. After the service I was called to the front, where I recited an appropriate passage from the Bible. The congregation, consisting of about fifteen or so Jews, congratulated me properly. Grandfather opened a bottle of vodka, and some cookies and little glasses were produced. Everybody including I had a sip of vodka and a cookie, and then each hastened to his business or place of work. I too went to school directly from the ceremony.

The summers were happy times for me because I would go home to mother for vacation. In the summer a big weight would fall off my shoulders—there was no gloom, no frigidity, no discipline. Everything was natural; there was a loving atmosphere. My mother spoiled me and gave me love and attention. My sisters too were very nice. Of course, I didn't tell mother about my negative feelings towards my grandparents and my life in Proskuroff. I made her think that everything was fine with me. She was glad that I had a chance to go to

school, and she was dreaming about me becoming a great doctor or lawyer.

My mother hardly made ends meet, and she was always planning and scheming how to get enough money for food and clothes for us. She was given a drygoods shop by her father, but she was not by nature a business woman. She would give away things on "credit," or she would sell things at a very low profit, and very soon the merchandise was gone, with no money to replace it. Every now and then her brother, who was also our neighbor, would come to the rescue, but it would last only a very short time.

In spite of all the adversity, we had many happy times. I remember my mother often laughing and being gay. We used to have a circle of friends who gathered in our house. They would drink tea and sing songs; one would read stories and novels out loud in Yiddish. My mother would burst into almost hysterical laughter when Sholom Alechem's humorous stories were read. I used to worry and shake her a bit to come back to herself.

My sisters had many girlfriends, of course, and I experienced my first puppy love with one. I used to wait for her in secret in various places and save some sweets or fruit for her. I longed to touch her, to kiss her—but I was too timid, and I doubt if she even suspected my feelings. Those were the bitter-sweet emotions which I cherished. The summer vacation passed too soon, and I had to return to Proskuroff, back to school and my grandparents.

\* \* \*

In Proskuroff everything was tumultuous. The place was full of rumors. The war was going badly—we could all see and hear it. Everyday the bombardments were growing louder and louder. Thousands of soldiers were going *back* from the front, many in very disheveled and even pitiful condition. There was talk of evacuation of all the schools.

One morning our principal barged into our classroom, breathless and red in the face, with the following order: We were all to be in school at six o'clock next morning. We were all told to appear



immaculately dressed, with shoes shined and uniforms cleaned and brushed. We were going to meet Tzar Nicolas, the czar of "all the Russias." Naturally, we were all very excited. The next morning we marched like soldiers to a road outside the city and were arranged in two rows on both sides of the road. The weather was pretty warm. I think it was September. We were all attired in our woolen uniforms and boots, and there we stood for at least two hours. Of course, there were many others, including soldiers and police. Finally we saw some open automobiles approaching. In the second or third car there stood an unassuming fellow in an ordinary officer's uniform. He had a small reddish beard and mustache. He was standing holding onto something, smiling and bowing, while we all nearly went crazy with shouting, "Hurrah, hurrah," and tossing caps and hats into the air. The czar, apparently, was so pleased with his reception that we were to be back when he returned about two hours later. All the military around him and behind him in the other cars looked so much more impressive with their gold and silver braid that I was a bit disappointed. I figured that the czar should certainly have more decorations. Why did the czar suddenly come through our town, close to the front lines? It was said that the morale was very low, that the soldiers were deserting. Many refused to fight. It was also rumored, which later proved true, that many soldiers didn't even have any rifles and that wrong ammunitions were issued. The soldiers were sent to face the great military machine of Germany practically with their bare hands. Inefficiency and corruption permeated everything. So the czar was sent by the military chiefs to try and instill some patriotism and enthusiasm to stop the demoralization. Of course, it didn't do any good. Disintegration of the army and all other institutions of the autocracy continued. Until one day—a thunder cloud—a sunburst—an event I'll never forget even though I was only fourteen—the czar abdicated! The Revolution began! I remember going along with hundreds of people to the newspaper office to read bulletins stating new developments which were posted every few minutes. There were many cossacks on horseback brandishing their *nagaikas* (whips), itching to whip and abuse the crowds—but something held them back. The Revolution was just too big and elemental for them. In fact,

they, as well as the police, found it prudent to make themselves scarce.

Now the floodgates were down. Everybody, the old and the young, became intoxicated with freedom. The chains were broken. Fear disappeared. There was a feeling of indescribable hope and happiness. Of course, the war—the accursed war—was still dragging on. New governments changed often. The old aristocracy couldn't govern; there was no trust in them. Finally, the Duma elected a fairly young man, Kerensky, to be prime minister. He was a mild socialist, a sincere democrat, and a great orator. He had "charisma" and was adored by most people. He had, however, two fatal flaws: He believed in absolute democracy, and he believed in continuing the war along with the allies to a victorious conclusion. He refused to make a separate peace with Germany. He didn't trust the Germans, and also felt honorbound to stick with the allies. Russia was not prepared, both physically and psychologically, to continue the war which the hated autocracy had begun. The Bolsheviks and anarchists took advantage of the anti-war mood; they went by the hundreds among the soldiers and urged them to go home instead of rotting in the trenches, to turn their guns against their "true enemies"—the landowners and the aristocracy. They coined various ditties, such as:

*Voina Dvortzam*  
*Mir khizhinam . . .*

War to the palaces  
Peace to the huts . . .

Kerensky hesitated to take firm measure until it was too late. The Bolsheviks cared very little about democracy—those were bourgeois prejudices, they said. They believed that the end justifies all means. They eventually seized power, and, of course, are still there.

There are many reasons why the Bolsheviks were not defeated. There were many terrible and stupid mistakes made by the anti-Bolshevik Russians as well as by the foreign powers. But history was changed completely, and is still being influenced everywhere because of the success of the Bolshevik coup d'état of 1918.



But this is not the place for me to try and analyze the various forces that caused things to be the way they are. Here, I am only trying to recall my experiences.

\* \* \*

The Revolutionary Period was like champagne. Everything was bubbling and tinkling. We didn't need any stimulants—events kept us all “high,” young and old. I remember the campaigns and speeches of candidates to the Constituent Assembly. Everybody—from Right to extreme Left—made fiery speeches. We all argued and chose sides. One of my cousins was a Bolshevik. He argued for an immediate end of the war and confiscation of all property which would then be given to the workers, peasants, and poor.

I vividly remember a Zionist orator. I have never heard anybody as eloquent and poetic as that young man. He was rather short and wore glasses, but the moment he mounted the platform, he became a magician. Hearing his orations was a catharsis. They were not just speeches; they were masterpieces. But even though I so loved to hear him speak and call for the Jews to embrace Zionism, I logically couldn't agree with him. I figured now that the tzarist regime was overthrown, we would all be equal; Russia would become a great and good country for all. Why should we travel to some unknown place? We were all born here in Russia. Why not live here and enjoy? But he told us to beware. We might be considered strangers and enemies. We might yet be accused of all kinds of crimes—for political expediency. How prophetic he turned out to be, but how little we believed him.

I felt I was living on top of a volcano, with things around us popping and boiling. School was boring and uninteresting. Discipline became lax. Who wanted to go to school and learn decimals and fractions when the world was topsy-turvy outside? The war was going from bad to worse. Soldiers were deserting by the thousands. A fresh bunch of soldiers were sent down from Siberia and the northern regions to replace the old units. They were billeted in the houses. In my grandparents' small apartment three soldiers were stationed. They

slept on the floor. I remember having a lot of fun with them. They were semi-literate, and they kept begging me to read newspapers and books to them. They were lolling around doing very little most of the time, waiting to be sent to the front. By the time they left they were almost members of the family. They were wonderful people. In spite of everything, I never lost my affection for the Russians.

By November of 1917, the Kerensky government was overthrown by means of a coup d'état, and the Bolsheviks (Communists) took over. Shortly thereafter the German and Austrian armies came in and occupied our place. Schools were closed. Suddenly food became unobtainable. All the food stuff, the cows, chickens, and horses were loaded on trucks and trains and sent to Germany. Everything edible disappeared. The German soldiers systematically went to all the peasants, warehouses, and stores and seized everything, which they paid for with wads of paper "money," that could not be used for anything.

My grandmother was practically blind. My grandfather worked in a big hardware establishment. Most of the time I was left to myself. I was running all over town, scrounging for a bit to eat and looking for excitement. My grandmother would give me a few coins, and I would go out and buy an apple or a slice of black bread full of chopped straw and other kinds of impurities. For dinner my grandparents, with a lot of trouble, managed to cook something up.

I would have loved to go back to Ostropol to my mother's house, but it was impossible to travel because of the occupation and uprisings by peasants against the Germans. Shortly thereafter the Germans set up an "independent" Ukrainian government in Kiev, with a "Hetman" or leader on top. Of course, he and his government were puppets of Germany. The German army was occupying the country until the Kaiser was overthrown in Germany after they were defeated by the allies. As soon as that happened the Germans left in a big hurry, and with them the "Hetman Ukrainian Government."

Then there was a great deal of fighting between various factions trying to take over. The Communists, who had been underground in our part of the country while the Germans were there, came out in small detachments and tried to take over towns and villages. The main



Communist armies were too busy for the time being fighting the White armies further north and east. The Ukrainian nationalists appeared well armed and uniformed. They came from the Austrian side of the border and began to mobilize local men. They managed to chase out the Communist detachments, as well as the anarchist armed groups, and set up a government headed by a man named Petlura.

Shortly thereafter I experienced the most horrifying, the most terrible event of my life. Even now, sixty-two years later, I still wake up now and then with nightmares.

It happened on a warm autumn Saturday afternoon. The adults were relaxing after a Saturday skimpy meal. The young ones, and I among them, were out in the street socializing or playing games. Suddenly there appeared from nowhere a detachment of cavalry, as well as foot soldiers, shooting straight at the people and killing many. They were shouting, "Go home, go home!" Naturally, I ran breathlessly home and told my grandparents about it. We immediately locked and bolted our door, which luckily led to a narrow alley and not to the street. The cavalry was just the vanguard. They were followed by detachments of soldiers and civilians who systematically forced the doors to the homes and apartments open, and, without any hesitation, murdered everybody in cold blood. Those who ran were caught and shot or bayoneted on the street. Nobody was spared, not even children and infants—as long as they were Jews.

I stood and watched through a small opening, and it didn't look real—just like watching a movie, or having a dream. I watched the garish bloody murderers swaggering and knifing and bayonetting, and people screaming and running and falling, falling. This tornado of killers rushed by our street and went to the next street, and the next street, murdering and killing in an orgy of blood. Soon I heard moaning and scratching on our garret. I went up and found our neighbor from the next apartment bloodied and half alive. We managed to get him down to our place and try to make him comfortable. The killers went into his apartment, adjacent to ours, killed his wife and child, stabbed him, and left him for dead. Somehow he managed to crawl up to the garret, crawled to the top of our place, and made himself heard. We spent the night not knowing what to expect next.

The next morning we cautiously ventured out on the street and what we found was worse than we expected. Corpses were piled all over—people who had tried to escape from the murderers had been caught and killed in the streets. Later in the day my sister Rachel, who also lived in the town, was bold enough to come to see if I was alive. My grandfather and I went fearfully to see if his son, my uncle, and his family had survived, and we were glad that they did. Several thousand Jews were murdered that Saturday afternoon; many more were killed during the next few days. That was the Pogrom of Proskuroff, one of the tragedies that befell our people in this century—a tragedy which I survived.



Rachel, 1918.



The apparent "reason" for this savagery was an unsuccessful uprising in our town, the objective being to establish a Communist government. Among the organizers of the uprising were a number of Jewish students and workers. They took over the railway station, the telegraph office, and other public places and waited for the Communist detachment to oust the Petlura (Ukrainian) soldiers. The Communists were supposed to be there—but they never showed up. Instead, they came several weeks later and defeated the Ukrainians.

I moved around like a sleep-walker. I was literally stunned and completely "immobilized" by my feelings and sensations. The experience I had just lived through was so overwhelming, so monstrous, that I couldn't "get back together" for several weeks. Eventually I snapped out of it, and as soon as transportation was available, I went home to mother, to the town of Ostropol. I spent the summer there, and I always remember my vacations with mother and sisters with pleasure. In the fall I went back to Proskuroff and decided to transfer from my other school to the *gymnasia*. They charged tuition, but I was accepted on a scholarship. My stay in the *gymnasia* didn't last long, about two semesters, because, after the Germans left, the Bolsheviks defeated the Ukrainians. The big war began in earnest, and, of course, all schools were closed.

The big war consisted of the Polish invasion. The Bolsheviks were not strong enough to fight so they simply decided to retreat. The Poles had a powerful army that was equipped with the latest war material by the French and English. Their commanding officers were French. It was generally known that the Allies were behind it all. The idea was to push the Russians at least behind the Dnieper River and to establish a Ukrainian government under the tutelage of Poland, or, if possible, to organize a "Greater Poland" with the help of the West at the expense of Russia.

With no school, I was left hanging in the middle, and I didn't know what to do. Luckily I heard from one of my sisters about a tutoring job in a village where three families were very anxious to have their children learn reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as some elementary Hebrew. I presented myself and was told to come and live there. I was promised good food, a place to sleep, and a "salary."

There was no commitment as to the amount of money, and in the end I never did get any money—they kept stalling and asking me to wait. I did get several bags of grain, however, which I took to mother. She had it milled and baked bread for the family.

I was happy in the village of Samchik for a while. The kids, three boys and a girl, made good progress. Their parents became very friendly with me. When I was about sixteen, I became infatuated with a girl who was about two years older. I don't know whether she took to me because of love or out of sheer boredom, but we had quite a blazing affair.

My employers were managers of the estate. The owners fled the estate right after the revolution, but the governments in power—and there were several succeeding one another—ordered the managers to stay and manage everything. One was managing the farms, another managed the sugar mill, and a third managed the flour mill. It was quite a big business. All that business was kept going. I still don't know who paid them, who bought the produce and sugar. It was all a mystery to me.

There was also a head bookkeeper, a man by the name of Tarabanoff. He had a big, thick, white mustache. He rolled his own cigarettes. He had a good singing voice, and he liked to philosophize. I think he was a widower. He had quite a few girlfriends. We used to eat our meals together everyday and became very friendly. He used to call me "*oochitelyok*"—"little teacher"—and I would call him "Taraban-Tarabanoff." He had quite a few books of Russian classics, such as Tolstoy, Turgeneff, Dostoyevsky, Gorky, Gonchiaroff, and Andreef, which he would analyze for me and discuss with me. He became a father figure to me. I felt a love for him. He was about the only gentile Russian whom I loved as a father, and who was very tender and understanding toward me. But that didn't last—for he was cut down in cold blood practically in front of my eyes. I shall return to that incident, and the events which followed.

During my stay in Samchik, political and military events were very turbulent. Armies and bands see-sawed constantly. No sooner did a detachment of Reds move in than an army of Poles, Ukrainians, or mixed Pole—and—Ukrainian bands moved in, fighting, chasing



out, or killing the Reds. Our village was relatively peaceful because the military maneuvers usually took place in the cities, but every now and then we got our share of "visitors."

Once, while my employers had gone to the city and only the maid and I were in the house, a group of soldiers and officers surprised us and "dropped in." The house in which I lived belonged to the manager of the estate. It was one of the most prominent structures in the village, so naturally the newcomers couldn't miss it. They came in, tied their horses in front, and I saw that they were ready for mischief. They asked where the hosts were, and on being told that they were in the city on business, they made themselves at home and ordered an elaborate meal from the maid. While she was busy cooking, they put me through a series of questions, such as: was I Polish or Ukrainian, what was I doing, and what was my relationship to the manager. After some whispered conversation among them, I was told to get ready to accompany them. That didn't go down well with me, especially since my cousin recently had disappeared under similar circumstances. While they were busy preparing for the feast and changing clothing, I slipped out through a rear door, ran like hell, and hid myself until they were gone.

On another occasion, a friend from the town of Ostropol suddenly appeared. He said he was on his way to Ostropol, and he invited me to join him on a hike there. I liked the idea because I hadn't seen my mother and sisters for several weeks, so I decided to join him. The distance was only about five miles. Spring was in the air, snow and ice were melting, and I felt idyllic and peaceful. My friend, who was about two years older, talked to me about his experiences.

As we approached our town (our town was situated on a hill), we noticed three or four Polish soldiers standing watch. We were challenged and told to stop. They aimed their rifles at us and told us to proceed. They took us into a peasant hut, searched us thoroughly, and removed our shoes. They decided that we were spies and were to be shot, but we talked them into taking us to town to prove that we were local people only going home. Fortunately, they did that, and as they led us through our town to their headquarters, people noticed us under arrest.

In the meantime we were taken to their military headquarters, asked all kinds of questions, with slaps and kicks thrown in, and were locked up in a dark place. I couldn't see anything, but I felt straw on the floor. I lay down and dozed off. I don't know how much later it was when a gruff voice woke me up and ordered me out to the front. My friend was already up and waiting. In the office I found our mayor and several other townspeople who identified us and confirmed everything we told them. We were then pushed out unceremoniously and told to "get the hell out." That was the end of that little experience. But my mother took it more seriously and told us we could have been shot as spies if the townspeople hadn't seen us in tow by the Poles.

In general, the Polish military was extremely nasty and arrogant, not only with the Jews, but also with the Ukrainians and Russians. They strutted around, gave orders, and meted out punishments. Their momentary success went to their heads. They were insufferable; even the bourgeoisie was disgusted with them and were hoping for anybody but the Poles. Their hope was fulfilled fairly soon. With the coming of spring, the Bolshevik army arrived and drove the Polish army out as far as the outskirts of Warsaw.

I spent about a week at mother's, recuperating a bit from my experience. Things were pretty grim and bare. Food was scarce. The only people who managed to eat enough were the peasants (farmers). Most of the time they refused to sell for cash. Cash was worthless. They would sell some of their produce only for valuables—jewelry, watches, furs. We didn't have any of those things, but my mother had friends among the peasants, and they would bring us a loaf of bread, some green vegetables, some fruit—just enough to help us get by.

Soon I returned to Samchik to resume my teaching. Things were very disorganized after the Reds had returned. Detachments of soldiers would come down almost daily to "buy" produce and to demand all kinds of changes in management. My employers didn't know from day to day how to manage things or what to do with the wheat and sugar beets. They were getting contradictory and conflicting orders from different "authorities." There were all kinds of "authorities" set up, very often to oversee the same things. It was one big headache.

One evening as we were having supper, there was a knock on the



door, and before we could answer, the door burst open and two armed Red Army men came in and asked, "Where is Tarabanoff?" Tarabanoff, who recognized one as a local boy who had a grudge against him, ran and hid in a back room. "We don't know," they were told. They bared their sabers and threatened to cut us all down if we didn't produce Tarabanoff. They must have known that Tarabanoff was with us. When he heard that threat, Tarabanoff appeared and told them, "No need to do that—here I am." They grabbed him, pushed him outside, and immediately hacked him to death in front of my eyes. Naturally we were all stunned. None of us could sleep that night.

Early the next morning I decided to avenge Tarabanoff's death somehow. I hiked over to the town where I knew the Cheka (Secret Police) headquarters were. I was sixteen years old. I was very thin, and my clothes were fairly ragged, so I must have made a favorable impression on the Chekists.

The Cheka had a very terrible reputation. They were supposed to fight against terror and counter-revolution. They also "fought" by means of terror. They didn't hesitate to "shoot first and ask questions later." The adults were terrified of having anything to do with the Cheka, especially my employers, who used to work for the old landowners. But I was young and naive, and I was burning with rage against the murderers of Tarabanoff. I remember bursting into the "holy of holies" of the Cheka. They ushered me into a room where a one-armed, skinny man was sitting at a table and sipping tea. I broke down and wept, and between sobs managed to tell him what had happened. He took sort of a fatherly interest in me. He offered me some tea with sugar and bread. He was mainly interested in how many Red Army men there were. He kept asking if there were only two, not more. I understood later that if there were really only two, then they must have deserted their post because only detachments of a dozen or more were sent out.

The same day a detachment of cavalry was dispatched to Samchik to fetch Ivan and his friend and bring them to the Cheka headquarters. They were brought back and questioned. A few days later I was called to identify Ivan. He tried to shake my hand, for he felt his fate was somehow tied to me. I shook his hand loose, and I remember saying,

"I wouldn't shake the hand of a murderer." Several days later Ivan and his friend were executed by shooting. The reason was primarily because they deserted and took the law into their own hands. The Cheka didn't mind killing, but they refused to let others indulge.

My pupils and their families had moved out of Samchik after Tarabanoff's murder. The Bolsheviks had occupied the place, there was very little order, and they felt that they couldn't accomplish anything on the job. All kinds of people were carrying guns and demanding things, and they were afraid for their lives. So they moved to the town of Constantin, which was about ten miles away. They were very crowded in one small house, and the children could go to school in town. I felt I was not needed anymore so decided to go back to mother's house. The three employers owed me some money as I hadn't been paid for all the months of my tutoring. But they told me, "Abe, how and where could we get the money now? Can't you see that we left everything in Samchik and have hardly enough for our own needs?" I felt that they had enough assets with them, but I didn't want to press the argument, so I asked for whatever they could spare to tide me over to get back to Ostropol, and we parted as friends.

Back home I enjoyed my leisure and the friendship of people my age. I read books (mostly novels) and tried to help my mother. I took a couple of trips to a town called Khmelnik to buy peasant handicraft, such as wooden spoons and bowls, for mother to sell. I didn't realize at the time that this would be the last summer my mother, my sisters, and I were together. I feel very sentimental when I look back on that short summer. I remember mother and how I used to go and visit our peasant friends and try to buy produce or dairy products—and how often they would give us a present of some radishes or cherries.

The evenings were mild and fragrant from the scent of lilacs. The river Sluch was running close to the rear of our house, and I used to love to go down to the grassy bank and laze around with my friends or jump hop-scotch over pebbles and stones. I remember when I was much younger that I went with a bunch of friends to the waterfalls on the other side of the dam, and how we nearly drowned when suddenly somebody emptied the dam on us without warning. We had just enough time to jump to the shore.



Towards the end of the summer, things began to take a bad turn. The first thing we noticed was an endless procession of soldiers, horses, wagons and cars going east, usually during the night. Then the retreat continued during the day. Soon there was nobody but small cavalry detachments of Bolsheviks coming and going. They usually stopped in town, broke into houses, and demanded money or food. Some became violent and shot those who refused to or couldn't give things. Most of the soldier-bandits were very young peasant boys from distant provinces. They were very embittered and called everybody "bourgeois." They didn't know the meaning of the word, except that it was something bad.

We had no newspapers or news of any kind, and had to deduce that the Bolsheviks were defeated and retreating again. The Bolsheviks, when driving and defeating the Polish army, had galloped hundreds of miles to the outskirts of Warsaw. It seemed that nothing could stop the Red army. But soon they depleted their supplies; the armies became stretched very thin. They were exhausted and didn't get any replacements because the Bolsheviks still had to fight against White armies on other fronts. Transportation was also bad. The Polish and French general staff took advantage of the poor Russian strategy. They coiled their fist like a spring. General Weigand, who was an "advisor" of the Polish army, gathered up the guns, ammunition, and manpower, and as the exhausted Russians neared Warsaw, they were given a terrible thrashing and were rolled back hundreds of miles.

Naturally, we learned all that much later. At the time we didn't know what went on. Finally, the Red patrols stopped harassing us, but we could hear shooting of rifles and machine guns. We got used to the firing and tried to lead as normal a life as possible.

And so it happened that I was out on the town with a couple of friends one day when suddenly all hell broke loose. I seems that the Reds decided to make a stand on the outskirts of our town and the advancing Poles were blazing away with everything they had. I couldn't go back to our house. We found ourselves in the middle of a battle. The only thing my friends and I could do was to run westward. We practically ran all the way to Liuber, a town about five or six miles west of our town. We had nothing but what we wore—light summer

clothing. We headed for the nearest inn. The innkeeper put us up and gave us some food. He knew where we were from, but he kept asking us, "How in the world did you get here with all the shooting and fighting?" When we explained how we happened to be caught in crossfire and how we managed to escape, he called us "refugees," a title that seemed very funny to me.

I keep mentioning names of towns. I must clarify. There were numerous towns in the Ukraine very close to one another—about four or five miles apart. The centers of the towns were populated by almost a hundred percent Jews, while the outskirts were populated by Ukrainian and Russian peasants. Jews were not allowed to live in certain areas. The Church thought the Jews would try to convert the Christians. Since the Jews were not allowed to own land, they became craftsmen, artisans, professionals, and merchants in the towns.

The peasants were mostly farmers, and not all were necessarily poor. The peasants didn't live on or adjacent to their farms as is customary in the West. They lived in villages or on the outskirts of towns, and they rode or walked to their farms that were situated all around the villages and towns. They would bring their produce to town for sale and get their clothes and shoes made and repaired by the Jewish artisans. Despite their separation, some Jews and peasants became friends, as in my mother's case.

Every town had several inns where travelers and horses would rest and eat or wait for fresh horses. We spent the night at the inn, and the next morning I decided to go to Constantin, where my old pupils and their parents were living now. The innkeeper helped me find somebody going there and I got a ride. I found the house of my former employers crowded and noisy. They were willing to put me up and feed me, but I found it too crowded. I asked them to give me enough money to get to my grandparents in Proskuroff and some extra money for food for a couple of days.

I found my grandparents terribly aged in the last couple of years. I was in a very confused state of mind. I didn't know what to do next. I knew I couldn't stay with my grandparents; they were too old and couldn't afford to feed me. I couldn't go back to Ostropol because there was too much fighting and it was very dangerous to travel.



Besides, I was extremely fed up with the country, with the war, and with the Russians and Ukrainians.

I was very young, and most of my life had had very little satisfaction or happiness. I had found a lot of cruelty and prejudice among the general population, and I came to the conclusion that Jews had no chance for understanding or acceptance there, and that no matter what political system they devised, the Jews would always be blamed for the system's shortcomings. I was especially provoked that those who spoke of great things to come didn't respect life. To me all life came first, and all the other things they were dreaming about were to be an adjunct to life, or secondary to life. Their treatment of the czar and his family is but an illustration of brutality and bestiality.

As is known, when the czar abdicated, he, his wife, four girls, and one boy were exiled to western Siberia. They had no power nor any influence whatsoever. They were completely defeated. But when the Bolsheviks entered that town, they were ordered by the government to "eliminate" the czar and his family. One morning the czar, his wife, and all the children were taken to the basement, one by one, and shot in cold blood. This sheer brutality is *still* characteristic of the Communist mentality. I learned that the writer Gorky came to see Lenin and begged him to order his people to stop killing people just because they or their parents were from the aristocracy. Lenin said to Gorky, "But what can we do with them? We can't fit them into our society." When I saw them shoot and murder people because they didn't live up to the Communist's theory of social structure or religion, I felt nothing but contempt for them and their theories.

I was yearning to get away somewhere from the madhouse that was Russia. Fortunately, a miracle did happen. A man from America came with authorization to pick up some survivors from the various pogroms and people who had relatives in America. Several dozen people in New York had pooled their money and sent a delegate to try and find relatives and bring them to America. He insisted that he could take only two from my family, but we managed to get him to take me along too. My sister, who left for America seven years before, gave him her savings of about a thousand dollars and asked him to take as many as possible from our family.

After many starts and stops, we finally began our journey (which would end about six months later with our landing at Ellis Island). Our "expedition" consisted of about thirty-five people. A couple of dozen wagons were loaded up with bundles and bags of measly belongings. We climbed on the wagons and the horses started their trot. About fifteen hours later we stopped in the town of Tarnopol in Galicia, a province of old Austria which was then in Poland. My sisters and I were lodged with a Jewish family consisting of a middle-aged man and his daughter. They refused any money but gave us food and lodging. They were poor people, but they felt it their duty to let us share their very simple food. We stayed there about two weeks while our American leader made arrangements for passports and further travel.

Our next stop was Warsaw. There my sisters and I found lodging with a Jewish family in a small, three-room apartment. The family consisted of a middle-aged widow and her son, who was about three years older than I. When we moved into the apartment, we found three more tenants—people who were traveling in our group. Our landlady was desperately poor, and she needed the little money we could pay her just for her and her son to keep alive. We lived there about four or five months. I don't remember now how we were able to cook, eat, and sleep with eight adults in that little apartment, but somehow we managed. Apparently some snag developed concerning our visas or tickets; it took months before we could get away.

In the meantime, I rather enjoyed the city of Warsaw. I remember even going to the opera, where I saw "Eugene Onegin" in Russian. Warsaw had a large population, with Jewish newspapers, magazines, and Jewish theatre. The Poles, who had regained their country and city from the Russians and the Austrians only a couple of years before, were still fairly flexible in their attitude towards the Jews, and there was a more tolerant atmosphere in the city. Later this would change quite a bit.

I got a little money from our American delegate and went down to the the open-air market to get some fairly decent-looking clothes and a





Warsaw, Poland, 1921.

Polish cap, so as not to look so strange and foreign that the police would stop me every block or two and ask for "documents." I was sixteen, but I looked younger. I was very slim and short, and I didn't shave yet. I met some Polish girls there and found some of them rather easy and willing to share intimacies. All in all, I enjoyed my stay in Warsaw. I was glad to be rid of the chaos and brutalities of Russia.

There finally came a day when we were called to resume our journey. We got to Berlin by train and were to change trains to Holland. Our American leader got into a big fight with some Berlin Jews. They came to the station and distributed sandwiches and drinks, but refused to give us lodging. Our American almost got into a fist fight with them. I remember them warning him, "This is not America; this is Germany! Better be courteous, or else!" Well, we spent the night on the floor of the Berlin railway station, but we were used to those little discomforts. Our American felt, however, that the rich German-Jewish community should have done a little more, and should have shown a little more feeling for their Russian-Jewish brethren. But the German Jews were infected with a lot of the arrogance and snobbishness of their German hosts. They always

looked down on the *Ost-Juden* (Eastern Jews) and figured that sleeping on the floor of the station would be good enough for us.

When we arrived in Holland, we were removed from the train and taken to showers right in the middle of nowhere, it seemed. We were scrubbed, shaved, and rubbed thoroughly. Our bundles, bags, and clothing were sterilized. After a hot meal, we continued our journey to Rotterdam. There we were lodged in barracks. Although we were fed very well and treated kindly, even warmly, by the attendants, we were confined and were not allowed to leave the barracks. The doors were locked, and the windows had metal screens.

I was very unhappy about not being able to go out and see the country and people, and I remember plotting and planning with other youngsters to steal out. But the attendants were everywhere, and they always kept an eye on us. Luckily, our stay in Rotterdam didn't last very long—I think about ten days. Our next stop was Liverpool, where we boarded the "Imperator," a German luxury ship that was seized by the British during the war. We were finally on our way to America.

Our crossing the Atlantic was uneventful, except that some of us were seasick, and some became involved in all kinds of flirtations. I especially remember my amazement upon seeing three big black men who were passengers on the ship. I had never seen a black man, and they seemed so unreal, so fantastic, that I kept following them and trying to touch their hands. They found me very funny and kept laughing at me.

When we docked in New York, we were transferred onto a ferry boat to Ellis Island, where we were herded into a huge barrack, the biggest structure I had ever seen. Inside it was bedlam. The noise, the tumult, the shouting of orders was something to behold. Gradually I became oriented and, in my mind, attempted to make some order out of the wild chaos. I imagined where the roped-off areas might lead to. I didn't understand English, but some signs were in Yiddish and some in Russian. We were herded into various lines: visa checks, literacy tests, medical tests. We were given food and were told to go to our cot in a "bedroom" consisting of perhaps two or three hundred cots. In a few days our names were called, and we were put on a ferry boat



heading for New York. On land we found our uncle and sister waiting for us. Finally, the end of my journey and the beginning of a new life in a new country! "How will it be?" I wondered. "Will I ever forget the trauma of my early years?"

\* \* \*

Soon after our arrival, my "American" sister rented a small, furnished apartment on East 21st Street in New York. It looked neat and clean, and my three sisters and I moved in. The first night in our new apartment I felt very tired and fell asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow. But very soon I woke up abruptly—I felt a terrible itch all over me. I turned on the light and saw bedbugs crawling all over me. I jumped into the bathtub and ran water over myself. I was full of welts and bites. My sisters had the same trouble. The next day I went to stay with a cousin on the lower East Side in a coldwater flat; my sisters moved in with other relations while we looked for another apartment—without bedbugs.

Naturally, I had to look for a job and to learn English. Since I couldn't speak English, I couldn't ask for work, except from people who spoke Yiddish or Russian. I had no trade, so I had to depend, like most new arrivals, on signs such as "Boy Wanted" and "Shipping Clerk Wanted," which were tacked up to walls and doorways. I was lucky in that a cousin who worked in an eyeglass frame factory took me in and introduced me to the foreman. How excited I was to be given a job. My job was to scrub the frames free of the material used for polishing. The work was nine hours a day and half a day on Saturday; the pay was fourteen dollars a week. I worked there about six months till I felt I would go crazy if I stayed another day.

In the evening, I went to school to learn English. During my stay in New York, I worked in about a dozen places, some jobs lasting a week, some a year. I worked in a tin can factory, in a belt factory, in a luggage factory, as a pleater of women's skirts, as a shipping clerk, and for a publisher.

There was no long-term employment. When things got busy, people would be employed; when it slowed up, people were dis-



My mother and sisters reunited in New York. (I was in California at the time.)  
Left to right: Rachel, Sarah, Mother, Adele, Sonia, Ethel, 1925.



charged, without even a day's notice. There was no employment insurance. There were very few labor unions, and the existing unions were very weak and practically useless. All the cards were stacked in favor of the employer, and the workers had no recourse at all. It was truly a "class society" in favor of the wealthy, the landlords, and the employers.

One doesn't always realize how ridiculous or tragic a situation is while he is in the midst of it. In my case, for instance, I was about seventeen when I arrived in New York. I had no skills and didn't know any English, so I couldn't understand when people spoke to me. And, I needed a job to contribute for my keep. When I did get some work as a result of my walking the streets and looking for "Boy Wanted" or "Help Wanted" signs, the wages were always much lower than those paid to "Americans," and besides, I was usually ridiculed for my lack of understanding or inability to speak English. In retrospect this situation sounds terrible indeed, and one wonders how I could bear it. But, at times, I found it rather funny, and when I got together with some friends who were more or less in the same boat, we found our situation hilarious, making jokes and laughing at ourselves and the others who took advantage of us. Was that a defense mechanism, a way of brushing off the unpleasant, the intolerable? Many of us couldn't brush it off, couldn't adjust to these conditions—and those became pitiful cases of mental illness.

Sometime after I learned English and became somewhat "Americanized," I was given a job as a mail order clerk for a publisher of college entrance review books. My job was to receive and fill orders to various high schools and other educational institutions all over the country. Naturally, there were no set hours or other established "working conditions." Many a time I worked till midnight, filling orders and dragging heavy bags to the post office. I was supposed to be grateful for the chance to work and to make about twenty dollars a week.

There was also a preparatory school in connection with the publishing business, or rather, the publishing business grew as an adjunct of the school. One day I was asked to do some tutoring in the English language. My student turned out to be a young and very pretty

Russian girl who had just immigrated to the U.S. I liked that part of the job, and she made quite a bit of progress. She was poor and wore a rather shabby coat. Her hands were blue from the cold of the winter while carrying her books and papers. I had a certain protective and tender feeling for the girl. I don't think it was love, but it might have developed into love.

One day I decided to do something about those cold, blue hands of hers. I went down to the stationery store and bought a briefcase for her books and papers — briefcases were "the style" in those days. One day when we were studying in an upstairs classroom, I presented her with the briefcase. Her response was very unexpected. She started to laugh. The more I coaxed her not to laugh, the louder she laughed. Finally her laughter became hysterical and very loud. Soon people from the downstairs's office rushed up in alarm, probably wondering if I were trying to seduce or maybe even rape the poor girl. When I told them that all I did was to give her a briefcase for her books and papers, they wouldn't believe it. Naturally, that was my last encounter with that girl.

I was unemployed quite often for various lengths of time. There was a mild depression in 1923-24 in New York, and I saw many bread lines, although I myself never had the experience of lining up for a bowl of soup. I kept up my schooling in the evenings and began taking New York Regent examinations in secondary school subjects.

I also became very interested in political movements and attended meetings and lectures on socialism and communism. There was a movement to acquaint the Americans in the concept of building "a classless society in the Soviet Union." The Soviet Union was portrayed as the hope for the future. I saw that things were very bad for the workers and the poor here and that a change was imperative. I felt that the poor must get a much bigger share of the wealth. I also believed that a revolution, such as the one I had witnessed in Russia, creates chaos, destroys wealth and property, and calls forth—along with noble sentiments—bestly and primitive hatreds and prejudices. It very often ends by enthroning some demagogue or a set of tyrants. But still, I was hoping against hope. Maybe in old Russia, where my people lived for generations and where I was born and spent my



childhood and youth, maybe something great and beautiful was evolving out of the blood and tears of oppression and tyranny. I read reports in the newspapers, listened to visitors and immigrants from there, and lived in a state of suspense. I wanted so much to find hope in Russia.

But I was never good at contradicting facts. In the late twenties and early thirties I could see the gradual elimination of all opposition, —even in the elite of the Communist Party. And, all the power was gathering in the hands of one man, one dictator—Stalin. One could see how the pioneers and leaders of the Revolution were shot after “trials,” on trumped-up charges, how the accusers in turn were shot, and how the newly accused were punished by a new batch of accusers. Thousands of people were brought up on false charges, blamed for nonexistent crimes, and made to confess to the most idiotic acts. Then they were shot or put into penal servitude.

The Russian Revolution, as so often happens, vomited up a monster—Stalin, who was consumed with hatred and revenge, and who ruled with fear and brutality for twenty-five years. And now, long after his corpse has rotted, his spirit still lives. There is no freedom of expression, no spirit of independence. Only what is ordered or permitted by the Powers is tolerated, nothing else, be it in art, literature, science, or social theory.

When I first arrived in the U.S., labor in New York was very powerless. We worked long hours for a very low wage. One could be fired at a moment's notice, at the boss's pleasure. But there was always the possibility, even the probability, of improvement—if the workers *wanted* badly enough to organize and fight for it. We could be helped politically by electing sympathetic officials, and economically by means of organization and strike. It was not easy to accomplish. But, there was always hope. In the thirties, as things became more and more intolerable, the workers and others awoke and began to affect change. As long as the political system is flexible, not rigid and solidified, *improvement is possible if the people want it*.

In the Soviet Union, improvement in living conditions is only possible if the men on top want it. Labor unions there are creatures of the government. If the government decides to spend its wealth abroad

for reasons of foreign policy, instead of improving the life of the masses, they do it. How the natural resources of the country and the products of Russian labor are being used is determined by a few people on top—who certainly did not get there by the active consent of the people. These are the convictions that I formulated much later. At the time I lived in New York, I was in a state of flux, and it took me many years to become absolutely convinced that we must distrust any person or political party that promises paradise if only we give them power.

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I lived in New York from 1921 to 1925. Toward the end of that period, I fell victim to a dark depression. Gradually a mood of hopelessness and despair overtook me. I saw no purpose or aim to my life. I saw no reason to get out of bed or to try to do anything. I would walk aimlessly for miles and miles of city blocks, then return home to my dark little room and fall into bed. My mother and sisters didn't know what to do; they were flabbergasted. I played with the idea of suicide, but I didn't have the determination and courage to do it. I moved out of our apartment into a slummy, smelly little room for a few dollars a month—I didn't want to see the tragic face of my mother or the accusing looks of my sisters. My room's window was facing some windows of a whore house, and I was subjected to some never-forgotten noises, shrieks, and language on this, the nineteenth year of my life. I felt hopeless and forlorn.

Fortunately for me, everything changed suddenly. My uncle who lived in Los Angeles came to visit us, and after a short conversation, invited me to come to California. California to me was like a magic land from nowhere. The idea of my going to that land, traversing the breadth of America, and actually seeing all of that was irresistible. I accepted with alacrity.

After having ridden on the train for almost a week, I felt sort of groggy, and the clicketty-clack of the train kept going in my head. When we arrived in Los Angeles, my uncle brought me to his big warehouse and place of business instead of bringing me to his home.



"This is all mine," he said. "These people here you think are my partners? Ah Ben, are you my partner or my hired man?" "Hired man, Morris." "You see, I have no partners. You want to see the upstairs, the downstairs? Come, I'll show you."

I said yes, but I was dreaming of a nice warm bath, a bowl of chicken soup, a piece of *flanken*. As he grew more enthusiastic about his success, I grew more distracted, and I kept nodding absent-mindedly, "Yea, yea."

"Well," he said, "you must be tired, but I've got a few things to do yet before I take you home."

I felt sticky and dirty, not having had a bath for almost a week on the train. He felt like enlarging and embellishing on how he had overcome his hard times. He said, "I came to California like a tramp—no money, no connections. I started peddling fruit and vegetables with a horse and wagon. After many ups and downs, I am O.K. now—as you can see." His mind was filled with the baggage of his monetary and commercial success. He was very boring to me, and I decided that afternoon not to connect my life to his in any way.

In the early twenties, Los Angeles was a lazy, provincial town; most of the time the sun was hot, the sky was blue, and people were meandering around and dreaming. Things were done leisurely. After my sojourn in New York for several years, where things were hectic and breath-taking, where everything was rush-rush, it was nice to be able to relax and take things easy for a while.

In Los Angeles one could see grass, trees, and flowers. In New York I felt like having been placed in some kind of a box, where one mostly comes into contact with stone, steel, and bricks. It seems that the people who planned and built cities like New York must have deliberately erected monstrosities to hem in and embitter human existence. Everything seemed to have been planned for profit, not for people.

In 1925 Los Angeles was undergoing a rapid metamorphosis from a sleepy, subtropical town to a metropolis. The Chamber of Commerce, the Realty Board, and their mouthpiece at the time, the *Los Angeles Times*, were waging a campaign to attract more and more people and industry. Miles of vacant land were annexed by the city;

water was "taken" from far away places and brought to the city; union labor was discouraged; and taxes were low. As a result, many new people, businesses, and industries came and settled in Los Angeles. The city kept growing, and while encountering many new problems, it became a rather unpleasant place to live.

However, not all newcomers came to participate in and profit by the growth of the city. Many came for precisely the opposite reason—to get away from the cold, inhuman, hustling cities of the eastern United States. It was cheaper and easier to get along in subtropical Los Angeles. Many Jews—tradesmen, professionals, retail merchants—from New York and Chicago settled on the east side or the Boyle Heights section of Los Angeles. The main street of that part of town was Brooklyn Avenue. Soon a gathering place, or "Center" formed in a two-story building on "the Avenue." It housed a vegetarian and dairy (*milhik*) cafeteria on the main floor, and upstairs were meeting rooms and a hall for concerts and big affairs.

All kinds of people frequented the Center—vegetarians, theosophists, anarchists, right-wing and left-wing socialists. I met and made friends with quite a few people. Some of the friendships lasted for many years. I also met Sandra there, a very lovely young girl with black, sparkling eyes, black curls, and a white complexion. She was a very good pianist and also very *zaftig* ("juicy," like a ripe peach). Sandra and I became good friends. On some weekends Sandra and I and young Tom Bell and his girlfriend would drive up to the mountains, rent a cottage, and spend the weekends as "honeymooners." We would hike and play and have fun. One time we drove up in clear weather only to find the next morning that it had snowed, the snow almost reaching the windows of our cottage. We hadn't drained the water from the car because we didn't expect such cold weather. Despite the expense and trouble trying to start the car the next day, we had an extra day of fun too.

Tom junior, though very intelligent and charming, lived somewhat in the shadow of his prominent father. His father, whose name was also Tom Bell, was a well-known philosophical anarchist and a leader in the anarchist movement. He was a very effective public speaker and a great logical thinker. I was flattered when he asked me



to speak to his club on the subject of delinquency and criminality.

I received quite an education listening to and arguing with many of the people I met at the Center. There were quite a few Marxists there. While I agreed with the goals of Marxism, that is the desire to build a just society, I could not agree with Marx's theories and some of his conclusions. In general, I found his ideas very mechanistic and simplistic, though they are written heavy-handedly and are linguistically involved (a style common among "serious" German writers).

The "city fathers" and police weren't favorable toward the Center and its people. We seemed to stand for everything contrary to what the city of Los Angeles stood for: growth, business, prosperity, and real estate interests. We were frequently visited by the police, especially "Red Hines," the Red Squad lieutenant. They kept probing and checking to see if something illegal was taking place.

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Shortly after my arrival in Los Angeles, I entered UCLA, qualifying for enrollment through having passed the New York State Regent exams. Attending classes in the mornings, I still had enough energy left to go out, belong to clubs, and meet people. I moved close to UCLA and shared a bungalow with two students. We led sort of a bohemian life.

I became interested in psychology and took my degree in that subject. Dr. John Watson was probably the most popular psychologist in America at that time, and the great fashion in psychology among young academics was "Behaviorism." Watson took his cue from Pavlov and Pavlov's work on the conditioned reflexes in dogs. To me, however, it was too mechanical an explanation, and I couldn't accept it as a valid explanation of all human behavior. The Gestaltists took more factors into consideration, and, to me, were a bit more valid. Personally, I hope that nobody will ever decipher the complexity and *yes*, even the perversity of human nature. We don't want to become predictable *robots*.

During my student years at UCLA, I joined the Cosmopolitan

Club. The Club's members were students from many countries and cultures. I found it very interesting to get to know all those people. We had endless talks, arguments and discussions. In the late twenties there were debates in the old League of Nations about disarmament. Our Club decided to debate the issue, and I was asked to debate. I took the affirmative—for disarmament. I spent quite a lot of time preparing. During the debate in one of the campus halls, I was very disappointed at the infantile arguments of the negative position. It seemed that my preparation was quite superfluous. The opposition argued that as long as people are warlike, they will fight each other with sticks, stones, and fists. Therefore, it is necessary to change human nature first. That kind of argument was so easy to demolish that I was sorry to have spent so much time preparing for something more sophisticated. All I had to do was to compare the number of casualties incurred by bombing raids on populated cities, deadly war machines of all kinds, to the number incurred by fighting with fists, sticks, and stones. The whole thing was ludicrous. The president of the Cosmopolitan Club was the older sister of my future wife, Ella, who was not in college then but came to listen to the debate. That was my first meeting with her. Ella soon left for Switzerland, where she studied dance for several years.

In 1929 I was married to my first wife, Frieda, and we were shortly to have a child. I decided to come to Berkeley for my graduate work. Later, Frieda followed me and left our child, Paul, temporarily with her mother, who joined us a few months later. At UC Berkeley, Frieda studied biochemistry and bacteriology, and she later became the head of the Biochemistry Department at UC Hospital in San Francisco.

When we came to Berkeley and I started my graduate work, I was quite different from most other students. I was older, married, and had a child. I was serious and had ideas about what I wanted to do. I had a passion to teach, to enlighten people.

But soon the Great Depression began. People lost their jobs, all kinds of businesses, large and small, went bankrupt and closed their doors. The Administration, under Herbert Hoover, was paralyzed and pitiful, not knowing what to do nor where to turn. It lacked the courage to undertake anything "radical," which the situation



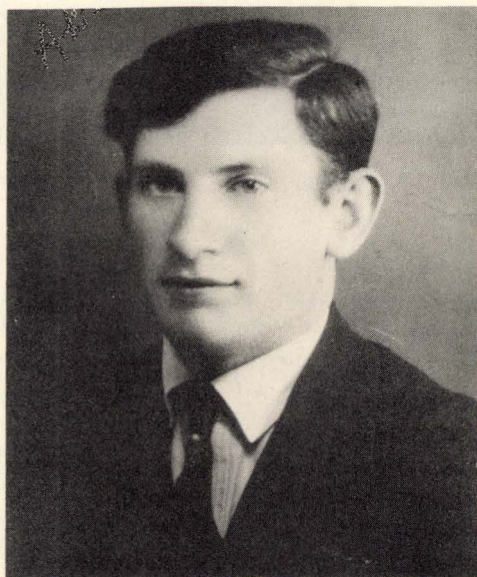


With my first wife, Frieda Levine, January 5, 1929.

demanding. There was an overall feeling of hopelessness.

In those days many socially conscious people turned their attention to Soviet Russia. The United States and the West were wallowing in depression and mass suffering. Germany was turning to Nazism; Italy was fascist. It was feared that the other Western European countries were turning fascist. Only Soviet Russia in the late twenties and early thirties *seemed* to move along the path of progress. There was a spirit in the intellectual, scientific, and artistic activity in the Soviet Union. Much was done and written in the field of child psychology and delinquency. There was a great deal of poetry and fiction published; things seemed so challenging in contrast to the hopelessness of the West.

I joined a student club where many of these things were discussed. At that time I was working in the field of clinical psychology, mostly dealing with delinquency. I was asked to speak at various places by people who were very curious about Soviet theories and activities in child psychology and delinquency. I contributed to *Psychological Abstracts* and also worked in the Child Guidance Institute. I researched Russian writings on these subjects because, at that time, most of the work of any consequence was being done in Soviet Russia. Because of these activities and my Russian background, I was soon suspected of subversion and radicalism. From then on I was watched and followed and refused employment. I became, along with many others, sort of an outcast. Sometime later, as a result of the struggle of the longshoremen to organize a union and the killing of two longshoremen by the police, labor declared a general strike in the Bay Area. It seemed



Graduate school at UC Berkeley, 1932.



absurd to see small-minded business people and others suddenly spring forth with vigilante ribbons on their sleeves, sticks in their hands, and come out on the street to deal with the "Reds." My role in the whole business was very peripheral—all I did was listen to Bridges and speak occasionally. Of course, I was sympathetic to the workers. I thought they had every right to organize a union. But I found myself on the subversive list too.

One day as I was coming home, my landlord met me outside my apartment and warned me not to come in because some vigilantes had been there looking for me and had told my landlord to notify them as soon as I came. He warned me instead of notifying them. I had a theology student friend who lived in the seminary dormitory. I came to him and told him what had occurred; he put me up for a few days in his room and probably saved me from a beating at the hands of the vigilantes.

In the twenties and early thirties, as we know now, there was a great deal of struggle going on among the various leaders of the Communist Party. Stalin at that time had not succeeded in suppressing and murdering his "comrades" in the Party. There was still a lot of flux, and many voices were clamoring for existence. Gradually, Stalin and his coterie (many of whom he treacherously murdered later by means of stealth, deceit, and cunning) gathered all power in their hands and turned the Soviet Union into a rigid and extremely brutal dictatorship. How ironic that in those days so many of us put our hopes for the future in the Soviet experiment. So many believed with Lincoln Steffens when, after his journey to the Soviet Union, he came back and said, "I have seen the future, and it works!" Walter Duranty of the *New York Times* wrote glowing reports from the Soviet Union. Many liberals and intellectuals made fleeting visits to the Soviet Union, where they were "wined and dined" and shown "everything," coming back as "friends." The explanation is simple: People were looking for a remedy, a solution to the impossible Western situation, to the suffering of the masses, and to our inability to solve anything. But there was the Soviet Union—without unemployment, without suffering, without the rich and the poor, an equitable and just society—*so it seemed*. But how false. How bitter the disillusionment.

How terrible the truth. Then gradually, little by little, the truth did begin to seep out—the tyranny, the persecutions, the cold, naked terror parading as “socialist realism.” Many of our radicals were simply duped. Many wore blinders; they wanted to see only what they believed. It would have been too painful to face the reality. Others knew and saw but became corrupt because they were deliberately hiding the terrible crimes committed in the Soviet Union in the name of socialism.

This deliberate falsification of Soviet reality continued until the Stalin-Hitler act. That event caused many sympathizers of the Soviet Union to turn away in sheer horror and disgust. But many, many others remained emotionally and intellectually enslaved to the Soviets to the bitter end—such is the obstinacy of dogma.

As for me, I had a brief intellectual flirtation with the Soviet Union, but in the early nineteen-thirties I became very skeptical, and very soon I could see no hope for mankind in any tyrannical and despotic society. It's very ironic, but the bureaucratic machinery and its servants in this country who make it their business to watch people and check on their loyalty mistook me for quite the opposite in my convictions as late as the nineteen-fifties. They even came to my son's place of employment to find out about me. They threatened to refuse citizenship to my *former* mother-in-law because of my alleged subversiveness.

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Yes, my days in Berkeley in the thirties were lean. I had degrees and credentials in my pockets but no bread on the table. Here I was, a man with a wife and child, but nobody wanted my services. Who needed education, who needed philosophy, psychology, and the like? Everybody needed bread and shelter even though houses were empty and food was dumped and milk was poured into the sewers. That was the mad situation in America. Trained and educated people were there to offer their services cheaply or even free, but “there was no demand” and no money.



I managed to have several small jobs, in restaurants, waiting on tables, and translating texts from Russian or German into English. But there was hardly enough to support a family. Luckily my wife, Frieda, was more adept. She found work with an allergy doctor. Later she worked in Petaluma for the State Agriculture Department.

When Roosevelt was elected President, things began to change for the better. Roosevelt and his friends were far more clever than the Republicans. They saw how dangerous it was for the social structure to have armies of hungry and idle people in the towns and cities of America. So they put people to work. A man felt much better having a check of fifteen or twenty dollars in his pocket on a Saturday morning.

As for me, I took a job cultivating patches of land adjacent to the sidewalks. I liked being among the workers. I worked in the open air, the wonderful spring air with a "gang" of men—young and old—and cultivated "the land." At first it seemed natural and beautiful. Of course, after a while it became boring. Luckily, one of my professors saw me, pulled me off the job, and gave me a job testing school children and teaching non-readers. At that time some psychologists observed and theorized that children who couldn't learn to read might be helped by teaching them through the use of their kinesthetic sense together with the visual. I have had good results with this. I was also asked to join the Child Guidance Institute, which was getting tons of literature from the U.S.S.R. on Child Psychology and had nobody to read and analyze it.

Just prior to my working at the Child Guidance Institute, I had moved out of my home and went to live by myself. My wife's mother had come up to live with us and manage the household. Somehow I began to feel like a stranger there; I thought I'd feel better living alone. It didn't help. Just as I was getting busy with professional duties, I began to feel dark and hopeless. It seemed that all the negative forces had gathered around me and were pressing down on me. I felt distraught and on the verge of suicide. Then I bounced back. I saw a glimmer of hope—but not in Berkeley. I asked for a leave of absence and left for Los Angeles. Funny, I never had cared much for Los Angeles.

Some months later my wife Frieda came down to see me. We

decided to drive up to the mountains for a short holiday, so we went to Lake Arrowhead. I tried to explain to her that our ways had parted, that there was no use trying to put broken pieces together. She slapped me in the face a couple of times, and I slapped her back. She began to cry—loud. Since the cabins were pretty close together, people nearby heard. They knocked on our door and windows, wanting to know if everything was all right. Frieda put on her robe and went out to reassure them. She told them that everything was O.K. But things were definitely over with us. The next day I drove her to the train, and she left for San Francisco, where she then moved. She came down to Los Angeles several times more. Our meetings then were more calm, more friendly.

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I met Flora in one of the evening classes I taught in Los Angeles. She was a striking woman with large gray-blue eyes that seemed to be weary and all-knowing. She had a beautiful figure. After class one evening as I went to my car (which I had just bought for less than a hundred dollars) to drive home, there was Flora. I was a bit taken aback and asked her if I could drive her home. She said, "I am going with you, if you don't object." We went to my apartment, drank some wine, and talked. We talked for hours. She told me about her life—which was very disorganized. Sometimes she would sing and play an instrument on street corners for the Salvation Army. I asked her why, and she said because a very dear friend had asked her to. Her father was an executive with the railroad, her mother was busy with other activities, and she was left to do whatever she wanted with herself. We talked a lot that evening. She made no move to go home. I didn't want to make advances. I finally said, "Come, I'll drive you home." On the way home she told me she thought she knew men, but now she admitted her ignorance. Then, one Sunday we had dinner together and went to my apartment, where we had our intimacies. She was very good and experienced. She had beautiful full breasts and a nice body. The clothes she wore did not show her build to the best advantage, as she had the tendency to hide her femininity and slouch a



bit. We had a rather short but intensive liaison. I was too restless a person at that time for a permanent relationship. But I'll always remember Flora.

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Another student of mine turned out to be Ella's (my future wife's) brother. One evening he brought me an invitation to come and have dinner with his family.

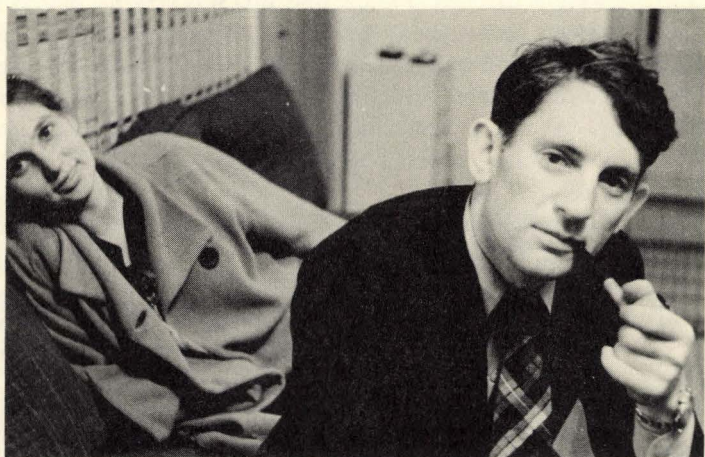
When I arrived, I found only Ella there. It seems that the rest of the family was busy with other activities. We did a lot of talking and reminiscing during our dinner and drinks. We both decided that we wanted to know each other better. We went out together a few times. Then Ella, who was a dancer, had to join her theatre group and go to New York for an engagement. I didn't hear from her for some months. My time was pretty full, but every now and then I wondered how Ella was doing, and when, if ever, I would see her again.

One day I was walking down Hollywood Boulevard. Suddenly I thought I saw her across the street. About the same time she saw me, too. We rushed across the street to each other. After that meeting we were hardly ever separated again. I had initiated divorce proceedings from Frieda some time before, but I was by no means psychologically ready to marry again. It came about gradually and almost as a matter of course. We felt so natural with each other that I never thought about our different backgrounds and religions.

I was very interested in the stories Ella used to tell me about her family. Her parents visited this country from Holland in 1904 or 1905 to see the St. Louis World's Fair. They were practically newly-weds. Ella's father was an engineer; her mother was quite a poet. When in this country, they traveled all the way to California. They were so fascinated by the tremendous size and natural beauty of the country that they decided to settle here. Her father then purchased some land in a place called Altadena. He acquired horses and cows, and I suppose he must have been dreaming of becoming a gentleman farmer. But soon he went back to his engineering profession. Later the land was subdivided and sold.







With Ella in Los Angeles, 1937. The photographs were taken by our friend, Hy Hirsh, an artist and professional photographer.

Ella's father, Iwan Serrurier, was probably a genius. On his own time, after his hours of work, he invented the Moviola, which transformed the process of film editing to a precision technique. Its use is widespread to this day. This invention was officially recognized by the Mayor and City Council of Los Angeles by a proclamation which designates March 24, 1982 as Moviola Day, and commends "Iwan and Mark Serrurier [his son] for the major contribution they have made to the motion picture industry through the invention of the Moviola."

Eventually I met and liked Ella's family, but I hadn't met her father. At that time, Iwan lived separately from the family. Ella kept insisting that we go and meet him, but I felt very reluctant. I can't explain why; maybe I felt he would disapprove of me. Finally she coaxed me into it. We went to his office/living room.

Ella said, "Iwan, I want you to meet Abe. You must have been told about us?"

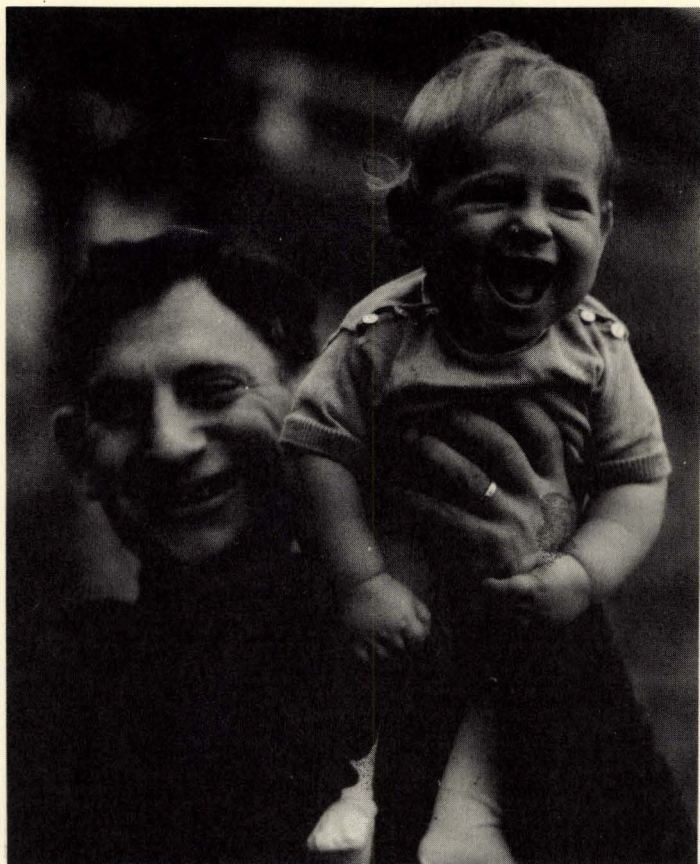
Iwan looked up from his papers, blushed a bit, and said, "Hello, Abe." He then went back to his reading.

Finally we got married. I know that Ella was very happy. As for me, I have always been cursed with doubts and queries. It took me a bit longer to know and appreciate the treasure that Ella was. We went and bought a funny three-level house (that looked like a boat) on a steep, hilly street with a beautiful view. The little street was named after a famous Polish actress, Modjeska. So we went to live on Modjeska Street.

In the midst of all that I kept up my work, teaching, and research at UCLA. One day I became very sick in the office. Somebody called my wife, and she brought the doctor. Discovering that I had acute appendicitis, he rushed me to the hospital and an operation was performed. It took me longer to recuperate than I had hoped. I was worn out and weak for three or four weeks. I had to cut down on my activities, especially my long trips to UCLA, where I was working for a Ph.D. degree. I went back to work full time as an accountant and member of a wholesale produce corporation.

Just before the war, Ella and I decided to build a new house on a nice hill in Hollywood. We engaged an architect friend, Raphael

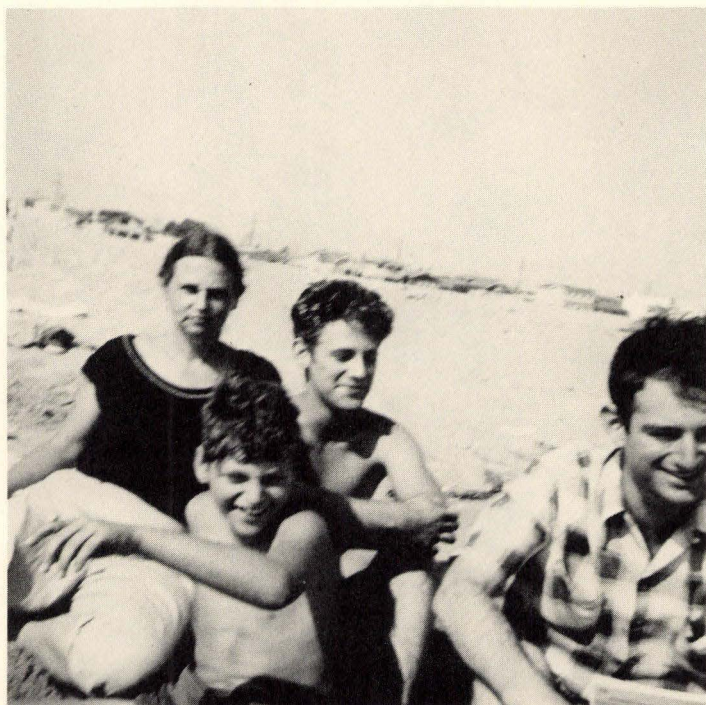




With my second son, Donald.

Sorriano, and Ella and I had a lot of fun planning and watching the construction. The house was finished in 1940. We had a lot of joy in that house. Ella and I had two sons, Donald and Tom. We were happy, and our lives were pretty full.

\* \* \*



Ella, Tom, Don, and Paul.



During World War II, I offered my services to the U.S. government for anything required (I was too old for the draft). I volunteered to go to the Japanese relocation camps to teach the children, or do anything else. I was very upset at the injustice and stupidity of herding innocent people—men, women, and children—into relocation camps far away from their homes and possessions. This was done by democratic, civilized America, not by some cruel dictatorship. I went to San Francisco, where the main “relocation” office was and asked to be allowed to go. They told me I was needed in the produce industry. I think they didn’t trust my patriotism.

I must admit that I did not fully understand the terrible conditions of the Jews in Germany at that time. Not until Germany was vanquished in the war was the full horror and savagery perpetrated against the Jews of Europe and others discovered.

We all knew, of course, what Hitler and his lieutenants had written and said about Jews and how they were going to deal with them, but somehow I couldn’t bring myself to believe that any human being could be so completely devoid of human feeling.

Finally, it became known that not only Hitler, but thousands of ordinary German citizens went about murdering and torturing men, women, and children for being Jews.

After the war and the defeat of the Germans, none of those people “knew” what happened to their Jewish neighbors, why they had disappeared. They “didn’t know” about the dozens of concentration camps and death camps all over the place. None of the Germans “saw” the looting, the beatings, the cruelties that were perpetuated against the Jewish people all over Germany and in Germany’s conquered lands. Yes, this was a strange time. Other people have also committed acts of cruelty and savagery in history, but there have always been brave minorities who voiced protests. That didn’t happen in Germany during the Nazi regime.

\* \* \*

By the late nineteen-thirties, and especially during the war years and after, the city of Los Angeles turned into a real estate and speculator's paradise. The city annexed territories miles and miles from the center. Lots were divided and subdivided twenty and thirty miles from the center of the city. Many gaps were left, but little bungalows were built and sold miles away from nowhere. More and more people had to acquire automobiles to travel to and from their jobs. Gradually all kinds of heavy industry such as chemicals, steel, automobile plants, and furniture factories established themselves in Los Angeles because of various kinds of inducements. More and more people came out and settled due to the availability of jobs and investment opportunities. Because of location, the industries, and heavy traffic, Los Angeles became a huge, "smoggy" metropolis instead of a subtropical city with blue skies and pleasant weather.

One summer Ella and I drove up north to Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia. A couple of weeks later, on the drive back, we stopped in Berkeley. The day was clear, and we felt a mild, caressing breeze from the Bay. The Bay Area was always my favorite part of America. Everything here seemed so well-proportioned: the ocean, the bay, the wooded hills, and San Francisco, so picturesque. I longed to leave the smog of Los Angeles and return to Berkeley.

Our older son Don was then a senior at UCLA, and I was hoping that he might want to do graduate work at UC Berkeley. Our younger son Tom was about to enter high school in the fall, so he could transfer to Berkeley High. The time for the move seemed propitious.

We found a couple of old buildings consisting of several apartments on a steep hill with a breath-taking view of the Bay, the city, and the surrounding hills. The price was very cheap because it belonged to an estate. The heirs lived in Carmel and didn't care about the property. My wife and I used to leave the car and trudge up and down the hill for our various errands and shopping trips. When we had visitors, especially from Europe, we would put them up in our glassed-in porch with a tremendous view of the Bay and San Francisco. When we visited Holland, my wife's young relatives would talk about nothing but "our scenic sleeping porch."

One of our tenants was a prominent psychiatrist, but he would



bring some of his patients home with him occasionally. One night, about 1:00 a.m. there was a huge blaze in his apartment. Luckily everybody got out in time from the building, and the fire department arrived promptly. During the questioning by the police, the doctor's patient told everybody how she lit matches and set the curtains on fire "for atmosphere, and how beautiful it was." She was taken to a hospital, and the poor doctor disappeared. He wrote to me later from Los Gatos, giving me full permission to dispose of all his property that had been salvaged from the fire. During the next few months we were busy repairing and rebuilding.

We had another tenant, a young woman—a graduate student—whose father was a well-known attorney. She took an apartment for herself because she needed it quiet for her studies, she said. We learned later from other tenants that a young man came to live with her. He had a gun which he had a habit of flourishing at people, especially those who had "a suspicious look." A young man who lived downstairs came knocking on the door of our young woman, "to ask her something," as he put it. Her friend opened the door, slamming it to the wall, and with a gun in his hand, confronted the fellow and warned him never to come knocking again. Naturally, the man from below was very frightened. I was glad when the semester finally ended and the odd couple moved away.

\* \* \*

My oldest son, Paul, was appointed by UCLA as a professor of Mathematics. Prior to that he taught in an eastern university, so I saw very little of him. But whenever he could, he would come up from Los Angeles and visit us. He would sit for hours, especially late at night, over a glass of beer, with a pencil and paper, jotting down all kinds of symbols and formulae. He seemed to want to solve all our worldly problems mathematically.

My wife Ella became very interested in sculpting. Along with her serious involvement in dance, she had been a student of art. She rented a small studio in our neighborhood and made it a practice to work several hours every day.

One afternoon I was working in a friend's office. The radio was on, playing music. Suddenly a flash came over the radio: "President Kennedy was shot in Dallas." I rushed out and headed for home, running all the way. I barged into the house and blurted out breathlessly, "Kennedy was shot." My mother-in-law, who was visiting us then, laughed at me and said, "You joker, who would want to shoot a nice young man like that?" My mother-in-law was very old, and she simply refused to accept any unpleasantness.

Not so long before that tragic event, I sat in the Greek Theater at UC Berkeley within a few feet of President Kennedy, who had come to accept an Honorary degree from the University. I don't remember now what he was saying in his acceptance speech, but I remember that he was the most handsome, the most magnetic man in the vast audience. President Kennedy had not accomplished much of a substantial nature for the country during his short tenure in the White House. But somehow he had a knack for igniting optimism and hope among the people. Kennedy's charisma has not been seen in another political figure since.

At this same time, our government's launch into Viet Nam became public. The government, in an attempt to extend American power thousands of miles away into Asia, bombed, burned, and poisoned Asian people and subjected American young men to injury and death. Many thousands of Americans objected to and opposed the Viet Nam policy, and I believe that the American people's opposition had a hand in the government's ultimate withdrawal and end to the war.

\* \* \*

Soon after our move from Los Angeles to Berkeley, our son Donald had completed his work for a B.A. degree from UCLA and was granted a Wilson Fellowship for graduate work. Ella and I very much wanted him to do his graduate work in Berkeley, and we had dreams that we would live together. But Donald had other ideas. After a short visit, he decided to go to New York, to Columbia University, because of a special professor with whom he wanted to study. While completing his M.A. degree at Columbia, he married Irene, another Colum-



bia student. They spent a few months in France, and on their return to New York they established a working partnership in researching and developing "instructional systems" for use by employers of large groups, such as the American Telephone Company, IBM, and Xerox. They became very successful in their profession and now are considered pioneers in their field of psychology. They have two sons, one of whom is now in college. I see them only occasionally because of the distance.

After graduating from Berkeley High School, Tom, our youngest son, majored in Anthropology at San Francisco State University. He rented an old house in the city with some of his friends. In the middle of the semester he became bored and took a trip to Seattle, Washington, probably to see an old girlfriend. When he returned, he dropped out of school, and, with his girlfriend, went to Mexico to live and to study art. One day, while he was "exploring" the streets of the town in which he lived, he was bitten by a stray dog. They couldn't find the dog, so the doctor talked him into taking the Pasteur anti-rabies treatment. That treatment, I understand, is very painful. When we found out about it, Ella and I went to Mexico immediately. We stopped in Mexico City, then took a bus to the town in which Tom stayed. (Unfortunately, I can't remember the name. The town had a large, well-known art school where many American, European, and Mexican students studied. The town was very picturesque, in a picture-postcard way. I remember a big plaza in the center built around a large Catholic church. There were many people leisurely enjoying the plaza, and the streets which radiated from the center in all directions housed hotels, cafes, and stores.) By the time Ella and I arrived in Mexico, Tom was cheerful and feeling pretty good. But, his girlfriend was moody and rather unhappy. Several months later they came back—with a cat they had acquired in Mexico.

A while later, Tom and his friends drove back down to Mexico to visit friends living there. No sooner had they arrived at the house than the police raided the house, and Tom and his friends were immediately deported back to the American border. The police said that marijuana was being used there. Tom is talented, but he refuses to become a routine job holder. All I can do is wish him well.

In my younger days in Berkeley, I was very outspoken and active politically. In those days most people were rather hesitant and afraid to be branded as subversive, especially during the strike of the Longshoremen. Even the city government of Berkeley was in the hands of conservative Republicans at that time. The school officials were a timid bunch, afraid to compromise themselves. We were in "The Depression," and anybody with a job was very anxious to "stay clean and respectable." When I moved to Los Angeles I made up my mind to get back into private employment, and eventually into my own private business. I had discovered some years back that in private business, if you know your job and do it properly, nobody cares what your ideas about life or sociology are. I went back to accounting and specialized in produce. I soon became a partner in a corporation and in charge of the office. I then became active in real estate as a broker and principal, and I tried my hand at furniture and in other occupations. But I was never really interested in any of those things. I did it only to earn and to save enough money—to be free and independent. With the help of my wife, we accomplished that. Of course, thirty-five or forty years ago one needed far less than one needs now to be independent. During the sixties and early seventies, we enjoyed our life in Berkeley.

I recently went to the memorial service for Fred Cody. Mr. Cody was a man I liked and respected a great deal. I knew him from the time he had a book store on Euclid Avenue, before he opened the one on Telegraph Avenue. I would drop in to his store, browse a bit, and occasionally buy a book. I soon saw that Fred Cody was not just an ordinary book merchant but a man who loved books, people, and ideas. He was never too busy to exchange a few words of interest and concern to both of us. Somehow he inspired affection and trust in me. These thoughts came back to me recently on the occasion of his death.

Another very old friend, with quite a different character, also died recently. L. and I went to UC Berkeley together. He was talented as an actor and director, and he had a fine, resonant voice. Whenever we got together, we would argue politics, to the disgust of his wife. My



friend L. lived in a static world. To him nothing had changed since the early thirties. He believed, for instance, that the Soviet Union was still the struggling home of the working class—the same Revolutionary example everybody should follow instead of one of the worst examples of tyranny, thought control, and despotism. But, many people live in the past.

\* \* \*

In the summer of 1972 my wife and I were delegates from the Bay Area to the seventy-fifth world Zionist Jubilee Convention in Israel. We were happy to go. I had wanted for some time to visit Israel. That "Old-New Land" was being transformed practically before my eyes. Young people, mostly from Eastern Europe, came by the thousands, and with their toil and idealism, transformed the land that had been dormant for centuries. I saw thousands of acres of fruit and vegetables ripening in the sun, and saw many flourishing cities, large and small, on the beaches and inland. We saw and loved the inspiring city of Jerusalem, where every inch bespoke history. We saw the Western Wall, where there was some kind of a celebration almost every day—weddings, bar mitzvas, or just praying. The Wall which, I understand, served as an ancient foundation to the Temple, consisted of large, rectangular slabs of rock. The crevices between the slabs were filled with slips of paper on which various messages and prayers were written.

We criss-crossed that interesting little country from the Golan and the Galilee to the Dead Sea and the Masada, with its forbidden exterior and secret prayer and meeting rooms deep inside the rock. We visited the warm Mediterranean beaches, and saw visitors from as far as Sweden, Norway, and Holland, swimming and relaxing in the warm sun. Israel was crowded with tourists, especially German tourists, mostly young German men and women. Israel seemed to have had a special fascination for them.

We met many leaders of the government. I was especially impressed with the Prime Minister, Golda Meir. She was a most persuasive speaker and advocate for Israel. She kept telling us how essential it was

for Israel and the Jewish people to have more immigration from America. She was very worried about intermarriage and kept repeating, "Do you know where your children and grandchildren will be? Will they be Jews?" She herself, of course, immigrated to America as a young child from Russia, received her education in the U.S., and became a teacher in Milwaukee. She was always a Zionist, and in the nineteen-twenties, came to Palestine, where she became a leader of the labor unions and, finally, in the government. One could see the rare qualities she possessed that enabled her, despite all odds, to become the leader of her people.

The hills of Jerusalem that were bare and deserted have now been mostly reforested. It is customary to plant trees to commemorate one's departed friends and relatives. My wife and I also went up and planted trees in memory of our mothers. On the way back to our hotel we stopped in a section of Jerusalem called Mea Sherim, the ultra orthodox quarter. The people there were dressed in medieval, long caftans and round fur hats. They had long beards and curly sidelocks (*peyes*).

Most everybody we met seemed to come from elsewhere. In Haifa I visited a small barber shop. As the barber cut my hair, I noticed the telltale concentration camp number on his arm. The conversation began with his question, "Are you an American? . . ." He then proceeded to tell me about Auschwitz. It's strange, but he talked as if all the suffering had happened to a third person, not to him. It's true that to preserve one's sanity, the mind can interpose another person who "actually" suffered the trauma. In some cases the person actually becomes two, with two names, one who underwent the suffering, and the other who tells about it.

My wife visited a tiny store in Jerusalem where a prematurely old-looking woman was making and selling women's hats and scarves. After a very short acquaintanceship, she insisted that my wife accept a scarf as a present. I saw the concentration camp number on her arm. After going through hell, there she was—trying to make ends meet! It tells me something about the persistence and durability of our Jewish people. During our sojourn in Israel, I often felt emotionally uplifted. Somehow, I felt more like a participant than a tourist.

\* \* \*



Back in Europe, my wife's relatives in Holland treated us royally. We were wined and dined and were taken on interesting trips through the immaculate and well-ordered country of the Dutch people. It was hard to part from such lovely relatives. We then spent another week in England—and then back to America.

I consider myself fortunate that my children, grandchildren, and I live in America. In spite of the shifts in economic and political policies and conditions, I believe that this country is basically progressive, that we have an evolving society. Our Constitution has built-in mechanisms for change, and the men who formed the political structure of this country, such as Jefferson, were *not* men thirsting for power, but men of vision who truly loved liberty and the free spirit. We have here a heterogeneous and multi-racial society. It will be most fascinating to see if a new, harmonious social structure will evolve in this land.

When Ella and I arrived back in New York from our trip, the customs man checking our passports said to me, "Welcome Home," He probably said it routinely to everyone, but to me it meant something special. "Welcome Home!" to an old refugee. For this I wish my adopted land good fortune.

\* \* \*







Why you grizzly oldster  
do you weep as though you were an infant?  
Life, which wasn't too considerate,  
hasn't toughened your nerves and glands?

I weep because I lost three-quarters of my life.  
I didn't see her wrinkled face,  
nor things that go with aging flesh.  
I saw her as an answer to all my queries.  
I saw her as fulfillment of all my longings.  
I saw her as she really was—  
the rarest creature of us all.

1981



## FROM MANHATTAN

Alas, the sun has gone into hiding.  
No more pretences . . .  
The gullies are running dark brown,  
The sky is weeping scanty tears.  
Why pretend bright youth will return?  
Count your days, count your hours.

The synagogue is shut throughout  
The congregation is Sabbath-feasting,  
There is no quorum. . . . My cry cannot be heard.  
Mundane matters and appetites  
Take precedence o'er eerie sounds . . .

The sphere is turning faster,  
Magnetic force is pulling  
Into the searing furnace of oblivion.

1979

## A DREAM

Ripe, red autumn leaves  
With faint smell of rot — falling  
Entwined vines reaching up  
Gnarled roots of ancient oak  
Purring brook — meandering...

Elongated, slim body of her . . .  
Her lips half-parted in desire  
    and anticipated fulfillment  
But distorted fulfillment  
As disinterred ancient body . . .

Surrounded by chemicals  
She, my lovely dream, stands erect.  
No, don't show your grief, your wounds  
    to stony crowd —  
    You're no beggar!

Red, ripe autumn leaves  
With the faint smell of rot  
Falling, falling . . .

*New York, 1979*



Autumn leaves are yellow, withering

Limbs are heavy, faltering

Leaves are yellow, brittle

Eyes are dimming

Fruit is ripening, luscious,

Appetite is big in autumn

Head between twin breasts

Limbs between limbs of spring maiden

In late autumn

Leaves are falling

Skin is brittle

Sky is mournful

Eyes are dim

Limbs are heavy

Love is wanting

In late, late autumn

*Written after a walk through the UC Berkeley campus on a  
dreary autumn day, 1979*

It is not an empty page I look at  
But the wide expanding sea.  
These are not my fingers' shadows  
But the craggy mountain tops arising from the sea  
Upon which many a schooner has been wrecked.

Can't you see the jetsam floating  
In turbulent foam, in agitation?  
Have I covered you, my waters  
With my agitated restlessness?

I see your shrewd, mocking eyes  
Staring from these blank pages.  
Yes, taunting me, challenging me:  
Do I have the tongue, the gift of elocution,  
The wealth of language  
To pour out into an ordered stream  
My formless, tempestuous emotions?

Or am I like Moses, who longs so much to go forth  
But lacks the tongue to make them listen.

But now . . . all is quietude within,  
All—but a feeble amber glowing.

1980



The rows of ancient visages  
Blinking their tears away.  
A stolen peek at a tiny mirror,  
A dab of color on her lips,  
A barely audible groan:  
Oh, my days, where have they gone.  
A time was . . . yes . . .  
What was that obtrusive thought?  
The droning of the reader  
Went on and on . . .

*Observing an audience at a Senior Citizen's meeting with a lecturer, 1982*

I walked abreast of tiny things,  
Behind me pearly breakers sang.

Three lonely rocks stood by and dreamed  
Of things as they might be:

Of life abundant, of fragrant gardens,  
Of human species, who as locusts came  
And desolation wreaked.

How fast and far I walked,  
Well beyond the horizon.

But the gold I sought to crown my hair  
Was never there.

*Written after a hike in the mountains of Marin county, California, 1982*



## EXODUS

Finally the day arrived,  
The waters of the Red Sea parted,  
And Israel was freed from Pharaoh's slavery.

And even though some longed-for Egyptian flesh-pots  
And familiar scenes of their native land,  
Forgetting thus the lashes and humiliations suffered,  
Most liberated slaves were enthralled by freedom.  
Though food and water were very scarce  
And hunger stalked the barren land,  
Not knowing where and when to find a resting place.

One day Great Moses, the Liberator of the Masses, said this:  
"My children, even though I am your shepherd and love you deeply,  
I now must leave you for a fortnight maybe  
And ascend the holy Mountain that you can barely see,  
Converse with God, who summoned me,  
And chart some plans for you and me.  
Do not fret and worry my dear children,  
I leave my brother Aaron in full authority  
To cater to your wants and needs.  
When I return, as I surely will within a fortnight,  
I will bring you a gift even greater than your freedom gained,  
For you shall be chosen to carry God's laws to Eternity!"

Now, Moses was greatly o'erburdened with his task.  
He labored day and night to assuage the needs of Israel.  
Of late, seldom a smile did cross his lips,  
And rarely did he touch his comely wife,  
For his burden was too great to bear.

So, when he decided to ascend Mount Sinai  
To relax a bit and hold communion with his Lord  
The flock of liberated slaves was happy as could be  
To have their shepherd gone.

But sadly I must relate the fact  
That other reasons too prevailed,  
Why the Israelites were glad  
To see their beloved champion depart.  
After a life of slavery, they yearned for a bit of carefree joy,  
They dreaded to undertake new missions and holy tasks  
And longed for a respite from their stern champion.

As time did pass thus joyously,  
The Israelites fashioned a lovely golden calf  
From ornaments and treasures they stealthily brought out of Egypt,  
Around the Golden Calf they danced and sang and frolicked  
Into the night and morning, with Aaron's indulgent smile!  
This joyous frolick was not an act of disobedience,  
Or lack of reverence for great Moses—  
the Prince in the house of Pharaoh,  
Who slew the keepers of the slaves and championed the lowly toilers,  
And saved them for great deeds,  
To bring the Word of the One and Only God  
Throughout the World.

Then, one day when Moses came down from the Holy Mountain,  
Staggering under the weight of the Tablets  
Upon which he laboriously engraved  
The many do's and don'ts for the Israelites to obey  
Under the strictest penalties extent—  
After forty days and forty nights of unceasing labor  
To fashion new bounds for the just liberated slaves  
For the system for which Moses was striving.



As he was thus descending  
With his heavy load of Laws and Orders  
Engraved upon the tablets,  
He anticipated a lost, forlorn host, a mass of longing sheep  
Whose shepherd was gone so long . . .

But from afar he heard distinctly  
A clattering sound of drums and cymbals . . .  
And as he drew nearer he beheld  
A dancing, celebrating, joyous host  
Whose songs and rollicking laughter  
Carried almost to the Holy Mountain.

Moses was at first astounded, then angered,  
And finally his anger turned into rage.  
And in his terrible rage he raised his holy tablets sky high  
And dropped them crashing upon the heads of celebrants!  
"A Golden Calf," said he.  
"And I, who sent the plague upon the Pharaoh,  
Who split the sea in two, who liberated you.  
I, who talked to God for forty days upon that Mountain—  
You did not miss me, but you celebrate my absence  
With new-found freedom.  
I don't intend new Freedom for you,  
But to bind you with new restrictions—  
For the role you are to play  
In the new system which I labor to fashion for you."

This Moses said to Israel.  
But within him everything turned into ashes,  
For he knew then that he shall not enter the Promised Land,  
That the slaves he liberated were not his to sway  
For his elaborate and lofty schemes.

He then appointed his successor  
And ascended his favored Mount Sinai,  
From which peak he caught only a glimpse of his Promised Land  
Before his voice was stilled forever.

It's said that God Himself gathered Moses into his resting place,  
And that Israel shall never have a Prophet the likes of Moses.

*Written to my grandson, David, 1978*

*A terrible faux pas—I read this at a Passover Seder, and the guests didn't like Moses being taken down a rung or two or my criticism of his expecting people to pay a price to him, the liberator, for their freedom. I was never invited back to that home for another Seder.*



You've now arrived at the gate of turbulence;  
Of quickened heartbeat and faster pace,  
Of fleeting pleasures and disappointments too.  
But lasting satisfaction, I am sure  
You'll derive from accomplishments  
That come from toil and talent.

I am not for giving you advice,  
But of one thing I am sure:  
Facing life and all its consequence,  
But being constant to your Self  
Is worth pursuing all the time.

*Written to Stefi upon her highschool graduation, June, 1981*

Last night I had a celebration,  
I kissed your lips.  
The bliss was a revelation.  
I know you are now in love —  
But not with me.  
You only shared your happiness with me.  
But gladly would I sit at your table's edge  
And eat a crumb from your bounteous repast.

1979



Amadeo, my bright burning torch!  
You came upon the tranquil scene,  
And swiftly you exploded like a meteor,  
Sustained by chemicals.  
Just as swiftly, my sephardic Amadeo,  
You created WOMAN—  
Valuptuous, elegant, elongated woman.  
Woman, such as only dreams can see,  
Yet woman as real as life,  
For whom we gladly live and die.  
And you, who fully drank in erotic love  
Of your creations, you said farewell.  
You left us all those exquisite creations,  
And you blazed away, you Meteor!

*Written in 1979 in homage to the Jewish-Italian painter, Modigliani.*





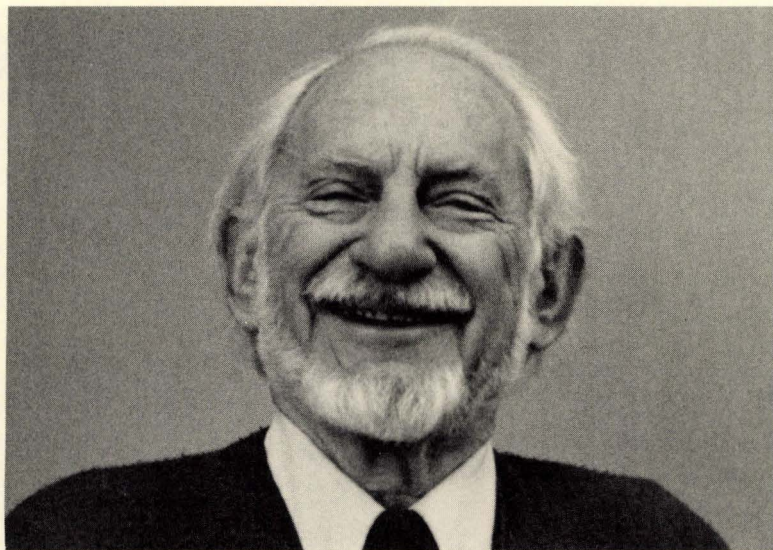
## AFTERWORD

"Who is that live-wire?" I thought to myself the first time I met Abe. I was attending a party at the Berkeley/Richmond Jewish Community Center and spotted Abe the minute I entered the room. There he was—an enthusiastic man with a shock of white hair, a white beard, and clear blue eyes just radiating energy. I've learned since that my first impression still holds true—it is often hard to keep pace with him.

Daring in his approach to life and involvement with people, Abe shows active concern over issues of social injustice. He is unafraid to express his emotions and opinions and is constantly immersed in the study of literature, history, art, . . . the list could go on and on.

Abe—a dear and wonderful friend—is a man whose presence enriches the lives of those of us fortunate enough to know him.

Eileen Ostrow



Abraham Koosis, 1984. Photo by Eileen Ostrow.





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