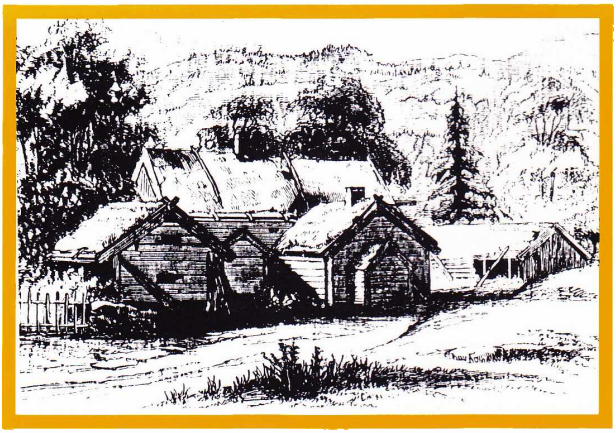


Memories *of* My Life

A PERSONAL HISTORY OF A LITHUANIAN SHTETL

by Bella Lown





ABOUT 250 YEARS separate the lives and times of two remarkable Jewish women: Glückel of Hameln, Germany, born in 1646; and Beile Hinde, born in Lithuania, the cradle of Jewish learning and culture, in 1896. In their later years each wrote about personal experiences and memories—as Jewish women, and, indeed, as the chroniclers of their times. Glückel's book was sub-titled: *Written by Herself;* and so was Beile Hinde's deeply moving story, written by herself.

Glückel has been reprinted and translated many times, and is now considered a classic of personal Jewish history. Beile Hinde (Bella Lown) will become a classic because of her equally descriptive views of *shtetl* life during the first half of the 20th century.

In her 95th year, in 1991, she looked back to the images that she clearly recalled as being "etched before my eyes." Her warm, personal remembrances of a vibrant Jewish culture will transport the reader into that time and place—of *shtetl* life completely surrounded by the

(Continued on back flap)



MEMORIES OF MY LIFE

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by Bella Lown

Joseph Simon Pangloss Press

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lown, Bella, 1896–
Memories of my life : a personal history of a Lithuanian shtetl / by Bella Lown.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-934710-27-9 : $19.75
1. Lown, Bella, 1896– . 2. Jews—Lithuania—Utena—Biography. 3. Utena (Lithuania)—Biography. I. Title.
DS135.R95L685 1991
947'.5—dc20
[B] 91-3576
CIP

Memories of My Life

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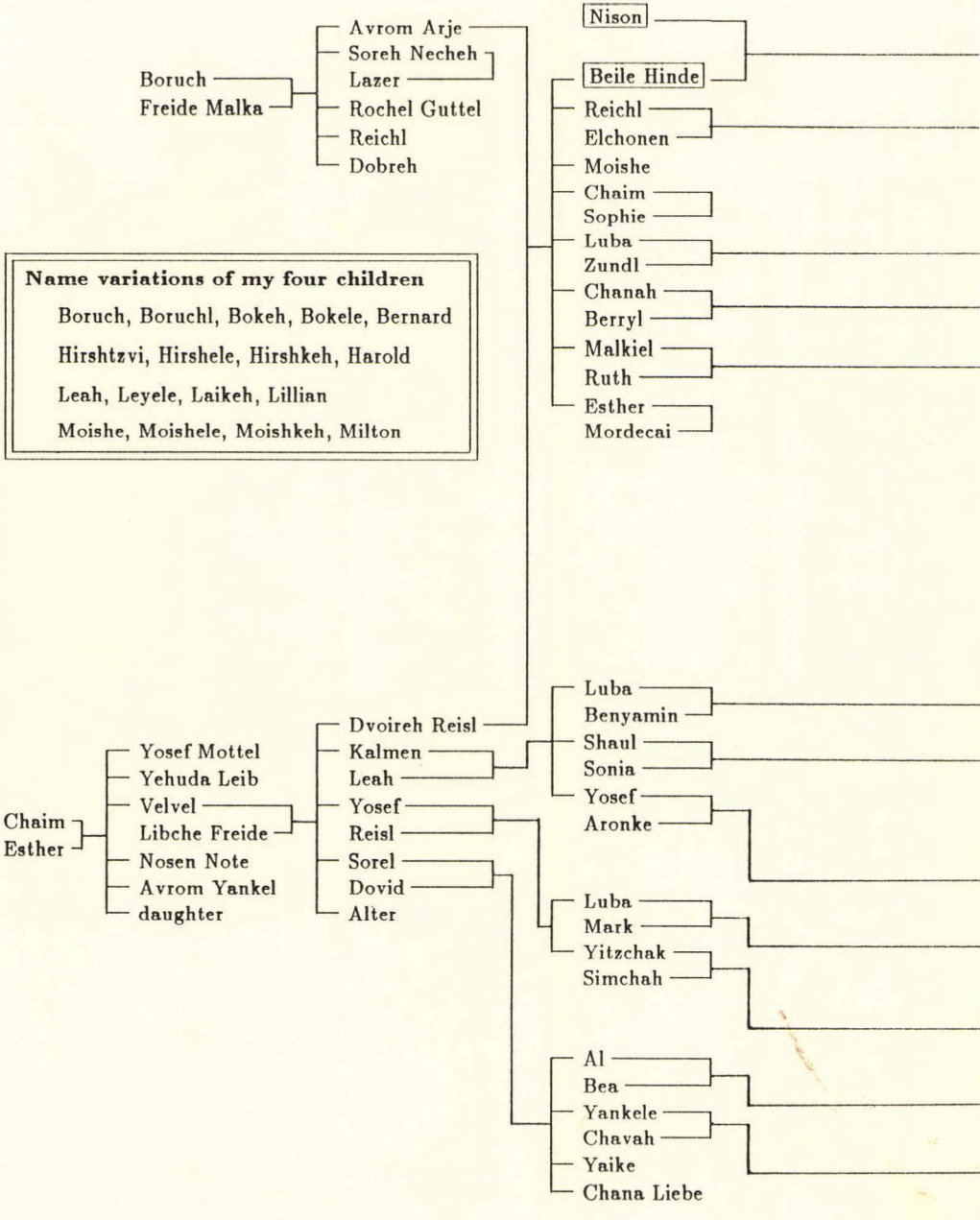
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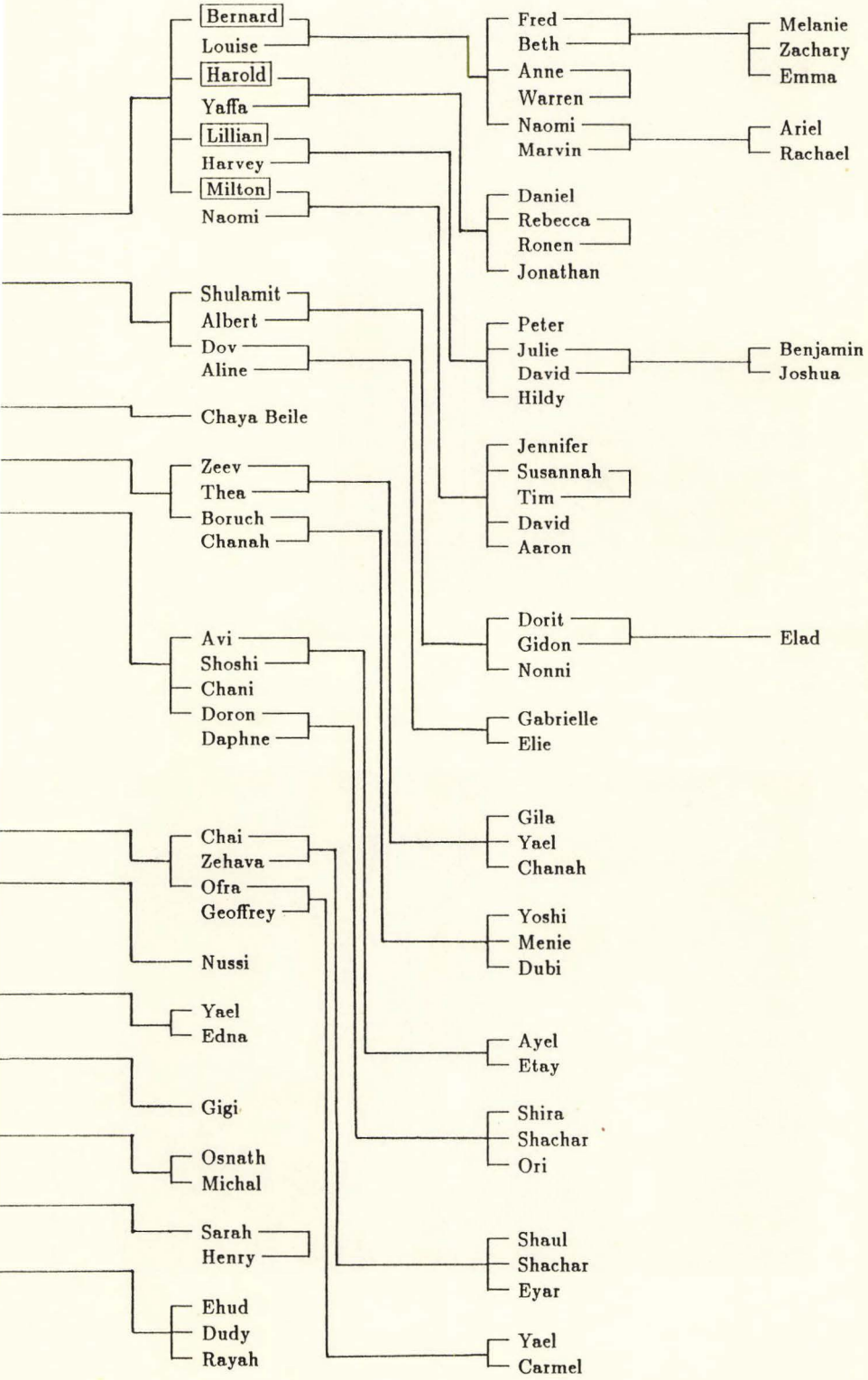
Acknowledgments

My autobiography would not have reached the stage of publication without passing through many caring hands. My cousin, Al Rabin, had the primary task of translating my manuscript from the Yiddish, and Bea Rabin typed the resulting English version. Teresa Joseph was very helpful all along the way from her early encouragement to the final production of this volume. My daughter Lillian worked through the manuscript many times line by line, comparing the Yiddish and English versions and consulting with me to ensure that the final version remained true to my original meaning. My granddaughter Hildy worked with me to clarify the manuscript, to interpret its expressions, and to provide a glossary for her generation and those to follow. My grandson Peter reconstructed the family tree. To be presentable in public a book needs to be garmented, it must be clothed. Here the family is blessed in Rebecca Lown to have an artist and designer of sound instincts and artistic imagination.

Finally, I would like to thank all my children and grandchildren for encouraging me to record my story.

The Family Tree
Seven Generations
1795 – 1990




Bernard
Louise
Harold
Yaffa
Lillian
Harvey
Milton
Naomi
Fred
Beth
Melanie
Zachary
Emma
Anne
Warren
Naomi
Marvin
Ariel
Rachael
Daniel
Rebecca
Ronen
Jonathan
Shulamit
Albert
Dov
Aline
Peter
Julie
David
Hildy
Benjamin
Joshua
Chaya Beile
Jennifer
Susannah
Tim
David
Aaron
Zeev
Thea
Boruch
Chanah
Dorit
Gidon
Nonni
Elad
Avi
Shoshi
Chani
Doron
Daphne
Gabrielle
Elie
Gila
Yael
Chanah
Chai
Zehava
Ofra
Geoffrey
Yoshi
Menie
Dubi
Nussi
Yael
Edna
Ayel
Etay
Gigi
Shira
Shachar
Ori
Osnath
Michal
Sarah
Henry
Shaul
Shachar
Eyar
Ehud
Dudy
Rayah
Yael
Carmel



ABOVE: Beile Hinde and Nison with (*left to right*) Hirshtzvi, Leah, Moishe, and Boruch.
BELOW: *Foreground*, Luba, Chanah, Malkiel, Esther; *seated*, Nison, Beile Hinde, Dvoireh Reisl, Avrom Arje, Velvel, Sorel, Kalmen; *standing*, Moishe, Reichl, Chaim.



Foreword

As a subject, object, and at times observer of this saga, I will try to add a few notes that may offer some additional perspectives. I am fully aware that as a brother I am in double jeopardy as to accuracy. I cannot claim detachment, nor disclaim subjectivity. Though many of the events, particularly of our formative years, were experienced jointly under the same periodically leaking roof, they have been perceived differently by us. These memories are Beile Hinde's emotional fingerprints formed by virtue of her natural endowment and the timing of her arrival in this world. She was early annointed as the chosen and enjoyed a special status in the family.

This is a visceral attempt to reconstruct a long and meaningful life spanning almost a century in the context of one of the most traumatic and awesome periods of Jewish history. True to the nature of autobiography, it begins with the story of self and gradually evolves into the story of humankind. It is because of this duality that the story has such a universal appeal. It touches the basic commonalities of our experiences and transcends the time and space that separates the reader from the writer.

The gestation of this chronicle began a long time ago. Over the years, it was recast and in the last decade took on this shape. Beile Hinde's expressed objective of this effort was to memorialize her meaningful past to her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, to forge a link in the long chain of our family's history. To us, the immediate members of the family, it was apparent that actually it represents a multitude of unformulated needs. It is partially the

wish of the survivor to pay tribute to the many who were lost during the Holocaust. There is also the universal desire to form some oasis of continuity in our fast-changing world. It is also a desire to retrieve and relive the past. The autobiography began almost as a confessional, a privately intimate self-revelation, written secretly as if exposure would defile its meaning. Only recently it went public.

The story traces the unfolding of the life of a pretty and talented child, a first born of the heir-apparent rabbi, the first grandchild of the functioning rabbi, and the *nogid* of the *shtetl*, the first niece of her legion of uncles and aunts, and kin to the prestigious *balibotim* of the community. This was a world of a unique warmth and tranquility within the home and fear and pending doom on the outside which miraculously stopped at the gate of the house. She was thus emotionally and culturally solidly anchored.

Her first two years of life, she reigned supreme as the one and only princess in the make-believe kingdom of the tightly knit *shtetl*. When siblings began to arrive, at times in pairs, encroaching on her life and space, she was dispatched to her paternal grandparents. There she retained her singleness and was doted on by unmarried aunts and an affectionate demonstrative grandfather who served God and his community with ecstasy, zeal and joy. His impact on her was profound and lasting. He played an important role in liberating her from the restrained emotionality of our ascetic father.

As a teenager, with the walls of the modest rabbi's house pressing down on her, the cultural and social life of the community was stagnant for this wide-awake adolescent. The family decided to offer her a wider horizon—the home of the rich and devoted uncle in the big city with greater exposure to Western culture. During the war, with food becoming threateningly scarce, Beile Hinde was chosen to go live with Aunt Sorel where food was not rationed and the home atmosphere, warm and free, was a center for the *shtetl*'s vibrating and politically awake youth and aspiring artists and literati.

The repetitive process of Beile Hinde's being in and out of

our home gave her a special image. We children viewed her with mixed feelings—a bit of awe, envy and lots of pride. Her nickname, interestingly enough given by our saintly father, was Madame Poincaré (a female version of the French Prime Minister and President, Monsieur Poincaré) which symbolized the family's attitude toward her.

Typical of the erosion of the life of the *shtetl* and the dispersion of its inhabitants, our family was catapulted in different directions; some stayed in Lithuania, some went to Israel, and I went to the United States. Feelings were intense, but contact was minimal. The renewal of our contact upon Beile Hinde's arrival in the States was a profound and disconcerting experience to me. At first the feeling was subtle and undefined, but gradually it assumed clear meaning to me. Under the veneer of American affluence—wall-to-wall carpeting—one sensed in her disenchantment and ennui. She appeared to struggle to retain her identity, to hold on to the image of herself which she enjoyed as one of the intelligentsia of her community. Here she was downgraded to the role of the foreigner, stripped of her exceptional gift for language and her cultural values. Her sense of not belonging was accentuated by finding herself in the midst of many who were just emerging from that state and vigilantly protecting their new status. However, consistent with her innate ability and drive, the tempo of her acculturation to the American scene has been phenomenal. Her past instead of being an inhibiting weight became a mobilizing and a catalytic agent.

The reading of this chronicle by a contemporary eye witness is both uplifting and disturbing. It invokes memories, some that we wish to retrieve and others that we wish we could forget. To the young it offers a glimpse of a puzzling phenomenon—the coexistence of a world of love, tenderness, joy and happiness amidst poverty and pending doom. The latter will feel indebted to Beile Hinde for reconstructing the glow of the holidays and the gray and bleak days between with sensitivity and imagination.

HYMAN (CHAIM) GROSSBARD

Prologue

Glimpses of the Irretrievable Past: Reflections on Mother's Memories

In 1973 my wife Louise and I returned to Lithuania, a country which I left 38 years earlier. With some trepidation we traveled back to Utyan, the *shtetl* of my birth. As we were driving closer the tension mounted with ever growing anticipation. On arrival, though, there was no excitement, no emotion, no feeling. The evoked effect was flat, like opening a bottle of seltzer with the carbonation long ago exhausted. Though I recognized the marketplace and many of the buildings, this town was foreign to me. When reflecting on the disparity between the impatient expectation and the disappointed arrival, it became clear that this was not the place of my earliest years. For no one was left. A place absorbs meaning from the people who inhabit it. Supposing not a soul remains. What continuity is provided by buildings, streets, cobblestones when emptied of the living witnesses that suffused them with life's relevance?

In the woods, on the outskirts of Utyan were mass graves; there I held communion. Buried in the black cruel Lithuanian earth was the humanity of my past. In several autumnal days all my neighbors, youthful playmates, and friends were coldbloodedly machine-gunned by the natives with the Hitlerites looking on. Kalmen Meyer, Utyaner's plumber, who miraculously survived, toasted my accomplishments, with tears welling in his old eyes: "You have achieved much in your life. It gives pride to all those who knew you. Do not forget, though, lying in this unkind earth are many gifted Bokeh's (my name) whose lives were snuffed out before their candle could illuminate widely."

Mother's autobiographic sketches bring a flood tide of memories. I reflect on the ghoulish death of more than 3000 beings whose humanity would not have permitted them to imagine or believe their bitter end. In a way Mother's igniting of remembrance pays homage to the victims. If asked the moment before their extinction what they craved most, knowing the hopelessness of their plight, they would no doubt have begged for a twinge of remembrance.

It is remarkable that Mother gathered the courage to put down in her simple words the story of a culture now disappeared and gone forever. And she did it with exceptional recall. Her words catalyze endless memories. One of the earliest is a winter evening. A darkness descends on the *shtetl* such as one no longer experiences with the advent of electricity. Winter was also the time of an all-pervasive silence. With meandering rivers and gurgling brooks frozen into quietude, everything seemed to have been sculpted by snow and frost into a posed standstill. The cold was dry and bitter, only the nose could peek out from behind layers of shawls, sweaters and muffed caps. On such nights Mother left the cozy house warmed by wood stoves and ventured out to traipse for night shift duty in my father's mill. I can still hear the crunching of her footsteps on the dry frosted snow. I would concentrate and would follow her steady gait until my imagination had her enter the mill a kilometer away. How I admired her fearlessness in confronting the elements. I would hug the blanket around me tightly to increase the warmth which I wished to share with her. In the early morning hours she returned painted white not from the snow but from the milled flour that seemed to permeate her every pore.

Reading this memoir brings gushes of little vignettes of remembrance. She was the most traveled person in Utyan, and we children never tired of hearing tales of Vilna, Kovno, Tavrik, Balbirishok, Meretch, Filipoveh, and Shirvint and above all of the mesmerizing grandeurs of Berlin. Of distant relatives once or now rich and accomplished. It provided hope of escape from a stifling and hostile surround.

The only place we could visit was Shirvint where Mother's

parents lived. Visiting with our grandparents was always an unforgettable adventure. A day-long ride in a horse-drawn cart over a rutted road shook up one's insides to churn the milk we drank into butter. My grandfather was a very impoverished rabbi. Survival was from hand to mouth. The food was neither varied nor abundant; we were always a little hungry. Nonetheless, Grandfather was a man I liked to be with. He exuded a warmth that was embered by his great virtue. Tolerant of human foibles, he did not let his orthodoxy overcome a native reasonableness. Though I was only six, I flaunted a worldliness and a provocative atheism which I proclaimed with bravado inviting a spanking; instead it evoked an amused smile as he combed his graying beard with an outstretched hand.

This memoir brings to the surface of memory colorations and events only suggested by Mother. I wished she had written more about the cultural ambience engendered in the absence of theater, music, radio, television, etc. Yet we were not culturally deprived. On the contrary, rarely after leaving Lithuania was cultural life so dense with meaningful events. In the first place, Mother flooded our early lives with song. In a soft, dulcet soprano she sang about kings and queens, about unrequited love, about justice and freedom. Then, of course, there were books, periodicals, and newspapers. Little Lithuania boasted four daily Jewish newspapers, each representing a political faction. Of books, the fixation was on French and Russian. Tolstoy was a landsman as though still in our midst, and Dostoyevsky was the most favored of the 19th century novelists. Gorki was deemed subversive by the authorities but the French communist Barbuse was permitted. We revelled in Anatole France, Balzac, Zola, Romain Rolland and Victor Hugo. Mother's having gone to a Russian high-school made her a supercultured lady. People respected nothing more than culture. Wealth was not on the same level, unless it was that of the Rothschilds.

How ravenously we all read and followed world events. Tirana, Addis Ababa, the Ruhr, Valencia, and Shanghai were next-door neighborhoods. And it seemed the entire

town awaited the arrival of next day's newspaper, not so much to learn the antics of a Mussolini or the spoutings of a Hitler, rather to follow the trials and tribulations of the hero in the serialized novels of Sholom Asch or Abraham Razin. The ghettoed Jews of my *shtetl*, however, held on to an enlightened postive world view like a bulldog to a pants leg. Perhaps otherwise people would have been driven to madness from sheer hopelessness. Through rose-colored glasses the imprisonment was not necessarily a life sentence. As a child it was healthy to grow up in an atmosphere full of good cheer and hope. In no small measure, Mother was the chief architect of such a *"weltanschauung."* Though born in an orthodox home, she was an agnostic bordering on atheism yet very much a Jew. I am reminded of what was said about Anatole France when he proclaimed his atheism after a lifetime immersion in ardent Catholicism: "Anatole has remained a Catholic though long ago he ceased to be a Christian." Mother had no great patience with mindless piety. Our house pretended *kashrut*. She did not hesitate to feed me pork and ham which had been suggested by a doctor as a cure for anemia. Her leanings were left politically, and she flirted with socialism. Yet her all-consuming dream was Zion.

Among the unforgettable imprints on memory is Father's correct appraisal of the nature of the Hitlerite menace. Already in 1932, he understood that Jewish life in Lithuania was drawing to a close. He began to toy with emigration to America. This dream would never have been realized if he had not received an invitation from his older brother, Philip, who had emigrated during the first decade of this century to the United States. Thereafter, he was like a man possessed, moving with dispatch to get out as though his brain were tuned to some doomsday clock. Mother was equally determined not to go to the United States where she was certain that our Jewishness would disappear. She wanted us to travel east to Palestine. Father was ready to abandon all his possessions and sizeable property to move in the opposite direction. I still recall the many intense discussions between my

parents. Father, as was his habit, was coldly and mathematically, even brutally, logical. His words were precise, lacking any overstatement and were spelled out like an accountant's ledger. The bottom line from his viewpoint was indubitable. We had no viable choices except America. Mother was lyrical, emotional, impractical but persuasive by dint of her passion. In the end Father carried the day.

While memories fade with the passage of time, one particular remembrance has grown ever more poignant. The year was 1935, the place was the railroad station in Kovno. My brother Hirshkeh and I are bubbling with excitement. We had packed our valises with corned beef, hard salami, tongue and bagels procured at the best delicatessen in Kovno, the famous Rosemarines. The train will take us to Berlin and Paris, and to Le Havre. Then on to New York via the *Ile de France*. We were leaving behind our mother, our only sister Laikeh and our little brother Moishkeh. We can't wait for the train to start moving. On the platform is one forlorn woman. Tears are at a flood as the train begins to roll forward, Mother trembles as though she is about to faint. We wave and she waves weakly back with a soaked white handkerchief. That very week the Nazis marched in to occupy Memel, the only Lithuanian port. Will we ever see each other again? Only years later the dread of this memory, long since negated by a magical family reunion, nonetheless haunts.

BERNARD LOWN

Memories of My Life

Seasons and Festivals

FOR A LONG TIME I have wanted to record my memories about my life in the small Polish *shtetl* near the German Border. Now that I have reached my ninetieth birthday, I feel that it is worthwhile to record these recollections for my children and grandchildren so that the grass of oblivion will not obscure the path I have taken. They should know that they descend from generations of rabbis on one side and from generations of fine industrious Jews on the other. But, will the force of my memory serve to bring forth the experiences long past and describe the vanished town as it was, with its lights and shadows? At any rate, it is certainly worth trying. Perhaps I will succeed in leaving a picture of long ago, of a world that has vanished and is forever irradicated, gone. And perhaps I will succeed in reviving the joys and sorrows of that earlier life in the small town of Filipoveh and, especially, in recalling the types and personalities with which the town abounded.

My earliest childhood memory is of sitting in my mother's lap, warming myself by the tile stove when, as I looked up at my mother's face and saw fear suddenly appear there, I turned in the direction she was looking. There in the window was her brother, Uncle Kalmen, covered with blood, his clothes torn, hardly able to move. At first mother was stunned. After the initial shock she rushed out and helped him in. What had happened?

Well, the winter that year had been colder than usual—which was cold enough. My uncle had come to visit and noticed that we were freezing, that there was no wood or peat with which to heat the house. So he crawled up to the attic of the synagogue next door to fetch some wooden shingles left over after the roof was repaired a while back. He had fallen off the roof and was badly hurt. He was bedridden for weeks.

On the Sabbath when Grandfather Velvel and Grandmother Libche Freide Zyman, my mother's parents, came from their estate in Shikeroveh about 15 miles from my home in Filipoveh to pray in the synagogue, they were alarmed not to find Kalmen there. Then they learned what had happened. I remember how Grandmother rushed into the house.

Our house was the rabbi's home, a part of the synagogue. It was the custom in many towns of Europe to build a rabbi's residence alongside the synagogue. It could not exactly be called palatial. The entire house consisted of four small rooms—a dining room, a bedroom, a kitchen and a "court room" lined with bookcases filled with books. In this room father would sit day and night at his studies. Whenever people came for an adjudication or with a question of law, they would always find him deeply absorbed in study. When we children asked him why he was always studying, he would answer, "The Torah is like a well, like a spring welling up. The more one draws from it, the more fresh water one finds." And he would then become absorbed in study again. He was a tremendously diligent student with an excellent memory. In the region where we lived he was known as a genius.

It was no wonder that Grandfather Velvel, a vastly successful landowner, had selected Avrom Arje for his daughter's intended and had given him 5,000 rubles as a dowry, a veritable fortune at that time, plus a year's board. Nothing was too difficult nor too expensive for Grandfather Velvel as long as he could get the talented genius for his beautiful and well-educated daughter, Dvoireh Reisl. For years people talked about the wonders of my mother's trousseau—the

many coats and dresses made for her for the wedding. As for the wedding itself, which took place in 1894, people related in awe how grand an event it was, when the richest man in Filipoveh married his daughter to the only son of the town's rabbi.

It was an unusual match—a match of contrasts. On the one side was Avrom Arje, the groom, a genius absorbed in study and in the higher realm of ideas, who paid little attention to material concerns. He scorned money with a passion—it was responsible for all the misfortunes and wars that plagued the world. Eliminate it and the world would be better off. On the other side was Dvoireh Reisl, the bride, worldly for her time. Her ability to write Yiddish, German, and Polish was famous in the town since in those days very few women knew how to write at all. When it was necessary to write a letter to some official, people would come to Dvoireh Reisl and she would write in either Polish or German. (It was the time of mass emigration to America, when men left their wives and children to seek their fortune in the distant land. My mother wrote many a letter in her unusually beautiful and ornamental handwriting to the men in the foreign lands.)

The fathers of the bride and groom were also a study in contrasts. Avrom Arje's father, Boruch Grossbard, was the town rabbi in Filipoveh and was always engrossed in study and prayer. Around his shoulders he wore a *tallis* and on his brow and his left arm his *teffilin* until noon, spending day after day and year after year in communion with his creator. We children listened in rapt attention to Grandfather Boruch at prayer which was full of devotion and inspiration and which went on until afternoon. When Grandfather prayed, he spoke with all his heart. He loved his God, but he also loved people and people loved him. He called everyone "my child," and he and Grandmother Freide Malka welcomed many guests to their small house beside the synagogue. That home was always open—"all the needy may come and eat." Grandfather Boruch never came through the passageway from the synagogue to the house without bringing a guest or two.

Grandfather Velvel was just as deeply religious a man. He

understood and could interpret a page of the Gemora, as what pious Jew in those days could not? But his estates captured his attention. He simply had no time to linger over prayers. He would pray quietly very early in the morning, eat breakfast—a bowl of cold noodles and milk—and be off to the fields to supervise his hired hands working the land. He never stood idle. He loved to plant and work his fields. In the spring, as soon as the sun melted the snow and the black fertile Polish soil was ready to germinate the seeds, Grandfather Velvel would traipse tirelessly through the fields. My memory of him is of a tall figure with a brown beard streaked with grey, blowing in the warm spring breeze, marching in the fields and tossing seeds nonchalantly.



I could never quite grasp how it was possible for my maternal great-grandfather, Reb Chaim, to possess such riches. How could a Jew acquire his properties and grow so rich? When he passed away, many years before I was born, he left for his widely branched family of six sons and four daughters and their families forests, lakes, two estates and houses in the nearby towns of Filipoveh and Bakleroveh, and a large business of grain and geese that were traded across the border from Poland into Germany.

The sons divided the inheritance with the two estates going to my grandfather. However, he continued to live in the nearby town of Filipoveh for many years. He was able to oversee the estates from there. The estates consisted of acres and acres of land growing corn, wheat, and rye; forests; a lake; and sheep. They also had a palatial home and many cottages for the peasants. When he left Filipoveh, he lived for a while in Shikeroveh, one of the estates, then sold it and moved to the second estate in Zaiyenchkoveh. He lived there until the Germans destroyed the estate in World War I.

Grandfather's fields were on the German border with only a ravine separating the two countries: Poland and Germany. During the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 and during the un-

successful Russian revolution in February of 1905, Grandfather Velvel saved many political refugees. It became known that my grandfather's fields bordered on Germany, and many political suspects showed up at his door to stay overnight on his estate. At the crack of dawn they would join the shepherd to herd the flock. A lamb would stray across the ravine and the escapee would give chase and thereby run across the border. Many, many persons were thus saved from Russian prisons and dungeons by Grandfather Velvel.

Grandmother Libche Freide—I remember her as always dressed up and wearing jewelry, even in the middle of the week. She had the air of an aristocrat and was apt to brag of her great lineage. She loved to tell of her experiences during the Polish insurrection against the Russians, the *Miahtezh*, in the 19th century.

Grandfather's house in Filipoveh was a two-story brick building right in the center of the marketplace. The entire marketplace was surrounded by houses, mostly of brick, where the elite of the town lived. In every house there was a store, and once a week was market day. Not only would the peasants come from the surrounding villages in their long wagons filled with all sorts of goods, but also merchants would arrive from the entire region, especially from the large city of Suvalk. They would set themselves up in the town square with their various wares which consisted of cloth, ready-made clothes, and all kinds of household goods. The trading proceeded from early morning until evening. The din and noise would rise to high heaven. Market day played a significant role in the life of the town Jew, for each and every one made his living from that day's trading. After selling his vegetables, fruit, fowl, cattle and horses, the farmer would go right away to the Jewish stores to buy bargains and then repair to the taverns where he would drink up his few hard-earned pennies.

I can imagine how heavily it must have weighed on my father, sitting alone in the attic absorbed in spiritual study, to suddenly hear the drunken voices rising from below, from Grandfather Velvel's tavern. It was customary for a respected

burgher to own a roadhouse or tavern to supplement his livelihood. But for the sensitive Avrom Arje it was insufferable. He waited impatiently for the miracle that would enable him to give up his board and escape.



The miracle actually occurred when Grandfather Boruch luckily received the call for the rabbinate in Balbirishok in Lithuania in 1895, and father took over the rabbinate of Filipoveh. He was able to leave the board of Grandfather's large and spacious house together with the noise of the tavern. No doubt it was difficult for my mother to leave her comfortable and affluent life and to move into the four small rooms of the rabbi's house to become the *rebbitzin* of the town, and where she was to bear ten of her eleven children.

Mother and Father had both been born in Filipoveh, had grown up there and everyone there knew them from childhood. Suddenly there they were in such responsible positions. They were to spend there many years of poverty and need. Children arrived one after the other every couple of years. I was the first born in 1896. Family needs were great and the income quite small. Grandfather Velvel had to help us out, for the town elders simply paid no salary. They knew that Grandfather would not let his daughter, his first born, suffer deprivations, but there was a limit to how much my Grandfather could help, for at home he had other children to rear. Grandmother Libche Freide had borne sixteen children —infant mortality had claimed all but five. But even for five the expenses were heavy. And then the tavern business worsened. It was necessary to sell the two-story brick house in the town and move to his estate in Shikeroveh and live among the gentiles.

Since I was the eldest in the family and my mother and father were also the oldest in theirs, we had special privileges with the entire *mishpocheh*, which was large indeed on both sides. Father wanted for his first born to be a son, but the poor man had to accept me. Considering that a girl did not

exactly fit his concept of what was best—how can one study the Torah with her?—he always demonstrated deep and sincere love for me. I liked to think that after the boys I was his favorite and most beloved child. They named me Beile Hinde after my two grandmothers. There was constant competition between my two sets of grandparents as to who would spend more time with me until the second child was born. That, too, was a great disappointment for my father because again it was a girl. They named her Reichl. And two years later, a third girl, Chayeh, who died at the age of two, was born. Finally God had mercy and heard Father's prayers and twin boys were born. How great was the joy! But not for long because both left the world even before the *bris*. The grief and pain were indescribable. The world simply darkened for Father and Mother, and the next few years were years of grief until God had mercy once more and in 1902 another boy was born.

Everyone believed that with the birth of Moishele it became bright in all the corners of the house, and, when two years later the second brother, Chaim, was born, my father's joy was complete. He would really be able to study with them day and night. And here again we encounter some contrasts. The two brothers differed from each other in appearance and character like the two grandfathers.

Moishele, the older, was the real product of generations of rabbis. With pale face and deep large black eyes, he was frail and delicate in appearance. He never raised his voice except to chant when studying the Torah and was always absorbed in the spiritual. Chaim was his opposite—a head of thick blond hair and grey-blue eyes and strong in appearance, he gave the impression of a *shaigetz*, hardly the delicate child of a rabbi. Both boys studied in the same school with an elderly woman whom they called Bashkeh the Kugele because she was fat. They would spend the entire day there and would often come home late in the evening carrying a lantern. Although Chaim was younger than Moishele, he was taller, stronger, a better swimmer, and was always ready to protect his older brother.

There were also strong contrasts between me and my sister Reichl. I was shy and she was more outspoken and more critical. Since I was the eldest, the entire family tended to cater to me, whereas my sister, who was two years younger and the second girl to boot, did not receive so much attention.



Our life in the rabbi's house in Filipoveh was not an easy one. Aside from the crowded conditions, with four children sleeping in one bed, we also suffered from the cold because there was never enough wood or peat to heat the synagogue and the rabbi's house.

Our greatest joy was when Grandfather Velvel and Grandmother Libche Freide would come in their beautiful coach or sleigh and take us for a short visit to their estate. Grandmother's house was spacious with a large living room and a wall covered with pictures that Mother had embroidered as a girl. The house sat in the middle of a vegetable garden surrounded by fields and forests. A little farther away were the barns for the sheep and cattle, storage buildings for the wheat and corn, and stables for the horses. Still farther down the hill were the houses for the farm hands. With a thick layer of snow it was a bit gloomy on the estate. But with the arrival of spring everything changed. As soon as the snow stopped falling and started to melt, the fields that had been planted with winter corn would become covered with a carpet of fresh and delicate greenery. The grass would break through the snow and the greenery would catch the eye. Bustling activity would commence on the estate: the barns and the stables were opened and the sheep and cattle would stream out onto the green fields, and the farmhands would get ready to plough and sow the fields with summer crops.

In the summer Mother and we children would always spend our time with our grandparents on the estate in Shikeroveh, and those were probably the happiest times of my childhood years. Spending every summer there, I absorbed a deep love for nature and for mother earth. When we were

older, Grandfather bought two small ponies, one for me and one for Reichl. My greatest enjoyment was to ride in the aromatic fields and meadows, particularly after the hay cutting when the air was permeated by wonderful aromas. When fall arrived and we had to return to the *shtetl*—back to the confined quarters and poverty of our life—Grandfather became sad. I remember how they would hitch two horses to a long wagon and fill it with all kinds of vegetables and fruit freshly harvested from the gardens and orchards, and we had to return home. That distance of seven miles was for us children a long, long journey.



No sooner had we returned home than we began preparations for *Rosh Hashonah*, the Jewish New Year. The whole family assembled, my grandparents and their family coming from Shikeroveh. Their arrival would be the real holiday for us children. They stayed at the large house of Uncle Yosef Mottel, grandfather's older brother, who lived on the main street of Filipoveh.

This uncle was an unusual character. A businessman and a scholar at one and the same time, he also was a fine orator. Every day at twilight he would study *Mishnayot* with the people. He often conducted business, selling geese to the Germans, and frequently traveled to the large cities of eastern Germany such as Koenigsberg, Insterburg and Tilsit. Upon his return from his travels he would always bring us gifts; but more important than the gifts were his stories about the wonders of Germany. He was a rare spinner of yarns and could transport us children into a world of fantasy. He never failed to drop in and play with us whenever he went to the synagogue next door to our home. He was especially attached to our brother Chaim.

It happened that Chaim did not talk until he was three years of age, and naturally our parents were worried. They decided to take him to Professor Schreiber, a great physician in Koenigsberg. The professor calmed them and assured

them that the child would soon start talking—his first word would be of someone beloved to him. And so it was. Not long after Chaim began to talk. The first word he uttered was "Uncle," his beloved Yosef Mottel, of course. We all believed that the Professor was a miracle man.

After *Rosh Hashonah* came the ten "days of awe," followed by *Yom Kippur,* when we prayed for forgiveness for the sins we had committed during the year. All the prayers cast a deep sadness upon us children since we did not understand what sins we had committed. Mother would repeat over and over that since a fish in water is afraid before the Day of Judgment, then certainly we sinners should be. She never explained it, but kept repeating that we should do penance. We lived right next door to the synagogue, so we were able to hear all the sounds of the heartfelt *davening.* The wailing from the women's wing took our breath away. How serious could their sins have been?

On the High Holidays Mother and her parents prayed in the large synagogue. Grandfather Velvel was the regular morning prayer leader there. But Father never left the small prayer house. Like patriarchs of yore, Grandfather and Father appeared in their white robes with their *talaysim* over their heads before going to their respective synagogues. Grandmother and Mother would dress up in honor of the holiday in their most beautiful white dresses with silk shawls over their wigs—when a religious Jewish woman was married her head was shaved and she wore a wig. We children also dressed up and we loved to wear our white dresses for the occasion.

The preparations for *Yom Kippur* were unforgettable. Every child performed *kapores.* The family was large and a good number of hens and roosters were slaughtered ritually. Afterward all the fowl was cooked in a large pot, in preparation for the last meal before the fasting on the solemn Day of Atonement. The entire meal was touching. Silver candlesticks were on the table and every child lit a candle so that the fire of his or her soul would glow like the flame of the burning candle. When Mother and Grandmother blessed the candles,

we were all moved to tears. We children, no matter how young, sensed the solemnity and holiness of the moment, and we swallowed our tears with the chicken soup.

After the final blessing, young and old would file out to the synagogue. The synagogue had a strange mystical appearance on *Erev Yom Kippur* at the chanting of *Kol Nidre*. The entire synagogue was enveloped in semi-darkness. Hundreds of huge memorial candles, stuck in sand and arranged on long tables, flickered near the podium. Most of the praying men were wrapped in white robes with *talaysim* on their heads, and all were swaying in rhythm. Sighs and wails came from all corners of the synagogue.

Especially piercing was the sound from the women's section, where the women let themselves go with a desperate wailing. They truly had had enough to moan and cry about considering their hard life in the *shtetl*—bearing and raising children, the high rate of infant mortality, the never ending hard work, and, generally, all kinds of illness and plagues. Very few of the women were able to read at all and even fewer understood the meaning of the words of the Hebrew prayer book. Grandmother and Mother were well educated and had a Yiddish version of the prayer book. The women would surround them and repeat the prayer after them word for word. And then they would lament, understanding that through prayer and penitence the Lord of the universe would have pity on them, forgive them their sins and grant them a good year.

Father and Mother did not leave the synagogue the whole day, standing and praying tirelessly hour after hour. I wonder now where they found the strength to carry on through so long a fast and through so much crying and wailing. They supplicated not only for themselves but for all of Israel. Upon leaving the synagogue how happy Father would be at the sight of a starry sky and a clear, bright moon, for now he would be able to say the prayer of the renewal of the moon. This was a sign of a good year.

The post-fast meal was much more joyous than the pre-fast meal. People felt drained but also cleansed. Every year

Mother would utter her usual saying—that life the entire coming year be as easy as the fast was for her this year and God grant it not be a worse year.

Immediately after breaking the fast Father would start building the *succah* next to the house in order to fulfill the first commandment of the new year. We would decorate the *succah* with different fall flowers, put up a mass of pine greens, and on the pine branches we hung the apples, pears, and plums that were plentiful at that time of the year. To enter the *succah* was to enter a perfumed garden.

By contrast with the solemnity of *Yom Kippur* the holiday of *Succoth* was one of our happiest times. It fell at harvest time. First, eating in the *succah* was exciting and special for us children. Not far behind were the tasty meals that Mother would prepare in honor of the holiday. The meals consisted of *kreplach* in chicken soup, *tsimmes*, roast chicken and compote.

After praying in the synagogue, many elders would come to our *succah* for *kiddush*, a blessing over the wine. Father seldom left the *succah*, and when it got cold he would put on his fur coat and sit and study there. Every evening after prayer, the people of our *shtetl* would arrange the celebration of *Bet Hashorva* with much song and dance.

On the seventh day of *Succoth*, *Shmini Hatzeret*, the yearlong reading of the Torah, was concluded. A large crowd gathered at Yosef Mottel's home where, alongside tables set with honey cake and whiskey, they would listen to the interpretation of the last chapter of the Torah. That evening, *Erev Simchath Torah*, they would lead Uncle to the synagogue with song and dance. The *goyim* of the town would stare in amazement at the procession, asking one another what the Jews were celebrating.

The synagogue was packed with men, women and children, many of them holding blue and white flags topped with

a flaming candle. All awaited the arrival of my father, the town rabbi. But this time the rabbi did not enter the synagogue quietly and thoughtfully as usual. He was carried on the shoulders of the people and accompanied by song and dance. The scholars and students of the town, with whom he had studied daily a page of the Torah all year long, carried him on their shoulders to express their love and recognition of their teacher. Facing him, the congregation jumped and clapped their hands, happy to have finished the year's reading of the holy Torah. Behrl the dyer and Moishe the miller, two old and important elders with long grey beards, would stretch out full length on the floor near the holy ark so that every scroll taken out of the ark for the parade around the synagogue would pass over them. The town had unusual types whose pious devotion to the Torah was impossible to exaggerate.

On this last day of *Succoth, Simchath Torah,* when the joy in the Torah was expressed, an entire business with *Aliyas* used to proceed. There were eight *Aliyas,* and the sixth and eighth were especially coveted. Not everyone was lucky to get one of these. The men would bid for an *Aliyah* for a long time with the bidding sometimes reaching high sums. The highest bidder would pay nearly a fortune, for it was an honor and a mark of good luck to obtain a good *Aliyah*. Often an elder would buy a desirable *Aliyah* and give it as a gift to the rabbi of the town. The reading of the Torah would last until late in the day, and between one *Aliyah* and the next the folks would take a drink in the synagogue, which was permissible only on *Simchath Torah*.

After prayers the people would scatter to houses all over town where every hostess had prepared her best dishes. Etiquette was ignored and visitors did not wait for the hostesses to serve them. The men would roll up their sleeves and remove from the baking ovens dishes fit for a king, such as roasted goose, *tsimmes* with stuffed necks and many other delicacies. They ate, drank, and afterward danced on the tables and rejoiced with the holy Torah. They were frugal

the entire year in order to be able to prepare such foods for the holidays.



After the holidays the entire household would seem to sink into a depression. Father would say sadly, "It is so long to *Pesach*." Mother had other reasons for lamenting. It is no wonder, with the cold winter in the offing. Not much wood or peat stored. The children in need of warm clothes, not to mention boots and rubbers. A rabbi's wages were hardly enough even for porridge and water—and how much help can one take from a father? The children had other reasons for long faces. We had little desire to go to school. We would rather play outdoors, throw snowballs, slide on the ice, or zoom down the hills on a sled, barely able to catch our breath, than sit the entire day in a schoolroom. We waited impatiently for *Chanukah* because on *Chanukah* we did not have to go to school in the evening.

Chanukah was sort of a holiday and not a holiday, half holiday and half weekday. The stores in the market were open, and business was transacted as usual. The horse-drawn coaches with Jewish drivers arrived full of passengers. They came on the highway from Suvalk and stopped for a while at Israel, the innkeeper's pub, and then departed for distant places, meaning that they crossed the border into Germany. We children were filled with curiosity and envy at the departing coaches, wondering where they were going, and imagining how marvelous it would be to sneak into one of them and travel out into the world. In the winter, the coaches were transformed into sleighs with bells, and this charmed us even more.

The days of *Chanukah* were like ordinary weekdays, but after we blessed the *Chanukah* candles and sang Rock of Ages with everybody joining in the song, the everyday feeling would give way to the holiday spirit. The aroma of *latkes* and goose giblets would come from the kitchen. Once a year, on *Chanukah*, we played cards in the house—especially on

the day of the fifth candle which happened to be Mother's birthday. Because of this special event, the *mishpocheh* gathered at our house, eating *latkes* and drinking tea. There was no talk of presents in those days, but we children received *Chanukah gelt*. We also won some money playing *dreydlach*.

Winter dragged on slowly; the days were short and the nights long. We used to wake up at the crack of dawn to the sound of the men arriving for the first *minyon*. Only a small corridor separated our house from the synagogue, so we were able to hear what was going on there. We could hear them knocking the snow from their boots, opening the squeaky door of the synagogue and entering. Only the various artisans would pray at the first *minyon*, shoemakers, tailors, hatters and so on. They would hurry to pray early, in order to start work at a good hour. The elders of the town would come to the second *minyon*. All day long the synagogue was seldom empty. Some would come to pray, some to study or randomly peek into a book, chat, trade news, and especially discuss politics. For the small town Jew, the synagogue was the center not only for religious life but also for social life.

For Mother, the winter day would begin with fetching the peat from the barn to light the stove and heat the house. The peat was piled up in the barn where the town's casket was kept. This casket was used to transport the recently deceased to the cemetery. It was returned to our barn after the burial to be readied for the next death. The deceased was buried in a shroud. The greatest punishment for us children was when Mother would send us to bring the peat from the barn. No matter how we tried we could not help but look at the casket. A strange fear would seize us and we would imagine that a real corpse was lying in the casket. Generally, we children were full of dread and anxiety about the dead and ghosts. When we returned from school in the evening and passed a large dark synagogue it would seem to us that from every window of the synagogue peered a devil. The children would tell fantastic tales, for example, that every night when the clock struck midnight, all the dead of the town got together,

opened the holy ark, took out the scroll of the Torah, and read the portion of the week. Only upon the break of dawn, and with the crowing of the roosters, did the dead return to their resting places. We were impatient for the long cold winter to finally come to an end and for *Purim* to arrive.



With the approach of *Purim* the days became longer. The sun shone refreshingly, the snow gradually melted, and rivulets of water from the melted snow would trickle through the streets and alleys of the town. One could feel the warm breeze beginning to blow and the beloved spring arriving. *Purim* had special charm for us, not the least of which were the gifts, the *homentashen* goodies and the fun of masquerading as a player in the reenactment of the story of *Purim*.

On *Purim* eve, at the reading of the *Megillah*, the Book of Esther, was a rehearsal of the real "battle" that would take place on *Purim* morning. The noisemakers that we had were sounded as we "shot" Haman, the evil one. The next day when the reader read the scroll, every time Haman was mentioned toy guns would go off and, together with the noisemakers, would make a loud racket. After the noise-filled reading of the *Megillah* we went home to a festive meal of soup with *kreplach*, *tsimmes* with fat meat, and compote. Immediately after the feast, Mother occupied herself with *shalachmones*. On large plates, covered by a napkin she would put an orange (precious because it was hard to come by), a few candies and cookies and a piece of *lehkach* for the children to deliver to relatives and friends. There were also special gift-bearers in town who received a few pennies for helping deliver the gifts. The wealthier the family, the more beautiful the present. On one gift plate we would sometimes find a Russian silver ruble. There was quite a fuss among us children to decide who would deliver the *shalachmones* since the child bringing them often received sweets.

That evening Mother would prepare a great meal including veal and a large coffee cake with all sorts of spices and

raisins. But the best and most impressive part of the evening was the *Purim* play. Children and adults would hide their identity behind masks and participate in the play depicting the story of Esther. With songs and dances the players expressed the great miracle of *Purim* and how the Jews were saved.

The month following *Purim* was spent preparing for *Pesach*, the holiday of freedom, the holiday of spring. From morning until late at night Mother busied herself making wine from raisins, brewing mead (a drink resembling beer), putting up beets and making jam. The bakeries were also getting ready to make *matzohs*. The air was full of *Pesach*.

Neighbors got together to bake the *matzohs* for themselves and for one another. For this purpose they selected the largest house with the best baking oven. They washed and scrubbed every corner and arranged long wooden tables that sparkled with cleanliness. They hung a few bright lamps because the baking went on until late at night. Those who rolled the dough arrived dressed in white aprons, and the supervisor would run around like a *fahrsamteh* mouse checking on the cleanliness and making sure that the *kashrut* were followed strictly. The wood in the large stove burned brightly and crackled, and everybody was in an elevated mood in anticipation of kneading the dough for the first batch of *matzohs*. How happy we children were when they let us help with the *matzohs*, like pouring flour or water. But when they let us roll out a *matzoh*, that was a very special privilege. The house was full of the noise of the rolling of *matzohs*, and of the hearty laughter that rose from every room. The male rollers would begin to sing a cantorial melody and the female rollers assisted with a folk song. They would compete with their knowledge of the melodies.

As *Pesach* approached there was more work. Mother's silver wedding presents came out of the locked drawer where they had spent the year. Once a year we took out the silver spoons, forks, knives and candlesticks large and small and polished them with chalk.

How surprised Mother was one time when she took out

the silver and was unable to find the silver spoons. What could have happened? If a thief had taken them he would have taken everything else, not only the spoons. There ensued an investigation and a search. In the middle of this storm Father returned from the synagogue. He realized immediately that he had been found out and had to confess that he was guilty of removing the spoons.

This was the story: In town there was a man called Yoshe who drove a horse and wagon for a living. He had many children and was very poor. He came to Father for advice. His poor old horse, his only source of livelihood, had finally given out and died. He did not have a penny to buy another horse. What should he do? The rabbi must advise him in his desperate situation. Father, too, was desperate. What kind of advice could he give him? The best advice would have been to give him money for another horse, but where would the money come from? He himself was not even familiar with the sight of money. He had a good idea. Remembering all the silver in the drawer—why not open it and take out a few items of silver and give it to Yoshe to pawn so as to buy a horse? But Yoshe must agree to redeem the silver and bring it back in time for *Pesach*. Fortunately Yoshe was able to redeem the spoons and the holiday was undisturbed. It was not the last time that Mother's silver items disappeared from that drawer so that Father could help people in need.

Several weeks before *Pesach*, as soon as the weather warmed up and the mild breezes began to blow, we dragged out tables and benches from the synagogue and placed our religious books upon them to air them out. The entire yard of the synagogue was carpeted with open books. We would beat the books with our hands to get the dust out, and the rest of the job of airing the pages was left to the wind. We turned the pages of the large *Gemoras* and longed to know what was in them, but we could only look at them uncomprehendingly "like a rooster looking at a prayer book." The

scrubbing and *kashering* of the house followed a prescribed ritual. All the tables and benches were taken outdoors. Heated bricks were placed on the furniture and water poured over them. Thus they became *kosher* for *Pesach*. In order to *kosher* the silver and special dishes, a long piece of string was tied around each item. Next they were carried to the town bathhouse where a huge kettle full of boiling water was ready and waiting. Then the dishes and silver were dipped in the kettle three times, and cold water was poured over them. That was truly *kosher*. If the dishes were new they were simply taken to the nearby brook for cleansing.

A few days before *Pesach* the activity in our home was like a circus. All day long the town's Jews would come to sell their *chometz*. Each person came with a list of his *chometz*. The "sale"—the transfer of all forbidden foods to the rabbi—went at full speed for a good two days. Our dining room became an office. Around the huge table sat several recorders who wrote down everyone's *chometz*. When we children grew up we would get the job of recorders. Every Jew had to report precisely what kind, and how much *chometz* he possessed. The rich would come with a list; the poor could remember the little they had. For a couple of days our family became the greatest magnates of the town, since all the *chometz* foods were sold cheaply to the rabbi of the town, though no money changed hands. For every sale there was a handshake with Father holding a handkerchief out to the seller to close the transaction. This signified that the *chometz* no longer belonged to the seller. For conducting this transaction each would leave a few coins—the amount depended on the status of the person and how much *chometz* he possessed. Some would give more, some less. But the selling of the *chometz* was our greatest source of income of the year.

On *Erev Pesach* Father's *goy* would appear, and the entire bundle of papers with the recorded *chometz* would be sold to him. By ten o'clock in the morning of *Erev Pesach* the *chometz* of the house, in the form of the painstakingly compiled lists, were burned by the *goy*. For that the *goy* would get a good drink of whiskey and a few coins.

The entire house was now *pesachdik*. From the kitchen came the aroma of gefilte fish, golden chicken, chicken soup, roast turkey. In honor of *Pesach* all would go to the town's bathhouse to steam and wash off the week's contact with *chometz*. Upon return from the bathhouse, new clothes were ready: a dress for one, a pair of new shoes for another. All winter long we saved, pinching pennies, in order to be able to renew our wardrobe for *Pesach*. How great the joy when all the children were able to dress up in new clothes. At the *seder* we wore our best and most beautiful, and the table was covered with a snow-white tablecloth, glittering candlesticks and silver dishes. Everything sparkled and our faces shone with excitement and anticipation. Mother looked like a queen in her new gray dress with its lace collar with pointed edges, her diamond earrings, and the golden chain with a watch on her chest. A sort of tired light shone from her gentle and delicate face. After so many weeks of toil and worry, what was the source of her strength to be able to welcome the holiday with so much love and joy? It must have been love of her husband, her eight children and the creator.

Everything was ready for the *seder*. The table was set, the candles were lit, the wine sparkled in the bottles and the "throne" (a large chair with cushions) was ready for the king —Father. The house was full of aromas and anticipation.

The *seder* began when the door opened and Father and the boys came in from the synagogue with an expansive "*Gut yontif*." Father was not much of a singer, but on *Pesach* he had to sing a lot and we children would help out. He put his all into "Blessed Be the Lord" or "Blessed Is He Who Kept His Promise to Israel," and his "Pour out Thy Wrath" was probably heard all over town. We girls certainly envied the boys because they could ask the four questions. The only thing we were allowed to do was to open the door for Elijah the prophet.

The *seder* lasted till late at night. Drained, we would finish with "Who Knows One?" and "*Chad Gadya*," which Mother with her sweet voice so loved to sing.

Pesach was the best and most beautiful holiday for us. We

could eat *matzoh* for an entire week, there was no school, and we played games. For one game we would make a hole in the ground and toss nuts, trying to get them into the hole. Another game consisted of cracking a round *matzoh*, setting the pieces carefully together and having someone try to find the crack.

Even the weekdays of *Pesach* were a holiday. And what a holiday! *Pesach*, like *Succoth*, consisted of eight days. The first and last two days were holidays and the four intervening days were half-holidays. We visited Grandfather Velvel and other relatives during the four half-holidays. Grandfather always sent a large wagon packed with hay and straw, covered with a spread made of leather, to make it soft and comfortable for us. And we, all dressed up in our new clothes, would set out on the road. The horses could barely pull the wagon because of the deep mud that had not yet dried out. As we passed through the villages, we saw that the *goyim* were getting ready for their Easter.

The first stop was our visit at the estate of our Grandparents in Shikeroveh, where we were welcomed into the large parlor. How majestic the large, beautiful house with the spacious rooms looked, surrounded on all sides by gardens and orchards. Ready for us on the table were a variety of goodies and *nosherie*, all of which we had to taste. We could not stay too long, because we had more stops to make.

The next visit was to Uncle Yehuda Leib's, Grandfather Velvel's brother, who lived in the town of Bakleroveh. Uncle Yehuda Leib had a large family—five daughters and three sons. The daughters were tall and beautiful and of marriageable age. But grooms were hard to come by because Uncle Yehuda Leib could not afford a dowry. We were always welcome guests at their house. The entire family was very devoted to each other. There, too, we could not stop for very long, because evening was approaching and we had to return home.

On the return trip we liked to drop in on Grandfather's farmhands to see how they too had decorated their shacks in preparation for their Easter. They would wait impatiently to

break fast after the six weeks of Lent during which they were not permitted to taste meat or milk products. They existed on herring, bread and different cereals. The Christians, like the Jews, were fanatically religious and superstitious. The oppressive Russian government kept them almost in bondage. They did not have the right to their own schools nor could they learn Polish or Lithuanian. The peasants were forever plotting, but were powerless when it came to improving their lot. We children used to like to go to their shacks and listen to their beautiful folksongs. Our *Pesach* often coincided with their Easter, and, when it did, they used to present us with colored eggs in accordance with their old custom.

Nearly every weekday during *Pesach* we went visiting. We traveled to the nearby town of Psheroshleh where the town's rabbi was our Uncle Lazer, who was married to Grandfather Boruch's eldest daughter Soreh Necheh. He had been a pupil of Grandfather Boruch. Father had a low opinion of Uncle Lazer, and used to say that he was a good scholar but a hard and cold human being. He very much loved his sister, Soreh Necheh, who was a fine, sensitive person. We often went to visit her. We liked her and especially liked to listen to her sing, which she did all the time, even when she felt sad and unhappy. The singing must have helped her express her frustration. She particularly liked to sing the Hebrew songs with words by the poets Bialik and Chernikovski, and in her beautiful soprano she would sing with deep feeling such songs as "I Have a Garden" and "Laugh at the Dreams." I could never understand how the delicate and gentle girl could have married a man like Lazer.



It was harder to be gloomy after *Pesach* than after *Succoth* because how could one be sad when spring was on the threshold with all its glory? It was so pleasantly warm and such a joy for us children to play all sorts of outdoor games. Moreover, thirty-three days after *Pesach* came *Lag B'Omer*. It was the one day in the six weeks between *Pesach* and *Shevuot*

when any kind of celebration such as a wedding or picnic, which we children enjoyed, was allowed. The rest of the six weeks was a period of mourning for the 2000 students of Rabbi Akiba, who died in an epidemic between *Pesach* and *Shevout* 2000 years ago.

On *Erev Shevuot* we bathed in the river nearby and picked greenery and ferns to decorate the house. Mother baked, producing full trays of sweet rolls and fried blintzes, because on *Shevuot* we could eat only dairy. We children slept very little on the night of *Shevuot* because the synagogue was full and noisy all night long. All its lamps were burning; the people stood and studied diligently. That was the custom on the first night of *Shevuot*, commemorating the giving of the Torah to Moses, when one must study the entire night.

Each person studied according to his own fashion, some quietly and others aloud, some with a Torah melody and some with no particular melody. They were so absorbed in study that they hardly noticed that night had turned to day. The sun's golden rays shone and the people arose as if from a pleasant dream and began their holiday prayers. After services, a large crowd came to our house and Mother treated everybody to hot coffee and sweet rolls. Father explained to the people the significance of *Shevuot* and of studying all night. *Shevuot* was one of the most important holidays—studying all night would leave an imprint that would not be forgotten easily.

One of the deepest impressions of my youth was my Father's trip to the land of Israel in 1908. This is how it happened. Grandfather Velvel subscribed to the Yiddish newspaper *Der Tog* (*The Day*) which appeared in Warsaw and which was conducting a promotion campaign to attract more readers and subscribers. The first prize was a trip to Palestine, at the time an extraordinary event. How surprised we were when Grandfather won it. The joy of the entire family was unimaginable.

It was no small matter to travel to the Holy Land. But what did Grandfather do? Almost without hesitation he transferred the beautiful gift to Father, saying, in effect, "Don't think that I don't want to travel and see the Holy Land. After all, which Jew who prays three times a day does not say, 'And our eyes will see your return to Zion with mercy?' But I believe that you, the great scholar and Torah student, are more deserving of such a trip, and perhaps it was because of your heavenly intervention that I won the trip. Therefore, don't hesitate, because I am giving it to you with my whole heart."

The preparations for the trip took a while, and right after *Pesach* that year Father was to go to Warsaw, where the members of the excursion were supposed to meet before going to Palestine. On the Saturday before departure Father gave a sermon and said goodbye to the people. The departure was an emotional one, for, despite the fact that Father loved Zion deeply and passionately and wished to see the land of the Fathers, the trip frightened him, especially the long distance and the ocean voyage.

Soon after he left, the town's Jews had an extra ritual of going every day to the post office and waiting impatiently for *Der Tog*. Every day, as soon as the trip started and as long as it lasted, the front page of the newspaper would carry a report of the voyage with photographs of the travelers. Among the travelers were such well known personalities as the famous author Frishman, the editor of the paper *Yatzkhan*, the humorist author Vendroff, and many other important public personages. In every report there was something about the rabbi from Filipoveh, for example, how the rabbi was looking for a *minyon* for services, how he presented a sermon for them, how he was never seen without a book in his hand, how he sat and studied all the time. It made a good impression on the readers and the newspaper congratulated itself in having so important a traveler. The whole town read the newspaper and avidly took in every word. It was no small matter to them that the newspaper would write about their very own rabbi and pay him so much respect.

I shall never forget the day Father returned from his long and distant voyage. Everyone knew ahead of time exactly when the rabbi was due to arrive. Everyone was curious to see and hear about the wonders and miracles of his trip. It was a warm summer day; the benches and tables from the synagogue were placed in the yard so that the people could sit down to hear what the rabbi had to tell them about his long sojourn. No one considered that he might be tired, or that he might wish to spend the first few hours with his family after being away for a month. What consideration? Nothing counted except that the people wanted to see him and hear him.

The yard of the synagogue was filled even before the horse-drawn vehicle brought the rabbi home. When he finally did arrive the people started pushing one another in their eagerness to shake his hand. Despite his fatigue, the curiosity of the crowd that wanted to hear about his impressions immediately pleased him and dispelled his exhaustion.

Hours passed, and the warm summer day merged into a cool evening. They prayed the afternoon and evening prayers and the crowd continued to sit, riveted, listening to the rabbi's engrossing stories. He went on tirelessly telling them of the different countries through which he had passed, the cities he had seen, the people he had met. But most of all he painted a picture of the Holy Land.

At the time the country was mostly desert. Tel Aviv, the various *kibbutzim*, and settlements did not even exist. The entire movement of the return to Zion, the *Aliyah*, was still just a dream, but for the pious rabbi the main experience was Jerusalem—that is, old Jerusalem and the Western Wall. And how rich were the colors of the Western Wall that he painted: He described *erev shabbat* when Jews from all parts of the world came to the Wall to pray, dressed in multicolored clothes: the Polish Jew in his long *kapoteh* girded with a sash and wearing a fur *shtreimel;* the Caucasian Jew in grey vest; the Oriental Jew in white coat and turban; the Bukharan Jew with flower-embroidered robe and fur coat. All filed through the narrow, dark alleys of old Jerusalem, the same alleys

through which Jesus was led to his crucifixion, to the Western Wall. What force or power united them all and led them to pour out their prayers and lamentations to the mute, black wall? The large black rocks of the wall were wet with the tears of the faithful. Prayers in various languages and dialects had been poured out there by many generations of plagued and oppressed Jews.

A strange picture was presented by the small congregation sitting in the yard of the synagogue, listening breathlessly to their rabbi about a distant, foreign land which they had never seen and probably never would. And yet, what a closeness they felt for it. All the names of the different places were familiar from their school years and from their prayers three times a day. It was not the rabbi standing before them telling of the distant country, but a prophet of yore speaking of it to them. The happiest person that day was Grandfather Velvel. He knew he had done the right thing by giving my father the opportunity to go to the land of Israel, for he would not have been able to describe and transmit his impressions as wonderfully as Father had that day. And that was his greatest reward.

The summer heat lasted long that year. It was already *Tisha B'ov*. We would eat milk products before the one-day fast and hurry to the synagogue to lament the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. The people took off their shoes and sat on low benches or boxes, like sitting *shivah* for the dead. Everyone lit a small candle, and the light of the small flame seemed to say in a sad and sobbing voice, "How solitary lies the city," as if the destruction of the temple and of the entire country had all happened yesterday. The people, in broken spirit, lamented. Sighs and weeping could be heard from all corners of the synagogue. They cried not only about the long ago destruction of the temple but also about the pain and misfortune of the besieged Jews.

Mother put a large pillow on the floor near the door leading from the house to the synagogue and sat on it, leaving

the doors open since the women's section of the synagogue was closed at night. And we children listened through the open door of the synagogue. Mother cried bitterly for us in Yiddish about what the Romans had done to the Jews, how they burned the temple, destroyed the Holy Land, and slaughtered our best sons and daughters. We children didn't fully understand, but we cried along with Mother. She assured us that the Almighty would not abandon the Jewish people. The day the temple was destroyed and the people scattered in the diaspora, a Messiah was born, and in the end he would come and redeem the Jews from their long and bitter exile. With childhood sensibilities we were confident that it would really happen.

Despite the fast on a long hot summer day, we felt no hunger or fatigue, and, along with all those who were praying, we knew we would go to the *guten ort*—the cemetery. It was called the *guten ort* because the *maaminim* would go there to the afterlife they believed in and be freed of their troubles.

At the end of the day, before breaking the fast of *Tisha B'ov*, we went to pray in the *guten ort*. It was quite a long way out of town and we dragged ourselves there, exhausted and hot, through the fields and meadows. We children still had enough energy to pick prickly burrs and throw them around.

Right after *Shabbat Nachmu*, when that day's portion of the Torah consoled Jews and promised them that the Messiah would come, Mother and the children again traveled to Grandfather's estate for a few weeks, leaving only Father, Reichl and me in the house. We were supposed to take care of Father. He was deeply absorbed in his studies and paid little attention to our comings and goings. Without Mother's supervision we ran around town like wild goats, although we were only fourteen and twelve at the time. We learned that Gedalveh the merchant was about to marry off his daughter.

A wedding in town was an important event. Everyone in the *shtetl* would come to the wedding, there were no invitations. One could come and make merry; all considered themselves part of the extended family in good times and bad. Reichl and I were among the wedding party. The house where

the wedding was held was packed with so many people that you could not squeeze in a pin. It was hot and people perspired, but that did not bother them nor prevent them from dancing. They danced *sheralach* and especially the *baroiges* dance. The *klezmer* played late into the night and the crowd danced on and on. After midnight the tables were set for the wedding meal and the seven blessings were conducted. Not until the crack of dawn did we arrive home, perspired and fatigued.

Early the next day, I woke up with a terrible headache and felt that I had a high temperature. Father, arriving from prayers at the synagogue, saw the state I was in and became alarmed. The town did not have a civilian doctor, only a military one. Because of the proximity of the German border, there was always a squadron of soldiers and officers in town, including a doctor. In the event of illness, we always used this doctor. He was a tall, handsome man, wearing a light blue uniform, who lived in the most beautiful brick house at the military hospital. The first time he arrived I was very frightened, because a doctor was called only when the patient was in desperate shape. I had only caught a cold at the wedding, I thought. But my illness was not a mere cold. It was typhus. My mother returned as soon as she heard of my illness. A typhus epidemic had spread throughout the entire town and I was the unlucky one to catch the illness and to infect the entire family.

In those days sanitary and medical conditions were very primitive. When an epidemic broke out, there was simply no way to stop it. I was sick for several weeks and the military doctor became a frequent visitor to our home, but he did not have the means or the knowledge to stop the epidemic.

Most frightening of all was when Mother took sick. For Mother to have typhus in her condition was much more dangerous, because she was pregnant with our third sister, Luba. Even the dispassionate military doctor, whom, it seemed, nothing bothered, was upset over Mother's serious condition and suggested that we call a well-known German doctor. Mother fell ill just on the eve of *Succoth*, but the holiday was ignored because who cared about a holiday when the woman

of the house was sick? Not only our family was broken up and downhearted, but the entire town was upset and sympathized with us in our misery. No one even thought of celebrating the holiday.

On *Erev Shmini Hatzeret* her condition worsened and only then was the German doctor brought in. He examined her, gave her medicine and said that the crisis was approaching. Leaving the house he said to my father that the medicine apparently had no effect. He said, "The best thing is to turn to your own medicine (prayers) and perhaps God will help." It did not take long for the word to get out and for the synagogue to fill up with the town's Jews. No one left the synagogue for the entire night and they kept saying psalms. Grandfather and Grandmother and the entire family fell in front of the Holy Ark and with crying and supplication asked that God the Merciful have mercy on Dvoireh Reisl and grant her years to mother her small children. Grandmother begged and with a choked voice cried into the Holy Ark, "Have mercy on my child; take me instead, because I am ready to sacrifice myself for my young daughter." The town believed that those prayers were heard because from that night onward Mother began to recover. Three months later she gave birth to Luba.

My Mother's recovery did not stop the epidemic. It continued to spread like wildfire. Every day more people succumbed to typhus and many, many left this world. Among them was our Grandmother Libche Freide. Her prayer that she be sacrificed for Mother and the entire *mishpocheh* was accepted.

Grandmother's premature death at the age of fifty made a deep impression on me. We did not want to believe—we could not—that our dear grandmother was no longer among the living. I remember how, early on a winter morning, a messenger came from the estate with the terrible news. Crying, we left for the estate. Upon arriving there we found a large crowd from the surrounding towns gathered already.

Lying on the floor, in the large hall, was Grandmother, covered with a sheet and surrounded with numerous candles burning in candlesticks. All the mirrors and pictures were covered. Chanting psalms in a sad manner were Grandfather and his three sons Kalmen, Yosef and Alter. His daughter, my aunt Sorel, who was still quite young, sat stunned.

Despite the deep snow and frost, the funeral took place that very day at the cemetery of Bakleroveh. When we arrived at the cemetery that none of our family had ever visited, Father was very apprehensive. On the night that Grandmother had become ill he had had a dream in which he went to a funeral at the very same Bakleroveh cemetery where they were now burying Grandmother. Throughout her illness he sensed that the verdict of heaven was that we would lose her. My sister Luba, born three months later, was named after this Grandmother. Grandmother's death brought to a halt the joyful holiday spirit of *Chanukah*. Our whole family went into deep mourning for a long time. Father tried to console Mother that at least she had had great *naches* when alive. She had lived to have grandchildren by her oldest daughter and had been privileged to lead her oldest son Kalmen to the *chuppa* to marry Leah a few months before her death and soon after Father's return from Israel.

And what a wedding it was! It was simply indescribable. For a long time the entire family prepared for the wedding. It was no small matter to marry into such a wealthy and aristocratic family as the Rabinovitzes from Tavrig. Grandfather and Grandmother made the greatest preparations so that the groom's side would be able to hold its own. Most of all, they were happy that finally, after all the matchmaking, Kalmen was about to be married into a respectable family.

Kalmen was very fussy, and he sought a bride with every desirable quality, especially beauty. He himself was very handsome, studied the Talmud a bit, spoke German and Polish nicely, and above all, he was a descendant of the Zymans, a well known family in the region of Suvalk. Finding a suitable bride, therefore, took a long time. The one he finally chose possessed all the qualities that he desired, except one—she was not beautiful. But her character and gentility and the

fine status of the family finally influenced him to announce the engagement. The wedding day was set for the Sabbath after *Tisha B'ov*.

In order to get to Tavrig in Lithuania from Filipoveh in Poland it was necessary to go through eastern Germany. All the *mishpocheh* in the vicinity were invited, and they all made elaborate preparations for the wedding. Grandmother ordered blue velvet dresses with white mother-of-pearl buttons for me and my sister Reichl. These were for the trip. To wear at the wedding they sewed for us bright blue batiste dresses decorated with silk bands and bows.

Those preparations and the voyage were as impressive for us as the wedding itself. At the age of twelve this was my first trip on a train. We were not able to tear ourselves away from the windows, admiring the landscape and the large, neat German towns. We did not want to miss anything. When the train stopped at Insterburg, we went for a walk through the large station swarming with people. We did not notice that a German woman was following us, and when we stopped for a minute she quickly took a pair of scissors out of her pocket and was about to cut off my long chestnut braids. Happily, one of our relatives noticed it and raised an alarm. They chased the woman, but she disappeared in the confusion, and I was left with my braids. This episode unsettled the entire wedding party, but when we arrived at the German-Lithuanian border even greater episodes awaited us. And this is what happened.



The Russian authorities did not let us cross the border into Lithuania (at that time Lithuania was part of Russia), saying that our papers were not in order. Our passports and passes were actually in perfect order, but the border commander knew that this was the groom's family traveling to the wealthy Rabinovitzes for the wedding, and figured on collecting a bribe. There was a hue and a cry and much pleading, but nothing was of any use. The commander became stubborn and refused to open the gate and let us through.

What was to be done? No one expected such a welcome. There were no telephones then, so it was necessary to send a messenger on to Tavrig to the bride's family with the news. In the meantime, night fell and we had to look for lodging for the night for our party, about thirty people. We were near Loksargen, a small German town that did not have any hotels. Finally, an inn was found but everybody had to sleep on the floor, since the innkeeper did not have any beds for us. Somehow the night passed, and bright and early the next morning Dzhenya, the bride's sister, arrived with a permit, in black and white, that allowed all the members of the party to cross the border.

Dzhenya was the eldest daughter who had to take over the supervision of her five sisters and two brothers when her father died (her mother had died earlier). Upon his death she returned from America, where she had succeeded in a business manufacturing ties and had become wealthy. She took over the family department store and married off five sisters, each with a large dowry.

Uncle Kalmen's bride, Leah, was the youngest sister and it had been a bit difficult to find an appropriate match for her. But nothing stopped Dzhenya, and so one cold winter day she came to Filipoveh to find out if Kalmen Zyman was a proper groom for her sister. Were the Zymans as respectable a family as the matchmaker asserted? When she arrived in the carriage and entered our house we were all stunned to see so tall and impressive a figure. She was dressed in a caracul coat and a fur hat that made her look even taller than she was. Speaking in a masculine voice she seemed more male than female. She was an educated and interesting person with a lot of experience in the wide world. For us small-town folks she was a phenomenon. She brought a letter to Father from his uncle, "the holy man of Gavreh" as he was called. Gavreh was near Tavrig. The letter revealed what a gold mine the marriage would be for Kalmen and what a rare girl the bride was.

Mother was at a loss as to how to entertain the important guest since she simply had nothing in the house. It was cold

in the house and she struggled trying to ignite wet peat in the stove to heat the house. But Dzhenya did not stay long in our house. She rented a coach and went off to Grandfather's house to see the groom. The groom and his family apparently made a good impression, for the match took place and we were on our way to the wedding.

Despite the sleepless night on the floor of the inn, we all cheered up, as is appropriate for wedding guests, and we climbed into a large carriage for the rest of the trip to Tavrig. Tavrig was a large city compared with Filipoveh. The streets were beautiful with planted trees. In the center of the city was a large marketplace full of stores, and in the center of the marketplace stood the Rabinovitzes' two-story white house where the wedding was to take place.

The house was large enough to accommodate the large crowd. The celebration started on Friday, before the blessing of the candles, and continued until Sunday afternoon. The relatives on the groom's side could not help being impressed by the affluence surrounding them. The banquets were fit for royalty. We hardly knew how to eat many of the dishes that were served. An especially deep impression was made on everybody Saturday morning when we arrived to pray in the beautiful bright prayer house, and were told that it was the Rabinovitzes' private synagogue that their late father had built for his family. It was beyond the Zymans' conception for a family to own its own synagogue. It was indeed a goldmine for Kalmen.

Among our wedding party were Grandfather Reb Boruch and his daughter, Aunt Rochel Guttel. She was on her way to America to join her bridegroom who had settled there a short time earlier. It was so sad traveling back from the wedding, because not only would Kalmen no longer be with us but Rochel Guttel was also departing. To part with her was hard, for she was much beloved by the entire family. Lively and happy by nature, she had a beautiful, strong soprano

voice. We loved to hear her singing songs in Yiddish, Hebrew, and even Russian during her frequent visits to our town. She now abandoned us and would be wandering in that distant *trayf* land, America, where people were only interested in making a dollar.

Our grandparents were broken up and downhearted about their daughter's departure. Whenever I went to visit them in Balbirishok it brightened up their lives a bit. Balbirishok was a larger town than Filipoveh, and it had been blessed with much beauty. The town was situated on the banks of the Nyehman River, the longest and most beautiful in Lithuania. Originating in White Russia, the river twists and meanders through the forests and fields of Lithuania and eastern Germany, and empties into the Baltic Sea. On the side of the Nyehman opposite Balbirishok were thick pine forests where people from the region went to vacation.

Since there was no schooling in Filipoveh except for the *chaider*, and my mother was anxious for me to get a good education, I was sent to Balbirishok at the age of twelve. I spent two full years at my paternal grandparents' home, surrounded by love and tenderness, hovered over and spoiled by Grandma and Grandpa and by Reichl and Dobreh, my aunts, who were still young girls. During the day I went to a Russian school, and in the evening a group of girls my age and I went to Hebrew school headed by Avrom Binyeh, considered the best teacher in town.

The winter of 1908, when I started to study there, he and his eight children were steeped in sorrow, for a short while earlier his wife had died while giving birth to twins, who survived. The mood throughout was depressed, their need and poverty overwhelming. A teacher did not earn much in those days. When the girls of the town and I went to the *chaider* we tried to help out with the housekeeping. It was such a pity to see the neglected house with all those little children.

Grandfather was aware of Avrom Binyeh's situation, and he also knew that it was necessary to send the intelligent Binyeh boys to study in a *yeshiva*. The middle boy, Mottel, barely fourteen years old, was especially keen of mind. Once Grandfather tested Mottel and his two brothers in their

knowledge of Talmud, he was inspired to start a small *yeshiva* in his house. Thus was born Grandfather's *yeshiva*, which was to grow in size and stature and become famous in Lithuania.

I recall the preparation that Grandpa made at the beginning of the lesson. He would remove his long black *kapoteh* and broad-brimmed black hat and remain in his *yarmulke* and a long fringed garment. He would place a chair on the sofa, light a candle in a candlestick, and lean the *Gemora* against the back of the chair. Then he would push the sofa away from the stove and stand by the stove to present the lesson.

He was not a demanding teacher, and his lessons were not merely dull explanations. He would weave into strict law of the *Gemora* a story from the *Midrash*, the biblical commentary on the law. Not only did he like to study, intoning the *Gemora* chant, but he would improvise melodies of his own. Grandmother and my Aunts Reichl and Dobreh and I sat in the next room listening to them with great enjoyment. We especially liked the legends of the *Midrash*. Whenever Grandfather became excited by a special portion of the *Midrash* he would call us in, repeat the portion, and embellish it a little.

He liked to study till late at night. Quite often he would drop off to sleep while reading the Torah and awaken with a verse on his lips. If the verse was a good one, like the promise that the Jews will return to Israel, it was considered a sign of good tidings—perhaps a cheerful letter would arrive from Rochel Guttel in America or other good reports would come from the rest of the family. But if the verse was not so good he would walk around crestfallen and worried, which meant that if Father was worried the entire family became sad. But it would not last very long because soon came the holy sabbath which could not be disturbed, for it was necessary to meet sabbath, "the Queen of Joy," without gloomy secularity.

The sabbath was really full of joy and song, for each sabbath different songs were sung. Grandfather's songs were well known. For many years his devotional melodies have been ringing in his children's and grandchildren's homes.

Those two years in Grandfather's house made a deep impression on me, and when the time arrived for me to leave Balbirishok, I was not anxious to do so.

After my return home in 1910, I missed not only Grandfather's home but also his pupil Mottel, considered by Grandfather as his best pupil. He had a keen mind, a good memory and was very diligent. Going to his father's school every day, he and I would exchange a couple of words and always look for an opportunity to chat. Thus our acquaintance developed. I would wait impatiently for him to arrive at Grandfather's *yeshiva*. A strange warm feeling would embrace me whenever I saw him. I was so happy when Grandfather praised him, saying, "He will be a great personality among the Jews." I did not understand then that a deep innocent love was developing, that first most beautiful love of youth.

Arriving in Filipoveh on *Erev Rosh Hashonah*, I was a welcome guest, and the entire household was happy to have me home again since they had not seen me for two years. It was good to be home, but the holiday was soon disrupted. On the first night of *Rosh Hashonah*, a fire broke out in the town, and at first it appeared as if only a few back alleys were involved, but suddenly the wind came up and sparks began to spread over different parts of the town including the market area. As the sparks spread so did the nightmarish cries and lamentations. All the houses made of wood were consumed by the terrible fire—only the brick and stone houses remained. As usual, the rich lived in the brick buildings, the poor in the wooden ones. So the few possessions of the poor went up in smoke. The synagogue and the rabbi's house were built of brick and were saved.

The entire market area looked like the aftermath of a pogrom. Everybody tried to rescue from their homes whatever they could. The marketplace was choked with beds, tables, dressers, chairs and piles of bedding, anything that it was possible to carry from the burning houses. People really risked their lives to save their hard-earned possessions.

A fire in those days was one of the greatest misfortunes. People were not insured and when a fire broke out and burned the house down, we believed that it was destroyed forever. It was very difficult to recover from such a disaster.

The crowd that began to gather in the synagogue that *Rosh Hashonah* morning presented a sad picture. Their faces were blackened by smoke and soot, and from not sleeping all night. Even those who did not suffer losses were affected by the great destruction that the fire caused in the town, except, perhaps, my father.

As was his custom, with the *tallis* over his head, he prayed and begged for mercy from the "Ruler of the Universe" for his suffering community. At the reading of the Torah he announced that he wanted to say something to the people. A murmur passed through the synagogue as if everyone was asking: What could the Rabbi tell us and how could he console us? But he was little affected by the murmuring and whispering of the crowd. Quietly and gently he stepped upon the *bimah* and turned to the people and said, "Friends, the great misfortune that was visited upon our congregation is not punishment, only a trial. The Ruler of the Universe, whose ways are hidden, wants to test us to know whether we are really good and honest Jews, Jews ready to share with our neighbors. Hence my plea to those who were not affected by the fire is to help those who were burned out. I propose that everyone take into his house neighbors and share with them all needs until their houses are gradually rebuilt."

In the days that followed nothing stood in Father's way in his effort to restore our *shtetl*. He traveled, gave sermons, and collected money for those who had lost their homes. He really did not rest until the town was rebuilt and had recovered.

Among the lads in Grandfather's *yeshiva* in Balbirishok were three pupils who excelled in their studies, and Grandfather decided that they needed extra supervision in order to become great scholars. And who better to supervise them

than the rabbi of Filipoveh? Hence he decided to send them to study with my father. So, one day right after the high holy days in 1910, when the town was still in a depressed state from the fire, three youngsters suddenly showed up at our house. They were Behrl the big one, Behrl the little one—and Mottel. They slept in an inn and ate their meals in a different home every day—*esen teg*. They started their studies immediately. The synagogue swelled with the sounds and songs of the students.

The boys spent about two years in our town. At first Mottel and I exchanged bashful looks and said hardly a word to each other, but slowly he became a regular visitor in our house, always finding an appropriate excuse to drop in. He finally found the courage to suggest to Mother that since I did not attend school any more and might forget what I had learned, it would be a fine idea for him to teach me. Mother liked the plan and Father agreed.

Every day around twilight he taught me the *Tanach*, a little Talmud, and Hebrew, the holy language. We got through the entire Bible. He was a good teacher, and thanks to his strictness I accomplished a lot in the two years. I learned the Bible well and really became proficient in Hebrew. I remember reading my first Hebrew book, *The Love of Zion* by Abraham Mapo. The heroes of the book—Amnon and Tamehr—and their frustrated love seemed to mirror the deep love we were beginning to feel for each other. Wintertime we studied in Father's alcove, and summertime we met in the women's section of the synagogue. Along with the studies, we poured out our warm feelings for each other. We were as careful as thieves lest our feelings, God forbid, be discovered.

Despite our caution, Father, with his perceptiveness, noted what had happened between us and decided that it would be best to separate us. Thus, it was arranged to send me to study in Tavrig, at uncle Kalmen's, where I had attended his wedding. The excuse that my father gave was that since I already knew the Bible and Hebrew well, I could devote myself to secular studies such as Russian, German, history and geography. Usually girls remained at home and only went to *chaider* to learn to read the prayers in Hebrew or Yiddish.

It was difficult for me to leave Filipoveh and even more difficult to part with Mottel, but when Father made a decision it had to be followed. It did not take Mottel long to leave Filipoveh and go to study in the *yeshiva* of Mir, a small town in Lithuania. After he left gloom enveloped me. For hours I haunted the places where we had been together, sad in thought, feeling that with Mottel's departure the most beautiful years of my childhood had ended. After a while, at the age of sixteen in 1912, I went to Tavrig where a foreign world with different experiences and trials awaited me.



I shall never forget Uncle Kalmen's generosity and devotion to me. He came especially to meet me at the train station in Tilsit, a large city in eastern Germany. The first thing he did was to take me to a large modern store, the likes of which I had never seen, and to buy me an entire wardrobe. He simply made me over from head to foot. When I took a look in the large mirror, I could not recognize myself. Instead of the small skinny girl in a short, tight, worn old coat with high buttoned shoes, stood a girl with a blushing face in a beautiful blue coat with a small blue hat over thick chestnut hair. Uncle examined me and said, "Now I can take you to Tavrig."

I still remembered the large spacious house in Tavrig from Kalmen's wedding. But how different everything looked! I hardly knew Aunt Leah at all, but I came to realize what a fine and good person she was. She was very tactful in getting me to feel at home. The luxurious management of the house surprised me at first. No wonder—who in Filipoveh had a cook and two servants? Every meal was to me a holiday banquet. But before very long I got used to the luxury. I even had a tutor to help me catch up with the other students at the Russian high school. More than anything I was interested in the store which was part of the house.

The store was large and contained everything in the world. The clientele consisted mostly of military personnel who served in the local Russian garrison. High ranking officers and their ladies would come to the store to buy, and I liked

to watch the clerks serve them. Uncle Kalmen did not like it very much when I was underfoot, and he would say, "Go prepare your lessons instead of hanging around here."

I became friendly with a few clerks, especially with Rivkeh, a girl who was much older and more experienced than I. We would often take a walk in the city park where, during the summer, a military band would play popular music. We also went to the movies which was a novelty in 1913. For hours we were able to sit in the darkened movie houses and look at rapid, mute, fantastic pictures.

That winter, Aunt Leah's sister Chavah came to visit, leaving her family in Russia. Since all the rooms were taken, they installed her in the room on the second floor that I shared with Aunt Dzhenya. It was a large roomy chamber and another person would not make it crowded. Dzhenya was very friendly to me and in the evening, when she did not go to her club to play cards, she liked to tell me about her experiences in America where she had spent so many years. She helped with my lessons and got me to read Russian poems aloud, saying that reading aloud would improve my Russian accent. But, once Chavah arrived black clouds seemed to hover over the entire house.

Dzhenya no longer spent evenings with me, but devoted herself entirely to communal affairs, opening a loan institution for the needy. Every evening Chavah would sit on her bed and bemoan the bitter fate and the troubles she had to endure from her husband, her two young children, and, in general, from the entire family. I was then too young and inexperienced to know what her real reason for complaining was, but my friend Rivkeh recognized her mental sickness and understood. She warned me to be careful, said that Chavah was not herself and nobody knew what she might do.

I, in my naivete, noticed nothing until one winter night when Dzhenya was not in the room. I suddenly woke up from my sleep and heard someone walking in the room. It was very dark at first and I could not see anything. I was paralyzed with fear, unable to move a muscle. I remembered Rivkeh's warning when my eyes got accustomed to the dark and I saw Chavah walking around our room. I was covered

with a cold sweat and lay motionless, for how long I do not know. Every minute was an eternity. Then I heard the door open and close, and heard some movements in the attic. I lay like that not moving a muscle until the day began to break. Only then did I get up enough courage to jump out of bed and run up to the attic. The terrible picture I saw followed me for a long time, and I was unable to put it out of my mind. Chavah was hanging stiff and blue from a post in the attic. I rushed downstairs with a fearful cry. My crying awakened the entire household. They stood about helplessly with heads bowed, grief-stricken by Chavah's suicide.

In the morning when Rivkeh came to see me she was frightened at my appearance and noticed a streak of gray hair on my head. I was not quite sixteen. From that awful night on I no longer felt at home in the large house, and the friendliness and gentleness on the part of everyone did not help. Only my cousins Shaul and Luba, Kalmen's twin children who were only three years old, were able with their childish innocence to distract me and bring a smile to my face.

Mottel had never stopped writing to me and, when he found out about the tragedy, inundated me with letters urging me to leave Tavrig. In my unhappiness I did not know what to do. I wanted to continue my studies and did not want to leave my friends, but at the same time Chavah's image kept following me and I was unable to find peace. A good occasion, my family's move from Filipoveh, helped me solve the complicated problem, and without thinking very long I decided to leave Tavrig where I had spent nearly two years, and return home.



When I left home I was a little girl; I returned a mature, developed young woman. The couple of years in Tavrig had made a great change in me. I found the entire family in a strange and elated mood, making preparations to leave Filipoveh. It hardly appeared believable that we would abandon our town of birth. But this is what happened.

In 1913 Father was approved as rabbi in Shirvint, Lithua-

nia. No matter how rooted the entire family was in Filipoveh and how difficult it was even to think of parting with relatives and friends, Shirvint was known as a town of rich men and scholars, and wages were much better then in Filipoveh. Before Father was given the position, about forty rabbis were interviewed. Every sabbath a different rabbi, sometimes two, gave a sermon in the synagogue. After many meetings and deliberations, the elders of Shirvint chose the appropriate one for the town—the rabbi of Filipoveh.

It was difficult for Father to make the decision. What influenced him to make the change was not the opulence of the elders but their scholarship—there truly were great scholars in Shirvint. Jews such as Moishe Lapikeh, Shmuel Green, and Kasriel Margolis and many more could match the learning of scholars in the largest congregations. Once Father decided, he wanted to arrive in Shirvint with the whole family, and that is why I was summoned from Tavrig.

It is hard to forget the day we left Filipoveh. The entire congregation gathered in the synagogue yard as if at a funeral, with crying and sighing heard from all sides. As downhearted as they were, Father and Mother were even more so. It was no small matter to have lived a lifetime among family and friends and suddenly to be uprooted, to face who knows what fate in a new place.

The wagon stood packed and ready to go, but it was very difficult to tear oneself away from all the familiar, beloved faces. From all sides people shouted, "Be well and go in peace." Slowly the wagon started moving, and the crowd moved after us. They accompanied us up to the last house on Suvalk Street and cried out, "Be well and go in peace. We shall never forget you." It was especially hard for Mother to tear herself away from her family and childhood friends, feeling that she would never see them again.

We traveled in the wagon to Suvalk, where we took a train to Vilna. From there we would take a horse-drawn coach to Shirvint. Vilna made a deep impression on me. The city was so different from the ones I knew. It was known as the Jerusalem of Eastern Europe. We felt at home among so many Jews who spoke Yiddish. In Vilna we met Uncle Yosef, Mother's

brother, who had recently married and lived in Meretch. He came to Vilna in order to help Mother buy furniture and various household objects for our new house.

At first sight Shirvint was not very impressive. It appeared to be more of a large village than a town, consisting of one street three miles long with a large marketplace in the middle. The houses were all wooden shacks. I always felt that Filipoveh, in comparison, was much more beautiful and worldly. When we arrived at our house, it was full of people who had come to see the new rabbi and his family. We children were confused by the large crowd and tired from the long voyage. We would gladly have foregone the guests and even the large table full of honey cakes, liquors, and various other goodies.

The house consisted of a dining room, a parlor that was separated by a curtain from a bedroom, one small room for seven children (two in a bed), and a long, narrow kitchen with a large baking oven. That was all. The only thing I liked was that the house overlooked a large meadow through which ran Shirvint's river, the Shirventel. On the other side of the river there were fields of various crops. Alongside the river was the park of an estate of a Polish landowner.

Shirvint was larger than Filipoveh, with more Jews and better incomes. Most of the elders had stores up and down the long street. As in other towns, the chief income came on the weekly market day and on Sundays when the Christians came out of church. The artisans in town such as cobblers, tailors, hatters, and stocking-makers, drew a meager income from their occupations. Very few young men lived in the town, for as soon as one grew up he would head for the large city of Vilna, where there were better opportunities of finding work. The children of the rich elders studied in Vilna in the secondary or trade schools, and children of the poorer craftsmen worked in factories or as clerks in stores. On holidays all the young people would come home to visit and then the town would liven up.

Father soon seemed at home in Shirvint. It was a real spiritual pleasure for him to study a page of *Gemora* with the scholars of the town every morning and "to labor," as he

used to put it, on a difficult rabbinical passage, or debate with them about a complicated matter. He also threw himself wholeheartedly into communal matters, tirelessly trying to improve the conditions of private Hebrew scholars, appointing more teachers, opening more schools, hiring workmen to fix the bathhouses and the *Mikveh*, and much more.

Mother, as was her custom, kept very busy with household matters. Caring for seven children, she simply had no time to miss her family and friends in Filipoveh. Moishe, aged 11, Chaim, aged 9, Luba, aged 7, and Chanah, aged 5, went to *chaider*, while Malkiel, who was only a year old, remained at home. Malkiel had been born in 1912, while I was in Tavrig. Father had sent me a postcard to tell me, but I didn't see Malkiel until I returned to Filipoveh.

For Reichl and me there was no suitable place to study. Reichl kept busy helping Mother, but I did not like housework, which is why the children called me the *panusheh*, "madam." I preferred to walk out to the meadow, hide in the high grass, and read there the entire day where nobody disturbed me. The town had a fine library stocked with Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew books. I became so absorbed in reading the Russian classics that the surrounding world simply did not exist for me. I lived and suffered with the heroes and heroines of those books and came back to reality only when the book was finished.

My sister Reichl did not like my behavior much. "How does one lie in the meadow all day, hidden by the tall grass, and read constantly?" she used to ask me. Wouldn't it be better to get acquainted with the young people who had just returned from studying in Vilna, or help Mother? She was an intelligent, practical girl, but I lived in a world of fantasy. I dreamed of going to Vilna or Warsaw to study, but all of my fantasies came to naught. To travel to a large city and to study involved great expense, and the meager Shirvint earnings were barely sufficient for the livelihood of such a large family. Moreover, at that time Mother had a miscarriage and her pregnancy was an embarrassment since I was already seventeen years old and should have been married.

Frustrated, I stopped reading and began to visit our neighbors, the Sedlises. They had the reputation of being worldly, especially Shayna Sedlis, who was known as a good business lady. She was in charge of a large drygoods store where her youngest daughter Rochl helped out. The other five children were scattered over the world—in America, South Africa and in different Russian cities.

Summertime, when the Sedlis children living in Russia came home, the town became cheerful and lively. They all had good voices and sang Russian romantic songs with feeling. The youngest son, Kaske, with his unusually fine voice, excelled especially. On warm summer evenings, a group of boys and girls would gather at the Sedlises and from there go off to the nearby forest, and the entire area would resound with different songs. Not only Russian romantic songs or Yiddish folksongs were sung, but also revolutionary songs, and through these songs we expressed feelings of hope for a better and more beautiful world.



Summer would pass quickly, making way for fall with its cold rain, mud and puddles. The young people scattered, and the town would sink into a strange apathy and sadness. The only item of interest that fall was the Bailis trial in Kiev. Bailis, a Jew, was accused of killing a gentile boy and using his blood in the *matzoh* dough. We devoured the various defense speeches over the months of the trial and were especially impressed by Gruzenburg's defense orations. How great was everyone's joy when Bailis was found innocent and was freed from prison and the terrible false accusation.

The cold and blizzards of winter settled over the town, with the river frozen and covered with thick ice, the surrounding fields and forests blanketed in deep snow, and the wooden huts half buried. Mother, in the later months of another pregnancy, kept on with the drudgery. She would get up at dawn to make a fire in the baking oven and in the tile stove to heat the house. When we got up we could see our

frosty breath. We were so occupied wrestling with cold and privation that we had little time to look up and notice what was happening in the world.

In the spring of 1914, around the time of *Pesach*, the cold weather let up and warm weather woke the town from its long, lethargic slumber. When summer came Mother began to get ready for her confinement. Her labor began in the middle of the night. Mother's cries woke the entire household. We thought something terrible was happening. When we went to her room, the strict midwife stopped us, saying, "You can't do anything for her. Make a large fire and prepare hot water."

That night, after long hours of struggle and suffering, our fifth sister, the eleventh child, was born. We were now eight children since three had died previously. The newborn was named Esther after our great-grandmother, who reached the age of 105, though some said that she was much older. Poor Esther! At birth she was weak and sickly. Nobody wanted another mouth to feed and everybody was too busy to pay much attention to her. Yet despite all that, she thrived. She came just before we were enveloped by a struggle that ignited the entire world.

Engulfed by War

THE VERY FIRST TO FEEL the anxieties of war were the young men who had previously served in the army. Since they were trained already, orders came that they must register immediately to defend the land and their "father" the Czar. At that time Lithuania and Poland had been part of Russia for over 100 years. Many discharged soldiers were found in Shirvint and the surrounding region. In 24 hours they had to report to Vilna where divisions were formed and they were sent immediately to the battlefield. A frequent scene was that of soldiers parting from their families. Among the fledgling soldiers were our friends the Sedlises, the Greens and many others. The weeping and crying reached to high heaven and everyone felt the deep sorrow and mourning that so suddenly was visited upon the entire world.

In the beginning the Russian army seemed to have the upper hand and kept winning. The Germans kept retreating, but all the while they fooled the Russian army and lured them into the swampy Mazureh Lakes in the eastern part of Germany, and there they put an end to the Russian army.

Day and night the Germans attacked and the Russians retreated, running wherever their legs would direct them. Regions that were quite far from the front suddenly became part of the front. Right at the beginning of the war our entire extended Zyman family was caught in the battle, and the region of Suvalk, where they lived, was occupied by the Germans.

We did not know what had happened to them. Grandfather Velvel's forests had become the front, and weeks of bloody fighting took place there. His green fields were soaked with

rivers of blood. His entire stock, a large herd of sheep, cows and horses, were immediately requisitioned by the Russian army. They also commandeered the crops that were still in the fields. From the vast beautiful estate there remained but piles of ashes.

Grandfather barely got away with his life, for they suspected him of being a German spy. For weeks he hid in a trench, and it was a miracle that he saved himself. He came to Vilna hoping to collect from the Russian government for the requisitioned goods, but he never received a brass nickel for the fruits of his entire wealth and his lifelong labor. Grandfather Boruch and his second wife (Grandmother had died in 1910) also barely escaped from Balbirishok and came to Shirvint which everyone was convinced was beyond the battlefront.

In the midst of all these events, as if nothing had changed, as if he had dropped from heaven, Mottel came to Shirvint. His excuse was that since the war had closed the *yeshiva* and Balbirishok was too close to the front, it was better to come to us and study with my father. Before me stood not a small boy as I remembered him, but a handsome young man, eighteen years old. A quiet friendship began to develop again, and gradually it was more than a friendship.

The war with its daily frightening occurrences proceeded, and the news of atrocities, each one more terrible than the last, began to reach us. The Russian government tried to throw the blame for its defeats upon the eternal scapegoat—the Jews. Every day rumors spread that German spies were found among the Jews; they presumably hid telephones in their long beards, and the *tefillin* gave signals to the German army. They especially concentrated on rabbis and important elders of the community.

The tense situation constantly worsened until a decree from the Russian government arrived. The decree stated that Jews in Kovneh and its surrounding towns must abandon their residences within twenty-four hours. Where they were to go and what they were to do was not mentioned in the decree. For generations Jews had lived in and around Kovneh,

and now suddenly they had to leave everything and take up the old wanderer's staff.

The sad news reached us on the *Erev Shevuot*, but who had a mind for preparing for the holiday? It was known that the majority of the exiles would follow the path to Shirvint, for Shirvint was the closest town to the Kovneh region. So what could be done? Was it possible to help? No one went to pray to welcome the holiday on that *Erev Shevuot*. Instead, Father organized an aid committee, and whoever was able went to the surrounding villages to hire wagons and horses. All night long they traveled throughout the area, and by dawn the committee had rounded up a hundred wagons. We lost no time in going to the nearby city of Vilkomir to help save as much as we could. At that time, Vilkomir did not yet have the Hebrew and Yiddish *gymnasiehs* that later became so famous, but it did have a network of Jewish institutions. Vilkomir had many synagogues, study houses, schools and *yeshivas*. It even had a Jewish hospital and a home for the aged.

Upon arriving in the city, one had the impression of a busy market day. Villagers and peasants from the entire area had converged to snap up bargains or, in general, to grab what one could of what the Jews had to abandon. The Jews were confused by the misfortune and frustration and did not know what to take with them and what to leave behind. The hundred wagons were put to good use, not only to remove the ill from the hospital and the old from the home for the aged but to transport those who had no wagons of their own. We also packed away the scrolls from different synagogues on several wagons. It took the whole day to pack, every nightmarish minute filled with terrible noise, confusion, and a sense of abandonment.

Toward evening we began the trip back to Shirvint. We dragged on the entire night for it was impossible to move on the road from Vilkomir to Shirvint, now filled with a thick mass of humanity, horses, and wagons. Not only was the main road full of refugees but also the side roads and fields. People did not talk, they did not cry, they wanted to get to

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Shirvint as soon as possible. Looking at the wanderers, I was filled with dread. What will become of them? Where will they go? were thoughts that kept recurring to me, as we moved toward our destination.

It was summertime, and the weather was beautiful and warm, so most of the refugees settled on the meadow by the river. It was simply impossible to take everyone into the houses. An aid committee headed by Baron Ginsburg of St. Petersburg had been quickly organized with branches throughout Russia. Father immediately wired to the committee office in Vilna about the terrible state of the thousands who found themselves under open sky and in need of help. Early the next morning long wagons with food arrived from Vilna. Crate upon crate was unloaded and the different foods divided among the people. Along with the food there arrived quite a few committee members with Madame Latski-Bertholdi, the wife of a famous writer, at the head. Only then did the work of the organization get started.

The first priority was to find residences. But where to look when every house already had several families settled in? The crowding that resulted was awful, and it was feared that an epidemic would break out. The committee thought that it would be best to send the refugees deeper into Russia because it was impossible for so many people to remain in Shirvint and live under such crowded conditions. Nobody wanted to listen to that kind of talk. People thought, "Why leave Shirvint for distant unknown places? Maybe this morning the Germans will come and we will be able to return to our homes." And no one budged from the place. Even free trains and food and other incentives failed to persuade them. They lay in the meadow and in the nearby forest, or in a farmer's barn. The lucky ones were scattered among the residents of the town, and they would not move even if you turned heaven and earth!

As long as summer lasted and as long as the committee supplied all kinds of provisions generously, the situation was not so critical; but what would happen when the fall came

with its rain, mud and puddles? Grandfather Boruch was sociable by nature and he enjoyed walking around among the crowd chatting with everyone. Everybody had great respect for him and his opinions. It occurred to members of the committee that Grandfather could address the crowd to explain how important it was for everyone to get out of Shirvint. First of all, the battlefront kept getting closer; second, winter would shortly arrive with who knows what added misery and misfortune if so many thousands of people remained. At first Grandfather was undecided. Why should he be the bearer of bad news—the news that would send them wandering? But after discussing it with Father he saw that no evil was intended, that his only concern was their welfare. And so he decided to speak.

The yard of the synagogue was packed. People stood crowded together to listen. A table was taken from the synagogue for Grandfather to stand on so he would be above the crowd. With his tall stately figure, long white beard and mild voice he seemed to hypnotize the crowd. And the surprising thing was that it worked. Gradually people began to get ready to renew their wandering to different parts of Russia.

In the meantime, the front was getting closer and closer. At night we could hear the sound of artillery, even see the fire. We who remained in the town became more nervous and uneasy. Many decided to abandon their homes and move farther away from the fighting. We, too, decided that the family should go because the situation had really become very tense.

Father decided that Mother and the children would go to Vilna but he would remain. So long as some Jewish families were still in Shirvint, he could not abandon them. Grandfather Boruch, as usual, agreed with Father and said that he too would remain for he could not leave his only son behind. Since I was eighteen years old and the eldest, was able to

take care of the house and had also worked on the committee for the refugees, it was decided by agreement of the entire family that I would remain with Father and Grandfather.

When Mother and the children left, it became terribly lonely at home. Silence enveloped everything, like the quiet before the storm. And, like a storm, an entire division of Cossacks struck the town. The very word "Cossack" brought fear and trembling. In all the Jewish pogroms Cossacks were the first to participate; but these Cossacks were not the same. They were called Kuban Cossacks and their appearance and dress were different. Instead of uniforms they wore tall fur hats and wide, long black woolen capes, and their chests were covered with rows of bullets. They rode on exceptionally beautiful black horses. A black cloud seemed to blanket the meadow where they made their quarters.

The very day they arrived in town there appeared in our house two Cossacks in full dress. They addressed Father and introduced themselves politely as Kohug and Yatchkula. They were looking for quarters for their staff, and since the entire division was nearby on the meadow it was essential that the staff set up their office in our house. We could remain in the other rooms and they would not bother us. We were astounded by their appearance and politeness. Father only said that he hoped we would not disturb each other. Our dining room was the largest room in the house, and it immediately became filled with Cossacks and typewriters. They sat and banged away at the typewriters all day.

A curious relationship developed between us. We had never in our lives seen such Cossacks; they had never set eyes on a Jew. A Cossack, according to our concept, was a terrible creature. We knew that whenever there was a pogrom, an attack on a demonstration or a strike, they were the first ones on the scene. They had their own image of a *zshyd*: there were no honest Jews; they were all usurers and swindlers, and all civilized people had a deathly hatred for them. Both sides sought an opportunity to get acquainted and find out about each other. Two officers were in charge of the office staff. Both were intelligent university graduates with lib-

eral leanings. They liked to discuss various topics with Father and chat with him about different issues. They had deep respect for him; several times they said that if the Russian people could know more closely Jews like Father, then they would change their opinion, and antisemitism would not be so rampant in their country. They liked to discuss with me Russian literature. How surprised they were when I told them that I was raised not only on Hebrew and Yiddish literature but also on the Russian classics. I told them about the richness of Yiddish literature and about the great Yiddish authors.

They stayed on the meadow and in our house for two weeks. They kept assuring us all along that no evil would happen to the town's Jews. When they were about to retreat they would let us know in advance. But that is not what happened.

Once, in the middle of the night, we awoke to a banging on the windows and the agitated voices of our neighbors saying that the Russian troops were retreating and that we were surrounded by Germans. We saw at once that we were in great danger. We looked toward the meadow and saw that it was clear and empty. We absolutely could not understand what had happened. We had had such confidence that the two Cossack officers, Kohug and Yatchkula, would let us know about the retreat and would not abandon us without help. So, what is to be done? How does one save oneself and escape the trap of the front?

From the fear and frustration, Father experienced terrible back pain and was like one paralyzed—he simply could not move. Grandfather stayed with him and I set out for town to find a horse and wagon. I could barely reach the home of a nearby neighbor, Moishe Blindman. The streets were impassable. Thousands of Russian soldiers, on horseback, in wagons, but mostly on foot, pushed one another and ran without order or direction. It was a horror to look at the mass of lost people. All around the town there were fires, as if a great holocaust had swept the entire region. The noise of the artillery, exploding bombs, and the clatter of the retreating army combined into one wild deafening voice.

With enormous difficulty, and for a good sum of money, Moishe Blindman succeeded in getting a peasant to take us to Vilna. But how to drive through the town to get to the Vilna highway? We managed despite danger to life and limb to get to the highway leading to Maishegole, the next town, but the more we traveled the more Russian military pushed in from all the highways and byways. We decided to take the side roads to avoid the military. Quite late at night we dragged ourselves, weak and exhausted, to a village where we found many residents from Shirvint. We decided to say there overnight and at dawn get underway again.

Until Maishegole we were able to travel on side roads, but from there on only one road led to Vilna. Our hearts grew heavy at the sight of the large throng pushing ahead of us. It appeared that the entire Russian army was to be found there, countless soldiers—countless. On the side of the road soldiers and civilians alike were digging trenches. With difficulty our wagon pushed into the military mass and began to drag along with them.

The soldiers soon surrounded us and began to pick on us. Their mood was very ugly, not having slept for several nights, starving, dragging themselves on Lithuanian roads retreating farther and farther from the mighty German army. Their defeat was great and they let out their anger over the defeat on the Jews, accusing them of espionage and other forbidden things.

We were scared when the wild mass of soldiers dragged us from the wagon looking for presumably hidden instruments that might give signals to the enemy. Not finding anything in the wagon, they said that perhaps they were hidden in Grandfather's and Father's beards and they were getting ready to cut them off. They also said that they would take care of me. We felt that such an agitated and impetuous mob would torment and finish us off and nobody would even know what had happened to us. Grandfather and Father kept whispering a prayer that God have mercy upon us and redeem us from our enemies.

In the midst of this nightmare we saw a Kuban Cossack

astride a brown horse approaching us. We simply could not believe our eyes that it was our friend the Cossack officer, Kohug. To us he was a guardian angel from heaven. And, he really was our redeemer, for who knows what would have happened to us if he had not arrived just then. He drove off the rampaging soldiers, upbraiding them with the worst insults. He told them that they should be ashamed for attacking innocent people who, like themselves, were running away from the German enemy. He calmed us and told us that he had been looking for us for more than a day and a night, certain that we had run away from Shirvint and were in great danger. The retreat from Shirvint was so sudden and fast that he did not have the opportunity to warn us. He was happy that he was able to arrive at the right time and save us from our tormentors. He accompanied us the entire day, step by step, until we arrived at the outskirts of Vilna. He promised us that he would return to say goodbye before his division retreated.

Our family had almost given us up, since the rumors that had reached Vilna were one more terrible than the other. They were sure that the rapacious army had finished off all the Jews that had remained in their homes. When they saw us, the joy and surprise was indescribable.

Grandfather kept telling the family and all the neighbors who came together from the entire neighborhood that it was not an ordinary Cossack who had saved us, but an angel from heaven. Father's idea was that the Cossack Kohug was one of the thirty-six righteous ones that are to be found in the world. For my part, I thought that even a Cossack can be a gentle and fine person with deep human feelings.

The following morning he came to visit us, and the entire courtyard went wild. A Cossack coming to rabbis! That is out of the ordinary. We consulted him about what to do. Should we remain in Vilna or travel farther into Russia? How surprised we were when he told us not to budge but to wait for the bad time to pass until the Germans occupied the area and then return to Shirvint. He said that he would like to have us come to Russia, but not as refugees—for what

would we do and where would we live there? He said goodbye, and Grandfather blessed him with a prayer that he arrive home in peace. And that was the last time we ever saw him.



The few months we spent in Vilna were not the best of times. We lived on a courtyard on Bolshaya Street with refugees from all over Lithuania. Everyone was looking for a way out, since a rumor spread that the Russians would not give up Vilna nor would they retreat from the region, which meant that the front line would locate there. What was especially feared was the spreading rumor that if they did retreat they would torch the city. People felt lost and did not know what to do—remain in that vale of tears or leave. But where does one go? Trains were unavailable and even a peasant's wagon was hard to obtain. Moreover, the matter of provisions became ever more difficult and our supplies were increasingly meager.

Despite the tense and difficult time, for us it was interesting. We had never lived in a metropolis and among such a large Jewish community. We never tired of walking along the streets, alleys, and parks of Vilna. Every day we discovered new wonders of the great old city. As *yomim noroyim* arrived, we would accompany Father and Grandfather to the famous synagogues and prayer houses where we heard cantors better than any we had ever heard before. On *Erev Yom Kippur*, upon returning from *Kol Nidre*, we saw and felt that our fate was sealed with Vilna's. We never dreamed how swiftly and easily it would happen.

Like poisoned rats the Russian officials and population fled from the city along with their retreating army. They left the city without resistance and did not have time to burn the bridges over the river Vilee. The city was suddenly empty and a strange silence spread over it. Only in one place it was not silent—in the large and small synagogues and study houses congregated in the courtyard of the Jewish street. There the *Yom Kippur* prayers continued as if nothing had happened.

Right after the morning prayers, German soldiers began to appear on the streets of Vilna.

We children ran to the synagogue where our family was praying to bring the good tidings that we were finally rid of the Russians and that the Germans had taken over the city. Whoever could left the synagogue on that *Yom Kippur* before the *Neilah* because they were so curious to see the Germans—the liberators (as many thought they were).

The refugees immediately began to think of home and got ready to return, but that was not so easy. One had to do the impossible to get out of the city. One had to wait in line for days on end at the German administrative offices in order to obtain permission to leave the city. Overnight the entire city assumed a different appearance. Wherever one went, people were standing in lines. A permit was needed from the German administration for everything, and for every permit it was necessary to stand in line. Daily life became unusually difficult, and each of the refugees tried to leave the city with its waiting lines as soon as possible, with the hope that the *shtetl* would make life easier.

Our extended family began to fall apart since everyone tried to get home as quickly as possible. It was difficult for the children to part from both grandfathers (our grandmother had died some time ago). Grandfather Boruch returned to his congregation and rabbinate in Balbirishok. We could not imagine that this would be the last time we would see him. He died a year later. But his majestic appearance, his unusual love for people and his rare devotion to us we will never forget. All the boys born in the Balbirishok region during the year of his death were named after him.

Poor Grandfather Velvel had no place to return to since his estate and all his belongings had gone up in smoke. Still, he decided to go to Suvalk and be near his fields and forests. Perhaps, he could get to them and have them returned to him.

One cold fall day we, that is, Father, Mother and eight children, left Vilna and took off on the road to Shirvint. How different the region appeared after only a few months! The fields were pockmarked with trenches. The entire area was littered

with parts of weapons. Many horses that had been shot remained lying in their puddles of blood. Along the road were hundreds of recently covered graves, with pieces of wood, instead of crosses, stuck on them, some with inscriptions. The entire region made a terrible and depressing impression. The driver of the wagon drove hard and whipped the horses so as to pass the valley of death as quickly as possible.

To our happy surprise we found the *shtetl* as if the war had by-passed it. No damage was done. It was hard to believe that a war and bloody battles had occurred there. The Germans were everywhere, and with their precise order they had begun to rule the town and the region. Shirvint was a country seat, full of offices from which various decrees to the population were issued almost daily. The first thing they did was to gather all the grain and supplies that could be found to send to Germany. They issued ration cards to the occupied population, and with these cards every family obtained a few provisions, at a high price—hardly enough to keep body and soul together. Four hard years, 1914–1918, began for the population—years of hunger and epidemics.

The German occupation continued for four years, and during this time they drained not only the wealth but also the health of the population. The town's storekeepers and artisans somehow managed. They would go to the villages and exchange their wares for a little flour and other food products. But Father, a rabbi, could not do this; so we suffered in silence. But how long can one be hungry? Hunger does not keep you quiet. Our sister Reichl who was more daring decided to do what everyone else was doing, and she started going to nearby villages to exchange clothes and linen for food. Our brother Chaim who was a strong and energetic lad of eleven would assist her. They would rise early in the morning and set off on foot in the frosty dawn. Many times they were successful, and the joy of the children would rise when they brought back a few provisions to quiet their hunger. But it did not last long.

A network of smugglers had spread throughout the region,

and the Germans, may their name be erased, found them out and severely punished those who were caught red-handed. Our small supply of food began to dwindle, and when Mother baked the black bread that was laced with potatoes, it was kept hidden so the children would not eat it up all at once. At every meal, consisting of potato soup and a piece of bread, Reichl and Chaim (since they were the bread givers) weighed the bread. They used the small scales on which we weighed yeast to be sold for baking *challeh* for the Sabbath, which added to our meager income. They weighed and divided the bread so that everyone would get an equal portion and were very watchful that no one should get more than his or her share. The younger children, Luba, Chanah, and Malkiel, used to stretch out their thin hands asking for another piece of bread. Mother would sneak them her portion. It was difficult for all the children, but it was most difficult for our youngest brother, Malkiel, who was an unusually handsome and healthy child with a lot of energy and a large appetite.

In the first winter of the occupation the Germans decreed the opening of elementary schools for Jewish and Christian children, but with German instruction. My knowledge of German was sufficient for teaching in the elementary grades, so I was hired to teach the children German. I also taught Hebrew and the Bible. We were four teachers and among them was Mottel Levine who taught the higher grades. We did our work with dilligence despite the difficult conditions. The school was in Shirvintel, on the outskirts of Shirvint, in an old and cold building that had been a synagogue before the occupation. It was quite a distance from our home and even farther for the children who lived at the marketplace. But, despite the distance, cold waves, mud and blizzards, the school was full of children. They studied and achieved more than in the *chaider* of yore.

In addition to teaching school, I had another occupation—writing applications in German to the regional administration from the villagers. The Germans in power requisitioned and took whatever they could. Those who suffered the most were the farmers in the villages. As soon as their crops ripened, the Germans would take them away without paying cash, leaving only a receipt showing the quantity that was taken. The farmers had the right to submit a request to the regional administration, and in time the farmers would get a little remuneration. The petition-writing was the best income of our household. I did not take money for writing the petitions, but each farmer would bring a present which consisted of food.

At that time Fanenberg arrived in Shirvint, a high German official who was a sort of governor in charge of the region. He occupied the estate of a Polish noblewoman, Lady Pesetske, on the other side of the river, and settled in her palace, the only nice house in the town. He began to rule the entire region with an iron hand. Although his task was to supply provisions for the German army, he nevertheless acted like a lord over the civilian population. The name Fanenberg aroused fear in everyone. He began to issue decrees and appeals to the populace, but very few people understood German, so it was necessary to translate the German into Russian, Yiddish, and Lithuanian.

How Fanenberg discovered my knowledge of the German language remained a puzzle. On a cold and frosty morning I received a command that within a few hours I must come to the palace and report to his "majesty" Herr Fanenberg. Terror overcame us—why such a command? How had I sinned? And how does a young girl go by herself to such a high official? After a long consultation, Father decided not to let me go alone. He would escort me.

Never before had I crossed the threshold of the palace, nor had I ever seen such a house. We had to pass through many rooms which had been converted into offices, where military personnel of various ranks were sitting tapping on typewriters. The appearance of the rabbi, with his long beard,

broad brimmed hat and long *kapoteh*, accompanied by a young woman momentarily stopped the banging of the typewriters as many pairs of eyes followed us with expressions of wonder.

We were brought into a large room where the floor and walls were decorated with birds, weapons and skins of various animals. As if lost in an exotic world we sat and waited for the master. We had to wait a long time, and it seemed even longer. Suddenly a side door opened and a tall, slim military man, with many medals on his chest, appeared. We understood that this must be Fanenberg.

The first welcome he gave us was, "Why did you bring your father with you? Why didn't you come alone?" I thought to myself, "Because we don't trust you," but we remained silent, afraid to antagonize him. In a stern tone he informed us that he must have a translator for all his decrees and appeals so that the civilian population would understand and know what the German regime required of them; and they wanted everything, including the innocence of the Jewish daughters.

A day did not pass without an embittered father coming to the rabbi for advice, asking, "Rebbe, what should be done? The cursed Germans lead our innocent Jewish daughters astray." What could the rabbi tell them—that he could not even give himself advice about his own daughter? After that first visit I would often go to the palace with translations, but avoided seeing Fanenberg in his private office. It was felt that great danger lurked for me, but how did one counter and rebel against the master's command?

Pesach soon approached and there was no flour for *matzohs*. From the nearby towns, nine rabbis came to Father for consultation. Incidentally, rumors had spread that the rabbi and, particularly, his daughter could persuade Fanenberg to obtain flour for *matzohs* for all the Jews of the region and it would not be necessary, God forbid, to eat *chometz*. The rumors were not entirely groundless.

Every time I arrived with my translations, Fanenberg would show up and in his best manner ask me what I wanted for my work. I would usually respond by saying that I

wanted nothing. Therefore, we were astonished when a good milking cow was sent to us from the estate and soon after electric lights were installed in our house. No civilians had the right to electricity. The cow was a veritable treasure and a salvation for our famished family. Milk, cheese, and butter began to appear on the table, and whenever Mother cooked up some *krupnik* and poured hot milk over it; it had the taste of marzipan. We used to eat *krupnik* and bless Fanenberg.

The story of the cow spread quickly through the town, and everybody was sure that all I had to do was ask and my request for flour for *matzoh* would be granted. I could not bring myself to do it, though, because I had never asked him for anything before. That cow and the electricity he had sent voluntarily. So, how could I go, especially heading a delegation of rabbis, and ask him for such a big favor?

I was in a terrible predicament. For Father, Mother, for all the Jews of the town it was simply a question of life and death. They would rather go hungry and become sick than eat *chometz* on *Pesach*. I really was in a quandry. How does one get permission from the cursed German to be able to buy wheat to bake *matzohs*? I finally took courage and decided to go with the delegation.

We made an unusual picture, ten rabbis and a young woman walking fearfully but resolutely in silence to ask for the flour. The closer we got to the palace the more uneasy I became. What if he turned us down? Where would one get the flour and what was the alternative? I was so absorbed and uneasy that I had not noticed the change in the weather during the last few days. The frozen snow from the long winter had melted, the sun was warmly refreshing, and the fields around had begun to be covered by a fresh greenness, as if everything had begun to get ready for spring and for the holiday of *Pesach*.

As usual Fanenberg met us quite politely. With a beating heart I conveyed our appeal, explaining to him that the Jews would not eat, many would starve without *matzoh*. He listened to me and said: "I knew that sooner or later you would have to come to me." His words seemed to scorch me, and I

was unable to answer. He said, "We Germans are civilized people and we want to live peacefully with the occupied nations of the East. If flour for *matzohs* plays such a significant role in your life, I will not prevent it, and I will not interfere with the conduct of your religious rituals."

On *Pesach*, all the Jews from the region had *matzohs* aplenty. In reading the *Haggadah* everyone added the story of the miracle of obtaining flour for the *matzohs*, thankful that the holiday was not spoiled.

Father and I were not particularly happy because we were afraid that Fanenberg would demand his reward. How great our joy and surprise when we found that because of his drunkenness and other kinds of misbehavior he was removed from his high position. We all believed it was because of God's intervention, and that a great miracle happened to me.



The arrival of summer and warm weather brought the spread of epidemics. The population was constantly hungry and lived under difficult circumstances. It aggravated the typhus epidemic which kept spreading more and more. The Germans were terribly afraid of the illness, since many of them did not survive it. Therefore, they undertook the most stringent measures to eradicate the disease.

The first thing that they did was establish quarantines. Whenever someone became sick with typhus, the entire family, even the neighbors, were immediately isolated in special buildings. The sick person was taken to the hospital where the care was abysmal. Not only were doctors and nurses in short supply, but also sufficient beds were not available for the patients. Therefore, when someone in the family got sick, it was kept a secret as long as possible. No matter how bad the care may have been at home and no matter how little medicine there was, it still was better than the hospital.

Then it happened. One hot summer day Reichl began to complain of a headache, and within a couple of hours she was running a high temperature. We were afraid to call a

doctor, because he would immediately send her to the hospital and the rest of us into quarantine. So how did we keep her illness a secret and get a doctor and medicine? We were desperate and simply did not know what to do. As if this was not enough, our brother Moishele also took sick and was laid up with a high temperature. We felt that great danger was surrounding us, that the epidemic would spread to the entire family. We held out for a week. Somehow we got quinine pills from the druggist Reznikovitz and ice from the butcher's ice house. Our neighbors knew what was happening in our home, but everyone tried to wipe out any signs of the illness.

How the Germans found out we never discovered. On a Saturday morning when Father came from the morning prayer, he suddenly saw that the house was surrounded by the German military. Nobody was let in or out of the house. Their first action was to carry out Reichl and Moishele and send them off to the hospital; next the rest of the family and even the neighbors were seated on farmers' wagons, and they were all put in quarantine in a nearby town. The doors of our house were boarded up and a sign posted that no one was even to come close to it because it was infested with typhus microbes. Whoever dared to enter the house would be put in quarantine and have to pay a huge fine. The townspeople ran off as if from a fire; their voices and cries were unimaginable. The important elders had turned to the chief of the region, asking him to cancel the decree and allow the rabbi and his family to remain in Shirvint.

But no appeals or pleading were of help. In the midst of the confusion, I had managed to slip out of the house and hide in the tall grass of the nearby meadow. I felt that I could not help Father, Mother and the children if I was in quarantine, but if I managed to remain in Shirvint I might perhaps be able to do something for the sick. Thus started for me days of self-sacrifice and nights without sleep.

The German mayor of the town found out that I was at large and started a hunt for me. Every day I hid in a different house and every night slept in a different bed. Everyone knew that if I was found in a certain house then that house would

be sealed and the people would be sent to quarantine and would lose everything. But, despite the danger, no resident in the marketplace, not far from the hospital, had refused to house me and protect me.

With unusual devotion everyone undertook to do something to help me and the sick ones. Every day, a different homemaker cooked chicken soup and prepared a basket of food for the sick. At the crack of dawn I would carry the food to the hospital where the nurse would divide it up among the sick who shared Reichl's and Moishele's rooms. I would not leave the place until the food was divided and every patient received his portion. The devotion of those who simply risked everything and did what their humanity dictated was unforgettable.

This went on for a couple of weeks until the crisis arrived for Reichl and she began to improve. I decided then not to burden nor to endanger the dear people any longer. A wagon was hired for me and on a dark night took me to the outskirts where I voluntarily gave myself up. The quarantine was in a large brick building surrounded by barbed wire and constantly guarded. Once there I was happy to be with my family again, believing that it would not last long.

I found them all rundown and withered. They would not eat from the general kettle because it was not kosher, but only what good people sent in from time to time. Added to the hunger was the fear of becoming victims of the disease themselves. And for that it was not necessary to wait very long.

A week after my arrival, Luba, Chanah, and the strong and healthy Malkiel were struck with typhus. The nearby hospital was full to overflowing, so we asked the doctor to send the patients to the Shirvint hospital, where our sister and brother were, knowing that the Jews of Shirvint would not abandon them, but would do for them what they had done for Reichl and Moishele who were now recuperating. The doctor agreed on the condition that I would take them there, for he did not have any extra people to help him.

We went on a hot summer day. The three children were

laid out on straw on the wagon bed and I sat near them. They burned with the heat of the sickness and of the sun, and I was able to wet their parched lips only with some drops of water. I thought that we would never get to the hospital. Driving in town I saw that it was Saturday afternoon, because all the stores were closed. There was not a living soul in the streets. The town was resting after the Sabbath *cholnt*.

With considerable difficulty I managed to see Reichl. It was horrible to see what had happened to her. Her hair was shaved, her face was sickly and dried up, and she could barely stand on her feet. She was only eighteen years old but looked like an old woman. Despite her weakness, I knew that she would give the children some supervision. With a heavy heart I left to return to quarantine.

All the way back a terrible idea bored through my mind that Mother was ill, because when I had left she was not feeling well. I made a vow that if I found her well, I would try to be good and pious and stop reading heretical books and not desecrate the Sabbath and expel all sinful ideas from my mind.

Arriving at the quarantine I started to run to our little rooms. I was petrified when I opened the door and saw Mother lying in bed with a face flushed from high temperature. Lying near her was little Esther who was only two years old. She too was burning with a high temperature.

Father and Chaim stood in a corner, as if paralyzed with their pain and sorrow. I fell down by Mother and begged her: "Dear Mother, strengthen yourself and get well." I hardly knew what I was doing or saying. But Mother was not even able to reply. Her temperature was so high that she did not know what was going on about her. We were truly orphaned when Mother and Esther were taken to the hospital. Of our entire family only Father, Chaim, and I remained.

Every *shtetl* had an estate nearby, and the large house on the estate was converted into a hospital during the typhus epidemic. But, what value was one hospital for a whole region when people were falling like flies? We knew that the care in the nearby hospital was even worse than in the one in

Shirvint, where the children were confined, but Mother was too weak to travel such a distance. So we had no choice but to take her to the hospital in the neighboring town.

That town's Jews had been coming to Father in Shirvint with various problems and conflicts to settle, and he never charged them a penny for handling the lawsuits. Thus we decided to appeal to the Jews of the town to supply food for Mother and Esther while they were in the hospital as the Jews of Shirvint had done for Reichl and Moishele. But the question arose as to who would be the emissary to spread the word? And how did one get out of the quarantine past the barbed wire and the guards? Father could not do it and Chaim was too young to do it. So it was up to me once again to be the messenger.

As soon as it was dark I edged up to the barbed wire and waited until the soldier on guard moved on a little farther. I had no fear, for all my senses were deadened by Mother's illness. Neither the unknown terrain nor the darkness and the soldier with the gun frightened me; only the danger to Mother terrified me. I pushed apart the prickly wires and squeezed through to the other side, tearing my dress and stocking that caught on the wires. On all fours I crawled and moved into the grass, farther and farther away from the quarantine—until I came to the unpaved road that led to town. I quickly stood up, and, catching my breath, I started running to the town.

I knocked on our friends' doors and they were startled to see me and the condition I was in—pale, scared, hands and feet bleeding. They quieted me, washed my wounds, and listened to my sad story. They promised to do whatever possible. Luckily they knew the administrator of the hospital and they were sure that he would not object to giving Mother special care. Also, they would see to it that the patients got fresh food every day. They even proposed that I stay with them until it all blew over.

Getting back in again through the barbed wire was not so difficult, and when Father heard what the *shtetl* people would do for Mother his spirits rose and he said, "The hard rock of

suffering is crumbling, and I feel that with the help of God, Mother and the children will get well."

From that night it was not hard for me to sneak out under the wires and run the few miles to get to the town. Every time, the good people would give me milk or chicken soup to bring to the sick. I found out which room Mother was in and got acquainted with the nurse, a good Lithuanian girl who did whatever was possible under the circumstances.

For hours I would stand outside at the long palatial windows looking in, hoping to see Mother. After several weeks a sense of uneasiness gripped me—an uneasiness close to desperation. Until one day I saw, through the window, a woman who had some similarity to my mother, but this changed woman could not be my mother. She noticed me at the window and a smile appeared on her pale wizened face. The world became brighter for me at that moment. Since she recognized me and smiled, she must feel better. I could hardly rest until it got dark so that I could return to the quarantine and bring the good tidings—that Mother felt better.

From that day, little Esther began to feel better too, and in a couple of weeks everybody was sent back to Shirvint. The joy of coming home and finding Reichl, Moishele, Luba, Chanah, Malkiel, Esther, and Mother was immeasurable. Although they were weak and emaciated they were alive and getting better. As we all sat down at the table for the meager repast, who could be compared to us? We all felt that we had returned from a long, distant, and perilous journey. And the blessing of our forefathers stood by us so that we had returned in peace and in health.



We really felt happy that seven members of our family had survived the terrible illness. But our happiness did not last long. In a few days, overcome by fatigue and depletion, I finally succumbed to typhus. Since nearly all in the house had had the sickness it was decided to keep me at home and everybody would watch over me, except for Chaim and Father who had not been afflicted.

It was a severe case of typhus with a high temperature. Finally, on the fifteenth day the crisis arrived, with a lot of perspiration. A few hours later, the temperature dropped and I began to improve. The family was happy that they succeeded in hiding me at home and thus saved not only me but my thick long braids. For the first thing they did to a patient in the hospital was shave the head for sanitary reasons. In our home everyone looked like shorn sheep.

It took quite a while for all of the patients to get back on their feet, for medicine and good food were not available. As long as the German occupation lasted, there was a shortage of everything, even at the end of the summer when fruits and vegetables were plentiful in Lithuania. But the cursed Germans laid their paws on everything. The produce in the fields and gardens barely had time to ripen before the Germans requisitioned it. They presumably paid the farmers for it, with useless marks, to forestall arguments. But in the meantime, the population was forever hungry, awaiting the arrival of the Messiah; then they would rid themselves of the occupiers.

Luba and I were weaker than the others, and Mother despaired of being able to make us well. In her desparation she turned to her brother Yosef and her sister Sorel. Yosef had been considered a tycoon. He bought forests in Lithuania, had workers chop down the trees and make rafts out of some of the wood, and the rest he shipped with other provisions to Germany. It was a very good business since wood was scarce in Germany but plentiful in Lithuania. However, during the war his rafts were taken over by the Germans. Although his business was ruined he was able to help us a little.

Sorel, Mother's youngest sister, married a storekeeper in Meretch about three years before the war. Although not very prosperous, they were considered the most important elders of the town. Even under the German occupation they did not live in such poverty as we did in Shirvint. Sorel was very devoted to the family, and when she heard of our sickness and suffering, she immediately invited us to come to Meretch. She wanted the whole family to come and recuperate at her home, but we decided that only the weaker ones would accept the invitation.

My aunt Sorel was only seven years older than I, and our relationship was that of close sisters. When we still lived in Filipoveh I often went to Grandfather's estate to spend time with Sorel who was the youngest, and spoiled by everybody. Grandfather would cater to her, especially after he remarried and brought in a stepmother.

Sorel considered many matches and many fine men had wooed her, but she was very particular. Finally, Uncle Yosef, her brother, succeeded in arranging a match with his wife's cousin, Dovid, who was quite scholarly and eminently suitable for our family. Since she was his youngest daughter, Grandfather decided to plan the wedding with a generous hand and invited not only the entire Zyman clan, but all who had any relation to the family, no matter how far.

Preparations for the event lasted for weeks. They hired the best waiters and *klezmer* from Suvalk, the big house was scrubbed from top to bottom and decorated, and two large barns, where crops were kept the rest of the year, were cleaned up so that there would be enough room for the guests to sleep. The cooking and baking filled the estate with delicious aromas and a lot of noise.

When the day of the wedding arrived there came *machutonim* from Grodneh, Bialistok, Tavrig, Meretch, Balbirishok, and from the various surrounding towns. They came almost from one end of Lithuania to the other and also from Poland.

The estate was full of people and the air became filled with melodies of the *klezmer*. The waiters ran about busily serving the wedding meal at long tables, and the crowd enjoyed itself. It was a beautiful summer day and a warm starlit night. The crowd danced, not only in the house but also in the garden, all kinds of dances, such as *quadrilles, baroiges*, snake dances and even waltzes. Young and old mingled together and did not tire of stomping and hopping all night long, as if everyone had a premonition that this would be the last time that the entire family would come together. And never again would the entire family come together for such a joyous occasion. The full picture of Sorel's unusual wedding ran through my thoughts on the road to Meretch. How different she

looked now, and how ordinary and difficult was her life. Her luck, unfortunately, was not as wonderful as her wedding.

Meretch was one of the most beautiful towns in Lithuania, and, compared to Shirvint, it was a metropolis. The town was right on the Nyehman River, ringed by hills of pine trees. Aside from the natural beauty surrounding it, the town was quite nice and built with some order, with long paved streets, with brick houses instead of wooden shacks, and with a traditional marketplace and many shops.

In the middle of the marketplace stood the Russian church which on a holiday would fill the market with the sound of bells. Down the street leading to the Nyehman, was the synagogue court, with synagogues and study houses.

It was a town with many Jews and all sorts of Jewish occupations, but the young people did not remain. They did not want, nor were they able, to continue in their parents' business. They felt no ground under their feet and saw no future.

A large emigration proceeded from Meretch before the war. It was said that there were more Meretchers in America than in Meretch itself. But the war stopped the emigration, and after the war the doors of the golden land were closed and young people were caught in a trap. In Meretch I found many of them in the last year of the war full of different ideals and aspirations.

It was a turbulent time, not too long after the Russian revolution. Different rumors of the events were in the air and one was caught up by the great overturn in Russia. Young people were full of hope that the Russian revolution would free the masses of the enslaved Russian people and also the persecuted Jewish people. They belonged to different parties and organizations, and two students, Dovid Berezovski and Zissle Klibansky were the organizers and the idealogues. Both young men were very talented and intelligent and had a great influence on the youth of Meretch. Both were very radically inclined and fully believed that via the revolution the sorry Jewish problem would be solved and anti-Semitism would be obliterated altogether. Since they were mostly unemployed, there was constant debate.

The center of all discussions and debates was Uncle Dovid's and Aunt Sorel's home. They were exceptionally friendly people and loved company. Besides, their house was on the marketplace, in the center of town. Their store, which was attached to the house, was a department store where one could get everything, but there were not many customers except on market day. The rest of the week the store was empty. The young people would get together there—it was like a club. Their children, Yisrolik (Al Rabin) and Yankele, were too young to participate in the discussion, but Uncle Dovid was always the leader. He was a strange one; despite his sharp tongue and even sharper pen, everybody liked him. He could not tolerate evil and would always take the side of the oppressed. He frequently issued a paper, which he named the *Gragehr*, in which he criticized in the most cutting manner those owners and landlords who fleeced the poor. He described them in such caricatured terms that people reading it would roll with laughter and try to guess to whom he was referring.

In the meantime I traveled a few times to the nearby town of Aliteh where Mottel was now living. He and his father Avrom Binyeh had opened a modern *chaider* where they taught entirely in Hebrew, a rare phenomenon at that time. I was very nicely received, but when I saw Mottel I immediately realized that my attitude to him had changed and that my deep feeling, along with my childhood, had vanished.

As a child I had idolized him because he was not only my teacher but also my guide. And in the most difficult time of the German occupation he helped me out both in the school where we taught and in the writing of petitions for the peasants. Most of all he had stood by me during the Fanenberg episode. But now, as a young woman, I had no feeling for him. In my eyes now he seemed to be a small town *melamed* and a *batlen*. Perhaps part of my disappointment in Mottel was caused by the Meretch environment and the ideas of Dovid Berezovski, the nephew of my aunt Reisl, Yosef's wife. His deep faith in the revolution and his trust in the ultimate triumph of justice influenced the town's youth, and me

along with them. The Germans were abandoning the occupied areas, Lithuania among them. It was simply not known what kind of changes would take place and what the next day would bring; and I had to return home to Shirvint after my year's stay in Meretch.



It was not long before the accursed Germans finally left and the people breathed freely and said, "Good riddance." But then the real troubles began, because with the retreat of the Germans, different disturbances commenced. Lithuania, which had been part of Russia for hundreds of years, became independent with the old historical city of Vilna as the capital. But before one knew it the Poles arrived and occupied Vilna with the argument that Vilna was a Polish city and it belonged to them.

The first thing the Poles did as rulers was to inflict a pogrom on the Jews of Vilna. How frightened we were when rumors about the pogrom reached our town! Many Jews fled from Vilna and came to nearby towns including Shirvint. At the same time there were bitter battles between the Poles and the Bolsheviks, and the Bolsheviks succeeded in grabbing the region from the Poles who had taken the territory away from the Lithuanians. As it is written in the *Wisdom of Our Fathers*, "Because you drowned someone, you will be drowned. The end for you drowners will be that you too will be drowned." In plain language, he who digs a hole for another will himself fall into it.

It was just after *Pesach* of 1919 and spring blossomed forth in all its glory. But who paid attention to spring when at any minute you could expect a battle raging around you between the Poles, Lithuanians, and Bolsheviks?

Actually, no battle took place, but the Bolsheviks occupied the region and descended upon the town like locusts. They began their occupation by plundering the town. They called it "requisitioning." Bands of Bolsheviks went from house to house, roaming and looting, and took whatever was

handy. How different from the Russian army of yore was the Bolshevik army! Torn and tattered, dressed in different ragged uniforms, famished and tough, they spared nothing nor anybody. Desperately they fought on dozens of fronts. What value at that unhappy time did the life of one human being have when the bitter civil struggle—the Russian revolution—was taking place, with people falling like flies from hunger and bullets? So of what value was a small country like Lithuania and a town like Shirvint? For those who had believed in the revolution the behavior of the Bolsheviks was a terrible disappointment.

Again, as the Kuban Cossacks had done four years earlier, the Bolsheviks transformed our house into offices. One had to be grateful that they let us sleep there and that they had not thrown us out altogether. They looked at each of us with suspicion and considered us capitalists and enemies of the revolution. Even worse was their attitude to Father—a rabbi was impure and should be shunned.

The only sin we committed against them was the hiding of Mother's candlesticks, large and small silver cups and some jewelry that Grandfather had left her. But where to hide them? We hit on the idea of hiding them in the cellar where we had dug a hole to store potatoes, which had been our main food during the German occupation.

Potatoes had helped to keep our large family alive. Mother, during the war, prepared a variety of dishes with the potatoes and we ate them all the time. For days on end she would peel and grate potatoes to feed and keep her famished family alive. We were considered among the lucky ones who were able to fill the pit with enough potatoes in the fall to last through the winter.

Now imagine the work of taking all the potatoes out of the pit (it was the beginning of winter and the pit was full) and of burying, on the very bottom of that hole, the box with the silverware. It took us quite a few nights to carry out the conspiracy, and we hid the box successfully. We only worried about what to do if the Bolsheviks stayed for the winter and the potatoes would be consumed and the box would then be

exposed. But every day new rumors spread that the Poles were preparing an offensive, that the Bolsheviks were not strong enough to oppose them and that they would finally leave the region. And so it was; they did not wait for an offensive, but gradually began to retreat, taking with them whatever they could.

The town's residents were trapped—they feared the retreating Bolsheviks and feared the arriving Poles. People were desperate and helpless and simply did not know what to do, because one could not run, and, worse, there was nowhere to run to. Most desperate of all was our neighbor Stolov. During the German occupation he had smuggled goods and done a good business. It was said that he had amassed a fortune. But the so-called fortune consisted of paper money. If the Bolsheviks found him out they would "just put him to the wall"—they would shoot him unceremoniously.

One evening he sneaked into our house despite the fact that it was full of Bolsheviks (except for the one room reserved for us). He turned immediately to my father: "Rebbe, you must save me and you must save my wife and my children. They should not, God forbid, become a widow and orphans. You must help me get rid of this money." Hearing such talk Father became frightened. How could he not save a Jewish soul? But, what could he do? Our neighbor unbuttoned his jacket and shirt and began to drag out a long towel wrapped around his body. In it were stowed thousands of bills. "Do with it what you want, Rebbe, bury it, burn it, but I must save myself, and you are the only one who can save me, because they will not suspect you."

As soon as Stolov put his fortune on the table he disappeared into the dark of night. We all remained sitting as if paralyzed. What was one to do? How to get rid of the money, where to bury such a corpse? It was a miracle that despite our fright we did not lose our heads. We put the whole big pile of paper money back into the towel and decided that someone of the household would carry around the contraband until the Bolsheviks left. Father could not do it—no matter what happened we could not risk his life. Mother?

Definitely not, because she would not be able to do her work carrying that heavy bundle. The children were still too young to be trusted with such a thing. So the lot fell to me, the eldest.

I was wrapped with the towel stuffed with the money, and I looked like a pregnant woman in her ninth month. I had a red cape that my Aunt Sorel gave me as a present and put it on. It covered all the sins. In order not to become suspect I went into the large room where the Bolsheviks' office was located. My red cape attracted their attention, of course, and they wanted to know why I was wearing it. Was it perhaps a sign of sympathy for the Bolshevik movement? What if they were to find out that under the cape a fortune was hidden? I sat and chatted with them as if nothing was amiss, but I was strongly tempted to open the cape and give them the money. Of course, this would have placed not only myself but the entire family in danger.

It was our luck that the Bolsheviks began to retreat that very morning without any battle. During the day, the first Poles began to arrive and gradually installed a civilian government. They tried not to show their deep rooted anti-Semitism, behaved well, and did not plunder the area. Perhaps the reason was that they knew that after the Germans and Bolsheviks there was nothing left anyway. Gradually, our lives returned to normal under the Polish government, with Polish regulations and Polish money. Our neighbor's money, for which he had risked our lives, was no longer worth a pinch of snuff.

Courtship and Marriage

Our life in Shirvint during the epoch of Polish rule, which lasted only about one year, dragged on in a strange and boring fashion. We were cut off from the world and lived with the hope that one would be able to tear oneself away from life in the small town. Two places especially attracted the young: America and Palestine. One was young and full of dreams, firm in the belief that Wilson's Fourteen Points would be realized in a final peace that would come to the world. It was the period when the Balfour Declaration, which promised the Jews a homeland in Palestine, was announced.

Everywhere the news arrived there were celebrations. The youth of Shirvint organized a celebration in Itchik Klor's living room. All the residents of the town were invited, but only the youth inclined towards the Zionist-Socialists showed up. The chairman of the Zionist organization, Shaynuk, opened the celebration with a speech stressing the significance of the declaration for the Jewish people, and what the tasks would have to be to realize the 2000-year-old dream of returning to the land of the fathers. Everybody agreed that it was most important to establish training centers where the youth would be prepared for life as pioneers in a *kibbutz*. The evening closed with my reciting Bialik's "The Son of the Bird" and with the singing of "The Hands of All Our Brothers Will Be Strengthened."

After that evening, the town was abuzz with meetings, debates, and also with actual work. Many of the youth had joined *Hachshara* centers where they learned farming and, with youthful enthusiasm, began to prepare to emigrate to

the land of Israel. My sister Reichl and I wanted very much to join the pioneer movement and go through the training, but Father, despite his love of Zion, would not even hear of it. The *kibbutzim* with their radical ideas were too far to the left for his concepts. We were very disappointed with Father's position, but did not have enough courage to rebel against him.

Disappointed, I went for a visit to Malat, a nearby town where Uncle Lazer, Father's brother-in-law, was the rabbi and my beloved aunt, Soreh Necheh, was *rebbitzin*. Malat was a town like hundreds of other Lithuanian towns. It did not stand out in any way—its young people were clamoring for big city life and looked with derision upon the small town. It had its good points and bad, but for me Malat had a special meaning and opened up a new chapter in my life.

Not far from Malat there was a village—Adrukentz—where a Jewish miller, Avrom Latz, had rented a watermill. Avrom was a God-fearing Jew and was considered well-to-do and a fine man. He was also blessed with a large family of sons and daughters, but one day his wife died. What was one to do when one was left with a large house full of children and no one to take care of them? He began to look around for some help—a wife who would be pious and good to the motherless children.

In Malat there lived at that time a woman by the name of Leah Tzivyeh who was both a widow and a divorcee. Her first husband had died and left her with two small children. Since she was very beautiful and had a reputation for being smart and a hard worker, it was not difficult for her to get married again. The match did not last very long and ended in a divorce. She was barely thirty years old when she was left high and dry and pregnant. In due time a third child was born. She did all kinds of hard labor to sustain herself and the children. No work was too hard for her; but how long can one torture oneself?

Avrom the miller heard of Leah Tzivyeh and knew of her poverty and hard life. He got the idea that she could be an appropriate match for him despite the fact that he was eigh-

teen years older than she. Leah Tzivyeh, in her dire predicament and desperation, and knowing that Avrom was a fine man with a good reputation, decided to accept him.

When she arrived at the village of Adrukentz she found that the three older children were already married, but she had enough to endure from the remaining children! With her good nature she accepted everything. Her greatest enjoyment was to cook and bake and invite guests. It was known in town that at her home the itinerant guest would have the nicest sabbath. Whenever a preacher, representatives of some charitable organization or men of the cloth arrived in town, they all wanted to spend the sabbath at the home of the great hostess, Leah Tzivyeh.

In the meantime the years passed, and every three years she bore a child. She gave birth to one daughter and three sons, and now the children were not considered "mine" or "yours" but "ours." Then a fire broke out and burned down the mill and the house, and the rich man became poor. Somehow, they moved to another village, but could not make a living there, so finally they moved to Malat where Leah Tzivyeh took up her old occupation—baking bread and bagels. They barely made a living out of her hard labor. In the meantime, the three boys were growing up, so how was one to send them to *chaider*? Where was the tuition to come from?

The best solution was to send the two younger boys, Zalmen and Nison, to a nearby community. There they would be taken care of by the generous Jews of the town. They would eat with a different family each day—*esen teg*. The rabbi would assign these families who considered it their duty not only to feed the boys but to pay for their tuition. But how would a child of seven feel in a strange place far from home and from the supervision of father and mother? Their older brother Feivel (later to become Philip) was already in this community. They spent three years there, only coming home for holidays. When they got older, they were sent to the large city of Vilna, to study there in the "butchers' synagogue" (each trade had its own synagogue). There they grew up and experienced the hard life of learning, developing

without any supervision by parents or relatives. They lived in the synagogue, slept on the hard benches, ate at the assigned place and swallowed tears. When Feivel became *bar mitzvah*, he was given the position of assistant to the *shammes* in a synagogue. The younger boys added to this meager income by praying at a bereavement or reading psalms for the dead.

At fifteen years of age, Feivel's dream to go to America became a reality. His half-sister Chavah, who had already lived in America for several years in great poverty, somehow managed to save enough money for her brother's passage. The two younger brothers, Zalmen and Nison, who had not even reached *bar mitzvah* yet, remained in the large city without their older brother. They would also, in time, get to America with the great stream of emigrants, but different events happened that would hold them in Lithuania for many years.

There was a law in existence at that time proclaiming that if a boy left his birthplace before reaching draft age, the remaining family was required to pay 300 rubles in fines. When tickets for passage for Zalmen and Nison arrived from the family in America, they were returned to avoid payment. Also, when the head of the *yeshiva* they attended heard of the boys' plans to go to America, he did not rest until he convinced them that before they decided to go to that heretic land they must study at least one year at the Slabotkeh *yeshivah*.

The three years that Nison spent in that *yeshiva*, under the supervision of the "old one," as the director of the *yeshiva* was called, left an indelible impression upon him. They crystallized his character and left a mark upon him that remained for the rest of his life. He was known in the *yeshiva* for his great diligence and sharpness. He would study day and night, as much as sixteen hours a day. The more he became absorbed in study the less he thought of America. But then World War I broke out.

The *yeshiva* was transferred to Minsk, and the older boys

left it because no one wanted to be a soldier and serve the Russian Czar. Nison joined those who were hiding in Vilna to avoid falling into the hands of the Russian army.

When the Germans occupied Lithuania, he came out of hiding and began to look around to see what he could do to keep body and soul together. He decided to return to Malat with the hope that he might find his family there. But those of his family who were there needed help themselves. From his earliest years he had been used to living with strangers and taking care of himself. It was only a continuation of his previous lifestyle.

Gradually he began to trade in different goods that became available in that occupied region where there was a serious shortage of just about everything. It was his idea to organize a company out of several young men who turned up in Malat. He divided them into two groups; one group would buy merchandize in Vilna, the other would sell it in Malat. But how to get to Vilna with which there was no communication? The Germans insisted on permits for travel, and these permits were impossible to obtain. It was decided to go on foot the distance of forty kilometers in order to sneak by the Germans. They dragged themselves in the cold of winter and in the heat of summer, but they did buy and sell and built up a good business.



No matter how tired Nison was after one of his trips to Vilna, he always found time to drop in at the Malat rabbi's home to study a page of *Gemora*. He thus became friends with the rabbi and *rebbitzin*, and they recognized that he was a fine young man who studied well. The rabbi of Malat, my uncle Lazer, did not wait long before he began to make plans to bring us together and make a match. Naturally, it was done with my father's consent. The year was 1919 and we were both 23 years old when arrangements were made for us to meet in the Shirvint Inn in Vilna, right after

Succoth. It was a cold and rainy day when Father and I arrived from Shirvint, after dragging along the muddy road the entire night.

The yard of the Shirvint Inn was full of coachmen, wagons, and horses from the surrounding towns. The noise and yelling was unimaginable. I felt strange and lost in the confusion and wanted to run away from the noise and from meeting the intended groom. We entered a room, and Father informed me that I should sit and wait until he tested Nison on his knowledge of Talmud and determined what sort of young man he was. How long I sat and waited I do not know, but the time dragged by very slowly. Every once in a while I felt the urge to rise and run away, far away. Finally, the door opened and Father entered with a blond young man.

My first impression was that he almost looked like a *shaigetz*, not a diligent student and a *yeshiva bocher* who had studied in a *yeshiva* for many years. I simply did not like him, but I had to be polite. So against my will, I had to try to carry on a conversation with him. But what was I to talk about? Father quietly left the room and there we were alone. From the fact that Father left us alone I knew that the young man had passed the test that Father had given him and that Father had agreed to the match. But what about him and me? Did we consent? I looked at the young man and noted that he was more at a loss than I. So I took pity on him and tried to initiate a conversation, but it somehow did not go well. It was difficult to find the appropriate words. Somehow we managed the two hours, and at the parting he stammered that we would meet again.

Four months passed before we met again in Vilna at the home of our friends, the Kabatchniks on Stephanski Street. And, it was surprising how different Nison was then. An unusual change had taken place. His fluster had disappeared and he did not have to try to maintain a conversation. I remember his entire behavior that evening as if it were yesterday.

We were sitting in a semi-dark parlor of the Kabatchniks, and, to brighten the corner where we were sitting, I carried over the burning lamp to the table. It was actually Friday

night. How could I commit the transgression of touching a burning lamp and thus violate the sabbath? I do not exactly remember whether I did it inadvertently or on purpose, whether I wanted to test his piety or did it without intention. If he were rigidly pious, he would have gotten up and left without a goodbye. He only looked at me with bewilderment and astonishment and in his look I could read, "How could a rabbi's daughter so casually desecrate the sabbath?" Despite the incident, we had a good conversation and felt that we were getting closer. And so we spent more time together, and the more we did the closer we felt to each other, until we saw that the rabbi from Malat was correct in his contention that we were a match made in heaven.

It was the middle of winter. The streets of Vilna were covered with a deep snow, but that did not stop us from taking a horse-drawn carriage and going sledding through the snow-covered, lighted streets during my week-long visit. We did not feel cold; we only felt a warm feeling developing between us.

My birthday fell during this visit in Vilna (the fifteenth of *Shvat*). How surprised I was when that evening Nison arrived loaded with packages of goodies, such as *bocksher*, dates, and almonds, and announced incidentally that we would celebrate not only my birthday but also our engagement. That is, if I consented. Despite expecting it, I was surprised by his proposal. At the time there was no telephone and I was unable to announce the good news, so that no one of our large family was able to come to celebrate our engagement. Early in the morning Nison had to return to his business (at that time he was in business with a partner in Utyan, where he had moved from Malat), and I returned to Shirvint with the good news. Nison and I decided to meet next in Kovneh, the capital of Lithuania, which was on the way to Berlin.

Traveling about was not easy since the war between Poland and Lithuania was still in progress. Nison lived in Utyan which belonged to Lithuania, while I lived in Shirvint which was in Poland. There was no postal connection nor

any other possible contact. We waited impatiently to meet in Kovneh.

Upon arriving home with the good news that, with good fortune, I would become a bride, a problem loomed immediately—how was a trousseau to be obtained? How can you give a daughter in marriage without a dowry or trousseau? Through the years of World War I and the German occupation there was great impoverishment and the *shtetl*'s shops were emptied. But Mother hit on a plan. She would write to her brother Kalmen, knowing he was a very good-natured person and devoted to the family, and gather up the courage to present the situation to him and ask for his help in the embarrassing predicament.

Uncle Kalmen then lived in Berlin. His home and large department store in Tavrig, on the German-Lithuanian border, had been burned during the war. Moreover, he had been taken prisoner in Germany where he suffered for several months, but with pull he succeeded in being freed and arrived in Berlin with a few marks in his pocket. Gradually he got settled and in time he built up a large business and became rich. But he did not enjoy his riches for his wife and three children remained in Russia where he had sent them when the front was getting close to Tavrig. He, himself, had remained in Tavrig hoping to save his business, and that is where he was taken prisoner. He had not been able to bring his family from Russia to Berlin because the Bolsheviks would not let anyone leave. Shortly after my mother wrote to him we received his answer that he was expecting me in Berlin.

It was dangerous to cross the border from Shirvint in Poland into Lithuania since the war between them was still going on. Nevertheless I arrived safely in Kovneh where Nison awaited me. How happy we were to see each other again! When I look back and recall the two weeks in Kovneh, it seems to me that those were perhaps the happiest weeks of our lives. We stayed at the Schlosberg Hotel which was considered an appropriate rabbinical inn. So how come in such an inn an engaged couple could stay alone in a room? Well, it so happened that my uncle, our matchmaker, the rabbi of

Malat, was at the same inn at the same time. He had decided to leave the Malat rabbinate and was taken as rabbi by the eastern Jews of Leipzig. On the way to his new post he decided to spend a few days in Kovneh at a meeting of rabbis. The first couple of days at the Schlosberg Inn I felt embarrassed to stay in the same room with Nison, but seeing that even my uncle made nothing of it, we saw it as a sort of consent for us to stay together.

I had never been to Kovneh before meeting Nison, and the beauty of the surrounding hills and the wide Nyehman River that was flowing at the edge of the city made a deep impression on me. It was a large city with a large Jewish population, and wherever you stood or walked you could hear the sound of Yiddish. The Jewish theater played to full houses; concerts and lectures on Jewish themes were given daily. It simply bubbled with Jewish cultural life. We both drank it up like the thirsty at a well of bubbling water. Every evening we would go to the theater or to a lecture. The famous Jewish actor Sokolov and his troupe were on tour, and how happy and inspired we were to see them perform not only the Yiddish repertory but also many translations from the Russian stage.

Nison knew Kovneh very well from the time he studied in the Slabotkeh *yeshiva* in a suburb of Kovneh. He knew not only the city but also many people, and he very much enjoyed leading me about to acquaint me with his friends and the city. He felt that he had made a good match and wanted to show me off. But soon our Shangri-la came to an end, and after a couple of weeks in Kovneh, we parted with the hope to meet after a short time. We had not imagined that my stay in Berlin would be so prolonged.



I traveled to Berlin by myself *via* a night express and was unable to see the passing landscape. Only when day was beginning to break did I first see how beautiful and different the German landscape was. Arriving in Berlin I simply got

frightened at the size and noise of such a metropolis. How happy I was when I saw Uncle Kalmen waiting for me. He had changed a great deal since I had last seen him in Tavrig. Seven difficult years had passed. He had suffered a lot in the war, but the hardest thing was the separation from his family who remained in Russia. He was not able to bring them back to Berlin until 1925. He had aged greatly, but his good-natured smile shone from his face upon seeing me.

We went by subway, a new experience for me, and in twenty-five minutes we were in Charlottenburg where Uncle Kalmen lived. Coming from a small backward Polish *shtetl*, his apartment seemed like a palace to me. And his life-style was very different from our life in poor Poland. My uncle was very proud of Berlin, as if he owned it. For days and weeks he led me tirelessly around the wide and beautiful Berlin streets. He was especially proud of Kurfierstendan Street with its marvelous shops. He neglected his bank business to show me Berlin, and it really was something to see. It was a city full of parks, museums, and royal palaces. Where did he not take me and what did I not see that spring! Every day there opened up a new world with new wonders. The Berlin Opera made a deep impression on me. It was the first time that I had seen an opera, and the impression of the *Tales of Hoffman* was not forgotten for a long, long time.

Berlin was a city with a large Jewish population. Many Eastern European Jews settled there after the war, but the German *Yuden* did not want to have anything to do with the *Ostyuden* (eastern Jews) and looked upon them with contempt. They claimed that the *Ostyuden* blackened their reputation and embarrassed them with their mannerisms and different appearance, with their *kapotehs* and *peyes*; and their use of Yiddish set them apart.

Every Saturday I liked to go to the different temples to become acquainted with the various Jewish communities. How shocked I was when one Saturday I went to the Fezanen Temple and saw how men prayed without covering their heads, in German, not in Hebrew, and how men and women sat together. But the beautiful choir and organ made up for the

bad impression on me. My uncle, who was a pious Jew, did not pray in such a temple—only in an orthodox synagogue where, he boasted, the most important Jews in Berlin went to services. He conducted himself in a fine pious manner after the pattern of the orthodox Jews for whom the sabbath was completely holy. Every Friday evening he invited many guests for the sabbath meal, and spent the evening singing *zmires* and discussing world problems.

Among the guests was a woman from Kovneh who was studying to be a dentist in Berlin. I noted that she did not feel too comfortable among my uncle's conservative guests. We agreed to meet and get better acquainted. From the encounter there developed a friendship between me and Dr. Efros, a woman of tact and intelligence. She was much older than I, and I learned a lot from her. I enjoyed going to the various museums with her as my guide. She also helped me no end in buying my trousseau. She went with me to the big stores such as Tiez and Wertheim and helped find bargains. In later years I would visit her in Kovneh, until I left for America.

In buying my trousseau, Uncle Kalmen instructed me, "You go spend as much money as you want and charge it to me." I bought sheets, towels, blankets, underwear and nightgowns, things one couldn't get in a small town. I still remember the two silk dresses I bought in Berlin—one grey dress with a blue collar, the other black—though I didn't really need such dresses in Utyan. When I finally settled in Utyan, the people of the town came over to see all the beautiful things I had brought from Berlin.

I spent three months in Berlin, and the impressions of those months influenced my later years. I prolonged my stay in Berlin in order to absorb the culture of the great city. I saw and learned a great deal, and I was grateful to my uncle Kalmen who gave me the opportunity to see and experience all that.

At the same time a question kept recurring to me: "Will I be able to return to the small town life of backward Lithuania?" I simply feared the future. During that period, Nison pelted me with letters: that I should come home sooner, as if he felt that the big city would have a bad influence on me

and on our relationship. He also wrote me about the wedding plans and that he had succeeded in renting an apartment for us at the Perlman's and had ordered furniture from the carpenter Moishe Segal. I was not excited about his plans and about settling in Utyan. Filled with the metropolitan influence of life in Berlin, I hoped that I would succeed in persuading Nison that he should sell his store and settle in Berlin. I had a chat with my uncle about my plans, and he assured me that he would help to realize them. With that hope it was easier for me to leave Berlin and return to Lithuania.

Nison was waiting for me when I got to Kovneh. The reunion was not as warm as our parting. After Berlin, even Kovneh looked like a provincial town; everything appeared smaller, and even Nison seemed different, like a bashful small-town groom. He noticed the change in me immediately, and he felt that I had changed my mind about the marriage and that perhaps I missed Mottel. I had told him about Mottel when we got engaged. He was sufficiently courageous to suggest that if I had such feelings for Mottel, I should renounce our engagement and he would give me the fare to Alyteh where Mottel lived. His proposal touched me deeply, and I assured him that I never thought of my former teacher, but after Berlin there was nothing here that I liked or could be satisfied with. We decided to celebrate our wedding soon, and that would perhaps help knock Berlin out of my head.

I had left Shirvint to go to Berlin during the winter when everything was covered with snow and frost, and had returned in the spring when everything outdoors was green and fresh and was full of the odors of budding flowers. Indoors the house was full of preparations for *Erev Shevuot* and for baking and frying for the great event—the wedding. We never imagined that at his advanced age Grandfather Velvel would undertake to come to the wedding all the way from Suvalk. And how joyous we were that we had a chance to see him again. Moreover, Uncle Kalmen was not loath to

sneak across the border and come all the way from Berlin. In the wedding party were also Uncle Yosef and Aunt Sorel from Meretch; they too had to cross the border at great peril, but so close and devoted to the family were they that nothing stopped them from coming to celebrate the wedding.

The wedding was held in our house, but the reception, where no women were allowed, took place at a neighbor's house where the elite of the town gathered at the set tables. They joined the rabbi in the happy event and listened to the groom's oration. At the wedding ceremony, in the house, I was seated upon a settee covered with a white sheet and surrounded by women and girls. A wedding in a *shtetl* was an important event, especially that of the rabbi's daughter. Everyone hurried to prepare for the sabbath in order not to be late for the ceremony under the *chuppa*, which took place just before sundown. Not only was it an event for the town's Jews to observe the ceremony but for the gentiles of the town as well. They lined the yard of the synagogue to view a Jewish wedding.

I sat dressed in my white dress and could not believe that it was actually my wedding that was being celebrated. Different thoughts plagued me. Was I taking the right step? What would the future hold? I was also anxious about Nison's speech. Would he be accepted by the town's aristocracy or would he shame my father? When my brother Chaim returned from the reception and assured me that Nison's speech was successful, I calmed down and awaited the groom. I did not have to wait long.

The door opened and I almost broke out in laughter seeing Nison in a top hat and in long tails escorted by my father and many of the elders. All the women and girls who surrounded me stood up in two rows with lighted candles. With slow steps the groom approached me, holding a bridal veil with which he covered my face. All the men left the house with the groom, and only then was I led to the *chuppa* to the accompaniment of the *klezmorim*.

The yard of the synagogue was packed with Jews and gentiles of the town; even the Polish soldiers of the garrison

came to observe the *chuppa* ceremony. Seven times did I walk around the groom, and it appeared to me that it took a very long time to read the *ksubbah* and pronounce all the blessings. Only when the silken veil over my face was lifted did I see the large curious crowd and feel satisfied that the ceremony was finished.

With elaborate pomp we were led into the house. The wedding feast was sumptuous. From all over town people had come with meats, fish, and baked goods—everyone wanted to participate in the celebration. And they really celebrated with bride and groom. According to custom I was led into the synagogue on the sabbath morning and, from the small window of the women's section, I was able to see Nison standing in the *bimah* reading the *Maftir*. Mother simply melted with *naches*. All enjoyed listening to his reading of the *Haftorah*.

But even a long summer's sabbath day passes and the regular week begins. It was difficult to tolerate the sudden arrival of ordinary days after so noisy and joyful a sabbath. We started to make preparations to leave Shirvint. It was very hard to leave Mother and Father, and finally, when the day of parting arrived Father took it the hardest. He could not control himself. He withdrew into a corner near the bookcase and cried aloud as in the *Yom Kippur* prayers. It seemed that he would have to part with his daughter forever. Father and Mother wanted to come with us to see where I ended up. But how could they go since they would have to sneak across the Polish border in order to arrive in Lithuania, and that was too risky for them.

We rented a coach and coachman, who undertook to conduct us over the border in peace. He was acquainted with the region and knew all the roads and byways. With us also came Uncle Kalmen. He decided that it was better and more comfortable for him to cross the border into Lithuania and from there to travel directly to Berlin. The night was cloudy and very dark. We hoped that on a night like this we would not have any difficulties. But in the darkness of the night our coachman lost his way.

All night long we wandered about until finally a Polish patrol stopped us and took us to headquarters. They suspected us of espionage. They pelted us with questions and wanted to know what we were doing near the border in the middle of the night. Our explanation that we were returning home to Lithuania after our wedding did not help. No petition or prayer helped. They incarcerated us and there was nowhere to turn for help. We managed somehow to get through the night, half sitting, half lying on a hard bench.

Early in the morning we were again brought before the staff, and again there started a series of questions and accusations. We were saved by a Polish soldier, a clerk at headquarters. When he entered the office and spotted us he was surprised and called out: "What are the bride and groom, who a couple of days ago got married, doing here? A group of soldiers and I witnessed the Jewish wedding." We were freed immediately, without further difficulty.

But when we arrived in Vilkomir, a city in Lithuania, we were arrested and again were accused of being spies, this time by the Lithuanian authorities. Uncle Kalmen was not at a loss this time; he called the Lithuanian officer aside and put a fine piece of money in his hand. We were immediately set free. We asked him: "How come you gave a bribe to the Lithuanian and not to the Pole?" His answer was that the Poles were much more civilized than the Lithuanians; one could reason with the Poles. But the primitive Lithuanians understood nothing but money. We parted from our dear uncle and rented a wagon for the trip to Utyan and our new life.

Life in Utyan

We arrived in Utyan on a warm summer day. Everything about us was green and enveloped in gleaming light. Our hearts were light, too, because we were so young and full of life and hope. We stopped at the home of Nison's half-brother, Mendel, and his wife Gittel. The couple of days we spent there were a continuation of the "Seven days of the banquet," the customary week-long wedding celebration. Nison had a large family in Utyan. There at the house were his brother Mendel and his family, his half-sister Chaye Soreh and her family, and the children of his half-sister Chanah, who also lived there.

All at once I became the aunt of nephews and nieces, most of whom were almost my age. They came to meet their young aunt and celebrate with the newlyweds. They devoted their sabbath to the visit, each one showing what he could do. Chanah's children stood out especially. They could draw, play different instruments, and sing. When Nison told them that I too could sing, they insisted that I sing my entire repertoire. They especially liked the Yiddish folksongs. I felt that I had come into a warm, homey environment with an advanced and aware group. That first impression of Utyan was not bad.

In comparison with Shirvint, Utyan was a big city. It had many streets and, as in all Lithuanian towns, the marketplace was in the center. It was a large marketplace with many stores which were owned exclusively by Jews. Utyan was a county seat where people came to buy and conduct different transactions. The Jewish population consisted mostly

of storekeepers, small traders, and artisans. They were far from rich, but they made a living. The schools were good—especially excellent were the Tarbus School (where everything was taught in Hebrew) and the Yiddish school.

There was an intensive social life with different organizations—mostly Zionist. The young people were divided. Those who concentrated around the Tarbus School learned farm work and dreamed of going to Israel and to a *kibbutz*. At the Yiddish school were concentrated the radically inclined youth who strove to build a Jewish life on a socialist foundation in the diaspora. They learned a lot and debated a lot. The well-stocked library contributed to their knowledge.

Our first home was at Perlman's in a corner of the marketplace. The little wooden house was surrounded by a few small trees which gave a fresh greenness and comfort to the residence of two rooms which had been added to Perlman's house. It had a tiny kitchen in the dining room with a wood-burning stove. For the first few months after our wedding, the small place was like a palace to us. I was only sorry that Father and Mother could not see it. But a few months later Poland concluded peace with Lithuania, the border was opened, and they came to visit.

They arrived on market day. The marketplace was full of peasants' wagons filled with different provisions that they would sell to the town's Jews. Then they would go to the stores to buy various goods for their needs. The stores, including Nison's, were full of customers, and much trade and bargaining went on. According to custom, on market day the storekeepers of the surrounding towns would arrive to buy goods at Nison's and his partner's wholesale store. What didn't they have in that store! Everything from all sorts of household goods to a barrel of herring. All week long business was slow, but Thursday, market day, there was a shortage of hands, and I would go in to help out.

There I was, serving a client, when I saw a wagon stop near the store and sitting in it, to my great surprise, were Father and Mother. I dropped everything, the store and its customers, since I had such important visitors. It soon became

known in town that the rabbi of Shirvint had come to visit his daughter and son-in-law. The people of the town did not wait long before sending a delegation with my brother-in-law Mendel at its head to invite the rabbi to speak in the large synagogue on the sabbath.

Mendel was very impressed by his in-laws; lineage was very important to him. Whenever a matchmaker came with a proposition for his daughter Chayeh, he always asked, "Will it rain in my collar?" The joke was that when you go about town and you are stopped in the middle of the street and are asked, "Who is marrying your daughter?", if the groom is of good lineage, there is no need to give too many explanations as to who his father and grandfather were; but, if the person is of modest background, it takes a long time to explain, and in the meantime it rains in the collar. Mendel was a cold man of few words, and his strictness was well known. But he was only cold externally. In reality he was a fine man.

My second brother-in-law, Meir Itzik, a pharmacist, was a strange and interesting man. If he had obtained a regular education and studied he would probably have become a scientist of renown. His interest in study and learning was boundless. He was never seen without a book. He was one of the first in Utyan to send his sons to study at the university, and one actually became a doctor and the other a pharmacist. But Meir Itzik knew more than both of them.

He would not miss sabbath prayers at the synagogue nor a verse in reading the Torah, but on his way back from the synagogue on the sabbath he would go to the store and prepare a prescription. He would always find permission in the Scripture that even on the sabbath one could write and do weekday things without sinning. Jews looked askance at him, not understanding his ways. "How can a learned Jew desecrate the sabbath in public?" Nevertheless, the main thing was that my Father liked both of my brothers-in-law. He was able to speak to them and study with them.

Our friends also made a good impression on my father, especially the teacher Aaron Shapiro and the mayor of the town, Dzhurat. For a Jew to be the mayor of a Lithuanian town at that time was a rare phenomenon. But Dzhurat was

a good and honest administrator, and had the welfare of all the citizens at heart so that even the anti-Semitic gentiles of the town ignored his Jewishness and voted for him. In the several years that he was mayor he did much for Utyan. Our friendship grew and we were practically one family.

We started getting ready for Father's speech in the large synagogue set for the sabbath. But, in the end it was quite different than planned. That Friday morning, Father announced that he was returning to Shirvint. We were dumbfounded and alarmed. We tried to get him to tell us the reason for his decision, but he kept saying that he would not reveal the secret until he got home, when he would write to us. Then we would see that he was right in his behavior. No entreaty or begging was of any help. We told him that he would shame us by leaving on sabbath eve. Mother and I soon noticed that he was very upset, as though a heavy load of worry was pressing upon him.

Before leaving he confided in Nison that early Friday morning he had awakened to the quotation from the Bible, "Arise and bury your dead." Father was sure that something had happened to one of the seven children back home. He did not want to disturb Mother's happiness and decided to return home alone. Being certain that a great misfortune had occurred, he wanted to spare her and postpone the time when she would have to be told of the calamity. Everybody, including Nison, soon found out that Father's waking to the terrible quotation was no accident.

It was kept secret from my mother and me for quite a while. But how long can a secret be kept? When Mother, after a few weeks of her visit with us, returned home, I found out about the great misfortune.



While Father and Mother were visiting us in Utyan, our brother Moishele, who was eighteen years old, suddenly became sick with dysentery. Medical help was practically unavailable. Only old wives' remedies were given and the instructions of the only paramedic in town were followed.

Moishele was frail by nature, and without the proper medical care he did not withstand the severe illness; he suffered for three days and passed away in Reichl's arms. When Father woke up to the quotation, it was the very hour that Moishele died, and it was necessary to bury him.

The deep impression that his death made upon the children is difficult to describe. It hit me the hardest because I had such a feeling of guilt. I was sure that I had had a part in Moishele's death because if Father and Mother had not come to visit at that time, the misfortune would not have happened. Father would have gotten a doctor somehow, as well as the appropriate medicine, and Moishele would have been saved. But with Father and Mother away, what could my brothers and sisters do? Reichl, aged twenty-two, and Chaim, aged sixteen, were the oldest but apparently were at a loss and did not know what to do. The remaining children, Luba, Chanah, Malkiel and Esther, were too young and needed supervision themselves. It was difficult to comfort them and more difficult to accept the fact that Moishele was torn away from us.

I went about as if I had lost my senses, completely numbed. Nothing mattered; only one question kept recurring in my mind—why was such punishment visited upon my good and pious Father and Mother, why, O Lord? How had they sinned that their beloved son was taken away from them? Nison and the rest of the family were worried about my behavior and undertook various means to distract me. My niece Elkeh, Chanah's daughter, with whom I had become especially close, tried everything in her power to cheer me up. I got pregnant at the time and this helped in overcoming my grief and desperation. My pregnancy revived me, and I waited impatiently for motherhood.

How surprised I was to receive a letter from Mother in which she wrote the following: "This morning Father came home from the service and greeted me with *mazeltov* and said, 'Dvoire Reisl, you are going to be a grandmother. Beile Hinde is pregnant and, God willing, will have a boy in good time.' You know, dear daughter, that Father's dreams and

quotes always come true. So let us hope that the good news will also come true and that this prophecy will be realized." When I showed the letter to Nison he was absolutely unable to understand how the spirit of prophecy was revealed to Father from time to time.

And so in nine months, on June 7, 1921, our eldest son was born. We wanted to name him Moishe, but Father was against it and asked us to name him Boruch, after his father, the rabbi of Balbirishok (may he rest in peace). "So why should our first grandchild not bear the name of such a saint?" Mother added. Besides, the wound of Moishe's death was still too fresh and we could not have called him by that name anyway. So Boruch it was.

No matter how embittered and depressed Mother was, she came for the confinement and tried not to show her deep sorrow, not to disturb our joy. And a great joy it was, not only for us but for the entire *mishpocheh*. The *bris* was celebrated and half the town came. Our two rooms were too small to receive the large crowd, so our landlord Perlman permitted us to celebrate at his inn. And this time, instead of the usual drunken melodies that would come forth to me from the inn, there were Jewish melodies full of sweetness. The *bris* was conducted according to the law and tradition, but the chief relative, Father, was absent. He excused himself from coming to the celebration, since he was still in deep mourning.

The entire family was so happy with the newborn you would think that the Messiah had been born. He was, by the way, a large and beautiful infant, and he sparkled in his swaddling clothes. Looking at him, I forgot the great pain of more than forty-eight hours of labor. Every day, another member of the family would come to have a look at the child, and they never failed to say, "What a beauty of a child he is" and, "He looks at you as though he understands." Then they would add, "*Kayn aynhoreh*." Mother used to say that he is a child like any other child, only his luck should be good. She, too, believed in the evil eye.

When Mother started to get ready to leave I grew lonely, of course. How would I manage without her supervision?

How was I to make decisions without her help? But gradually I managed and the child thrived and grew "as if on yeast." It was the middle of the summer, the weather was warm and beautiful and every day I would take him for an outing in his perambulator. These were days beyond compare. Whenever Nison returned from the store and looked at the child, he would swell with pride. "Who does he look like, whose eyes does he have?" we used to ask each other, bending over the crib and never tiring of looking at his bright little face. But the golden period passed all too quickly.

At the end of the summer of 1921 many refugees who had run away to Russia began to return to Lithuania after the war years. A terrible famine and a civil war were going on in Russia, and whoever had the opportunity to escape did so. The members of Nison's family who were caught in Russia were among the lucky ones who were able to escape from the new troubles that developed there. They suffered hunger and sickness aplenty and arrived in Utyan starved and exhausted.

It was the first time that I met my mother-in-law, Leah Tzivyeh, and brother-in-law Zalmen. Despite Leah's illness it was possible to see the traces of her past beauty. At first, we did not know what her illness was. We thought that she was only famished and emaciated and with good care and proper nutrition her strength would return. But we soon noted our error; every day she was worse. Finally, after an examination the doctor told us that she had cancer of the stomach. Nison's brother did not want to remain in Utyan and occupy himself with business. He had entirely different plans and at the first opportunity he left for Kovneh to continue his studies. Thus, the whole burden of my mother-in-law's illness fell on my shoulders. They were hard days for us; I had to take care of the child, who was barely six months old, and a severely ill woman. In the bedroom, in the crib, was little Boruch, alert and handsome, and in the living room, on the sofa, lay my mother-in-law, who was exhausted and clamored for life. In one room was the beauty of life, and in the other the ugliness of death.

I was exhausted and desperate about the hopeless situation. When her pains would subside, Leah Tzivyeh would talk, retelling the sad story of her life, a life full of plague and suffering. She frequently mentioned her children who had gone to America some years before. She would ask us to write to her daughter Alice and her son Philip (Feivel) in America to tell them about her illness and to ask for help. Naturally, Nison and I wrote immediately. She was very happy when a letter with a few dollars came from her son Philip.

For six months she lay in our small apartment, under terrible circumstances. When she felt that her strength was ebbing, she began to ask that she be taken to Malat, because she wanted to die there and lie in the cemetery where her husband and family were buried. We were not able to refuse her last request, and on a cold winter day Nison took her to her two daughters Soreh and Beile who lived in Malat.

We padded the sled with pillows and blankets. She was so thin and shrunken that she could hardly be seen in the bedding. And so she was taken to Malat. She suffered a short time longer, and the end finally came and rescued her from a life full of pain and suffering. The death of Leah Tzivyeh and the difficult experiences of her untreatable illness severely affected my mood. Suddenly I felt my youth was vanishing, and I saw before me a difficult life of bearing and raising children as well as experiencing children's illnesses and worrying over our livelihood.

I became pregnant again, not too happily, I must say. Little Boruch was hardly eleven months old, the apartment became too small and crowded, and our livelihood was skimpy too. I was embarrased when I learned of the pregnancy and did not tell anybody until the last months. Nison would often go by train to Meml, a city on the Baltic Sea, to serve customers.

One market day I was on my feet all day, climbing up and

down the ladder fetching goods from shelves. That evening our partner Shol Getzle Tzin remembered that several important items were missing in the store and it was necessary to write Nison in Meml to buy these items. I took the letter and asked Getzle's niece Nechamkeh to go with me to the train station in order to send the letter off more quickly.

It was a cold winter evening, a soft wet snow was falling and it was hard to walk in it. The couple of miles to the station took a long time. When I got home I was soaked through, cold and wet, and suddenly I felt sharp pains. At home there was only the fifteen-year-old girl who occasionally helped out. I suffered for several hours and when the pain increased and came more often, I decided they were probably birth pains, even though I was only in my eighth month. I awakened the girl and sent her to bring the midwife.

At home, I was alone with my pains. In his crib Boruch was asleep. But every minute the pains became stronger and my desperation deepened. Different thoughts passed through my mind. "What if the midwife could not come in time? I will succumb along with the child." As if in a nightmare I heard the door open and heard the harsh voice of the midwife asking why I had waited so long, why she was not called sooner. "You could have destroyed the child."

Half an hour later, our second son was born. He was a small, weak little soul. Early in the morning, when it became known that I had given birth to a boy during the night, practically no one believed it and asked, "Where did she hide it?" Mother did not come to my confinement and sent Reichl to help out. She arrived sulky and angry at the world. She constantly argued: "Who ever heard of having children so often in this difficult and strained time?" In part she was right.

Since the small Baltic states had become independent, the situation had become even worse than under the Czar's government. We all knew it, and felt that our Lithuanian government was moving down a treacherous path. At first they promised great fortune and even permitted the organization of Jewish communities, and we breathed a bit more freely. But gradually, the small amount of freedom got to be less

and the anti-Semitism, in tandem with fascism, got to be rampant. But our brethren, the Jews, were used to such outbreaks. And life proceeded despite all the difficulties.

We did not want to show the world how bad our economic situation was then, and so we made a fine *bris* for our second son Hirshtzvi, who was named for Nison's mother, Leah Tzivyeh. Our partner, Shol Getzle, decided to go to America and wanted us to buy him out, but we did not have the money or the means to run a wholesale and retail business. We looked for a way and, after long thought, Nison got the idea of organizing a cooperative of the small shopkeepers of Utyan who would agree to commit themselves to take over the wholesale business, and all would be equal partners. The idea was really a good one, but it did not last. When the owners of the other wholesale cooperative company called Progress saw that we were gradually taking away their customers, they began to reduce prices. The small shopkeepers not in the cooperative used the opportunity to get cheap merchandise. It went so far that the cooperative was left with so few customers that it was about to close. It was a miracle that the owners of Progress did not know the real condition of our cooperative and proposed to Nison that he become their partner. It was really the appropriate moment to leave a sinking ship. The new partners, Zachk and Goldfine, along with their wives and daughters, were all very hard workers. No labor or effort was too hard if money was to be made. When Nison joined Progress, the partners were already wealthy. With his arrival the business was about to expand and bring in greater profits. But Nison was never happy with his partners. He thought they were crude and were only interested in making money. They simply did not talk the same language.

In the meantime, we were able to afford a larger residence, and we moved into a duplex owned by Shimonovich who owned a store of records and Gramophones. Our half was spacious with three large rooms and painted floors, then considered a great luxury. The children grew but did not avoid any diseases. Boruchl had quickly started to walk and talk and was a healthy and beautiful child until the age of

four when he had the measles. But Hirshele, from the very first day, was constantly ailing. He could not digest food, had cramps, and cried all the time. Every day Dr. Svilis, considered the best doctor in town, would come, but all his medicines did not help, and one could see a bit of life leaving the poor child.

Dr. Svilis saw our suffering but he was sure he could not save the child. He confessed that he was helpless and could not cure him. He finally told me I should give up. I simply could not understand him. How could a doctor express himself in such a manner, and how could a mother give up her child? It took quite a few months before Hirshele began to improve. Gradually, he started eating and began to become healthier and stronger. As he became healthier and larger it became apparent what a beautiful child he was.

That summer my sister Reichl married and we all traveled to Shirvint for the wedding. This was my first visit since my wedding four years before. I came home with sad and mixed feelings. It seemed that I had just left as a young, carefree girl and now I was already a mother of two children. I changed a lot in the four years and, when friends saw me, involuntarily the expression escaped their lips—"Is this Naomi?", referring to a biblical story about Naomi who left Canaan to get married in a far-off land. When she returned to Canaan after many tragedies, the people barely recognized her. It was painfully difficult to come home and not find my brother Moishe. But everyone tried to maintain control and not disturb the joyful occasion.

And it was truly a celebration, for Reichl had found her intended. Her groom, Elchonen, was of good family and learned in the Torah. But, even more important, he was a fine, ethical human being. Before getting married they had decided to become pioneers and to go to a *kibbutz* in Palestine directly after the wedding. Both had prepared themselves for *kibbutz* life. Father and Mother were rather unhappy about these plans, but they were not able to interfere.

The wedding was somewhat disturbed, for an epidemic of

measles and whooping cough spread in Shirvint, and Malkiel and Esther fell sick on the eve of the wedding. They were immediately transferred to a neighbor's house, and Chaim watched over them. But our children Boruchl and Hirshele caught the measles, and upon our return from the wedding both were already quite sick. Besides the measles, they caught the whooping cough. It was a pity to look on as they would be convulsed with coughing. Boruchl did not suffer long from the illness, but from then onward he would often be sick and remained a weak child. A specialist in Kovneh said he was anemic and had large tonsils.

Hirshele's coughing went on for months, and the doctor told me to keep him outside so that he would have plenty of fresh air. I would carry him around near the brook and the nearby fields. We spanned many miles until he became well. And, surprisingly, the weak child Hirshele began to develop and become a healthy strong lad. On the other hand, Boruchl, who until four years of age was hearty and did not know of any sickness, suddenly started to become sick often. Nison was too busy with Progress, and with community affairs to help me take care of the children as they passed through the various illnesses.



The *Kehileh* was a council which governed the Jewish community. For twenty years after Lithuania became independent from Russia, the Jews were allowed to govern themselves. At that time, the chairman of the *Kehileh*, Becker, was finishing his term. How surprised we were that of all the candidates, Nison was elected, despite being the youngest and not even from Utyan. But it was known that he was the most able and would lead the community with a strict and sure hand.

It was not all easy going. The *Kehileh* had the power to tax all Jewish residents in order to maintain all of the Jewish institutions such as the Tarbus School, the Yiddish school, the

library, and even the burial society. However, many of the Jews did not want to accept a proposed tax. They protested and decided to undertake rigorous action. When sabbath arrived and the scroll was taken out for the reading of the week's portion, some of the rebellious Jews occupied the *bimah* and stopped the reading. Their argument was that if the rabbi did not get involved in the matter and did not see to it that the extra tax was abolished, then they would not let the portion be read. The rabbi gradually quieted them down and promised them that he would get into the matter and work on the removal of the tax.

Saturday night the rabbi's court messenger came to our house and said as follows: "Reb Nison, the rabbi of the town requests that you appear before the court in order to discuss an important matter that concerns all the residents of Utyan." When Nison went to the rabbi's house, he found a houseful of people, all of them excited and yelling, their voices loud enough to be heard in the entire synagogue square. "We do not want," they argued, "that this young outsider should lead us by the nose. We do not want him as chairman of the *Kehileh*, and by no means do we want to pay extra taxes." When the secretary of the *Kehileh*, Zeitman, who lived not far from the rabbi, heard the voices, he thought anything might happen there. The chairman might even get a beating. Out of breath, he arrived to help the chairman in need. But despite the heated spirits, it did not come to blows. With God's help, Nison had an idea. He would promise to repair the old, nearly destroyed *mikvah* if they would agree to pay the taxes. And so it was. He kept his word and the *mikvah* was not only repaired but entirely rebuilt. From that time onward there was never any difficulty collecting the taxes.

The *Kehileh* not only collected taxes, but it had the power to pass verdicts. And one such verdict is worth mentioning. The butchers of Utyan were special. People even feared them a bit because with people who constantly used knives and cleavers, you never knew what could happen. They were a strong and stocky bunch, with a lot of *chutzpa*, and nothing

scared them. When a fight broke out between peasants and Jews on market day, all that was necessary was to call the butchers and they would descend on the marketplace like a storm and there maim and break the bones of the guilty, and the fight would stop.

Among the butchers was one named Itchik. He had a brother who was handicapped—deaf and dumb—but strong as an ox, and he did chores for the butchers. He would do the hardest work in the slaughterhouse, but when he got angry he would grab an axe, and who knew what would happen if his brother did not stop him and calm him down? The butcher Itchik did not get along with the Goldfein brothers who were also butchers. There were frequent arguments between them. One time the battle went so far that Itchik winked at his handicapped brother, who, understanding the signal, grabbed an axe, and right there and then killed the younger Goldfein, who was twenty-six years old. He did it so quickly that the other butchers did not have time to stop the murder. The dumb one was immediately arrested, but what could be done with a handicapped person?

Everyone believed that the chief culprit in the murder was Itchik, and he should be punished for shedding the innocent blood. The *Kehileh* had the right to judge and punish him. The trial lasted for weeks. Every evening the *Kehileh* house was packed with people. Every man was interested in the trial. Sides were also taken in the controversy. One side believed Itchik, and kept arguing that he did not direct his brother, that he was innocent. The other side, headed by the Goldfein family and the victim's widowed mother, did not believe Itchik's arguments, and wanted revenge for the young life that was cut off. The jury, consisting of the most important citizens of the community, had a difficult task.

On the evening when it was decided to pronounce the verdict, one could not squeeze the head of a pin into the *Kehileh* house. People practically stood on top of each other. Nison, as chairman, had to read the verdict and decide the sentence. As he stood up to read he was pale, his hands trembled, and

with a choked voice he began to read. The verdict stated that it could not be determined what thoughts Itchik had when he winked at his brother, but that blood was spilled, a young life was cut off, and the victim's mother was left without a breadwinner. Therefore Itchik must in part absolve his guilt by paying the mother $1,000, a huge sum at that time. If he did not have such a sum he would have to sell his house and get the money. He also lost the right to come to the slaughterhouse or to carry on as a butcher. His brother, who actually did the killing, would remain in prison. The crowd breathed more easily after hearing the verdict, but people wondered how Itchik could produce such a large sum of money. Perhaps he would turn to his relatives in America for help.

After the trial, the town returned to its normal life. But conflicts were never lacking. There were school conflicts and party conflicts. The Tarbus School and the Yiddish school were at each other's throat. The Zionist organization and the Bund, a socialist democratic workers organization opposed to Zionism, were blood enemies. It was always noisy but merry. It was merry especially on holidays. Not only would our large family come over for refreshments, but also our friends. Therefore, when *Pesach* was approaching it would take weeks of preparation.

We would make wine, brew mead, prepare beet juice for making soup and adding to the horseradish, and make all kinds of jams. We would bake *matzoh* and crack it in the mortar to make *matzoh* flour and *farfel*. There really was work aplenty. But when the holiday arrived and the workaday atmosphere disappeared, the house would be clean and full of good smells of the holiday dishes. Guests would fill the house, and the satisfaction was great.

On *Succoth*, and mainly on *Simchath Torah*, the men would go from house to house and would not be bashful about taking the holiday foods out of the oven and enjoying the good times. Naturally, the men would do it when they were already a bit tipsy. No matter how much quarrelling went on, when the holiday arrived, we would meet in the

synagogue or study house, conflicts forgotten, and a deep friendship was felt by all.



The summer our daughter Leah, named for Nison's mother, was born, was one of the warmest and most beautiful of summers. It was 1925 and we still lived at Shimonovich's, which was not far from the town park and an orchard. Every day I would take the children, now aged two and four, for a walk in the orchard. I tried to plant in the children a love for the beauty of nature.

When Mother arrived for my confinement, she was very happy to see how well we all looked and how well I felt because I had an easy pregnancy. We hoped that we would have a girl, and I very much wished that our hope would come true. How great was our joy when a tiny golden girl was born. It seemed to me that a little angel had descended from above and filled the house with light. From the day of her birth, Leah did not cause any difficulties. She rarely cried and was a healthy child, so different from her brothers. We were really overjoyed with the birth of our little daughter.

But then our happiness was somewhat marred. Several hours after the birth, the midwife poured some hot water in a tub to bathe the little one, stepped out to another room to pick up something and at that moment Boruchl and Hirshele sneaked into the room to look at their newborn sister. The room was small and they had to squeeze between the tub and the bed. They apparently pushed the tub a bit, and it seemed to me that the tub with the hot water was falling on the children. I got terribly frightened and started to shout. The midwife ran in horrified and asked what had happened. I told her, not in my own voice, that I did not know what was happening to me, because I felt my strength ebbing. I was lying in a pool of blood.

She realized that I had a hemorrhage and that she must get a doctor immediately. But the only doctor lived far from us, nearly out of town. Mother believed that the good deeds of

our forefathers stood by us and that a real miracle had happened, because a few days earlier the first telephones had been installed in town—our house and that of the doctor, Dr. Svilis, now had telephones. If it had been necessary to send a messenger for the doctor instead of telephoning, who knows what would have happened! The doctor came immediately, and saved me. But for a long period of time I remained weak and was very sorry that I was unable to breast-feed the child.

The house had become too crowded, and we moved into a more spacious house on Bozhnitcheh Street near our friends Basyeh and Aaron Shapiro. Their three children were almost the same ages as ours and they played together and started to go together to the Tarbus School, where Aaron Shapiro was the director. Aside from his teaching, he was a Zionist activist and a good speaker. The Zionist organization would send him around the world to promote and to spread the Zionist idea. He even reached the Latin American countries, of which we knew so little. It would be a great event when he would return from his travels and tell us about different ways of life in the distant lands. My friendship with Basyeh deepened. We would always find a little time for a chat and talk from the heart, despite being busy with the children and the housekeeping. Life was hard and the drudgery great, but the satisfaction was that the children were being raised without trouble.

Once a year, in the summertime, I would take the children to Shirvint for a visit. We called it the pilgrimage. It was the greatest joy I could give to Mother and Father. I never imagined that Father could show such love for the children. He would stand by his reading stand with a book, but would not take his eyes from the children. He would stand for hours, look at them playing, with a smile of *naches* on his face. Once when Boruchl was barely five years old he said to me that the child had a good head and would be able to study.

That summer, upon our return from Shirvint, I noticed that Nison was preoccupied with new plans. Whenever he would start making new plans I would get uneasy, because

the plans always meant that some change would take place in our lives. I knew that he did not care for his partners in Progress and that it was difficult to get along with them. But what could be done? "When you need a thief, you take him down from the scaffold!" Better businesses than Progress were not available in Utyan. We made a living, so why look for something else? But Nison thought differently.

As usual, I was very busy with the children at home, and did not notice that Nison began to be friendly with Moishe Kutchgal who had a flour business in the market square. In town, they did not say very nice things about Moishe; part of it was exaggerated, but a lot of things were actually true. He was considered the Don Juan of the town, and, besides, he would exaggerate, and was not much of a scholar. So how did it come about that Nison was friendly with that sort of person?

Very shortly I found out the real story. On the way to Ponivesh, a nearby town, to buy flour for his business, Moishe discovered that the rabbi of the town was a trustee of an estate and had the right to sell a mill that a rich pious Jew had bequeathed to him. With the money from the sale of the mill the rabbi would build a *yeshiva*. The mill could be gotten dirt cheap and on good terms. Moishe liked the deal and told Nison about it. He proposed that they become partners. But, where would the money come from? About this Moishe did not worry much. The plan was to move the mill equipment to Utyan, but a proper location had to be found besides finding the money. Moishe felt that they could get a loan from the bank since they were both good risks. After much searching a location was found, and then the real difficulties of building and organizing the mill began.

The Progress partners soon found out about the plan. Not only did they not like the idea but they began to put obstacles in the way of the mill being built. They had a just argument. "What do you mean building a mill on our time? You have plenty of work at Progress and man is not an angel. Either the mill or Progress." It was difficult to decide but the problems were solved when the Progress partners were given some

shares in the mill. The mill, after a lot of struggle, was finally built. It was a five-story building, and next to the mill an electric station had to be built to supply power for the running of the mill. The entire undertaking cost a fortune, and Utyan had never seen anything as modern as these structures.



In the meantime I got pregnant again, and this time I was not at all happy, because Leyele was still a small infant. I was in such despair that in the first few months I tried all sorts of means to get rid of the bundle, but, as if in spite, nothing helped. When Leyele was barely fifteen months old, our third son was born. We named him Moishe, after my brother who died so prematurely. Moishele was a healthy child and not difficult to care for. From his earliest days he was lively and active. The whole family loved him, none more than his father and mother. With his birth my heavy mood changed, but other troubles and problems began.

The winter that the building of the mill was completed, old timers said that they did not remember so cold a spell. It started snowing right after *Succoth*, giving the place an enchanted look. When it stopped snowing, the cold became worse and the frost had so hardened the ground that it did not thaw out the entire winter.

The mill was finished on Christmas eve, and soon, to our joy, we saw the first milled grain. But the joy did not last long. The bills began to arrive and there was no money to pay them. The burden of negotiations fell upon Nison's head. He was so occupied with Progress that he could not tear himself away to supervise the mill. I therefore had to go to the mill every day and leave the children with our maid Tanya.

I rose at daybreak. First I had to fire the tile stove to heat the house. The cold was so intense that the water in the kitchen froze. The windows were covered with a thick layer of ice and it would be hours before they would thaw out. It was not with a light heart that I left the house, instructing Tanya how to deal with the children. Upon opening the door

to the outside, I would gasp because of the bitter cold. It was a long walk from the house to the mill, and my heavy fur wrap made the walk seem even longer. It was still dark. Not a living soul was to be seen on the streets because the town was still deep in sleep. I trudged through the deep snow in my woolen boots and kept wondering whether Tanya could manage the children; but Tanya, the daughter of a Russian peasant, was devoted to them. Nothing was too hard for her.

In the mill it was as cold indoors as outdoors, and the only place to get warm was in the nearby small house which was converted into an office and where the bookkeeper Libovitch took care of the books. He was a young man in his twenties, got along with people, and was well-liked. From his first day on the job we immediately saw that it was a good match. I would drop in not only to get warm in the office but incidentally to have a chat with Libovitch and feel the pulse of how things were going with our complicated businesses.

We soon saw that we were in over our heads, and in order to meet our monthly payments it was necessary to accept the proposals of the county governor—that is, to supply electric power for the entire town. At first we thought that we could generate enough electric power from the mill and that it would be a simple matter to install the necessary wiring. We soon learned, however, that a large diesel motor was required and that the whole undertaking would be very costly. But the impossible was overcome and we signed a contract obligating ourselves to supply the electricity. After months of hard work and great indebtedness, it was finally possible to activate the plan—"let there be light"—and there was light in all the corners of Utyan. But it was dark in our pocketbook.

At the same time we decided to build a house on a knoll opposite the five-story wooden mill and the brick electric station. We were living too far from the mill to properly supervise it. The house was not easy to build since we had so little time to devote to it. It took many months to complete, but when it was finished in 1929 the townspeople thought it was a palace. It was the first house in Utyan to have an indoor bathroom and electricity. Its rooms were spacious and

bright. There was a den, a kitchen, a large dining room, and two bedrooms. Leah and Moishe slept in our bedroom. Every sabbath, after the *cholnt* and the usual nap, the town's Jews would descend on us to admire not only the house but the entire complex that a couple of young folk dared to construct.

The house was barely finished when we started to construct a sawmill. The thinking was clear. After supplying power to the mill and town there was still plenty of power left for a sawmill, which would be almost all profit. And then a new process started. A sawmill eats logs, and in order to cut logs one needs trees; therefore it was necessary to buy forests, but for that one needs an expert. But can one stop a stream of water in the middle of its flow? Once they got an idea, there was no stopping them—it was impossible to stop the two partners in the midst of their building "castles in the air." So, in addition to all his occupations, Nison also became, with luck, an expert on forests. It took three years to build the mill, the electric station and the sawmill, and when the whole project was completed we realized that it was built on quicksand. Without the help of those from Progress the entire edifice would falter, so there was no other alternative than to take them in as full partners in the project.

All this was taking place just when Boruchl (we also called him Bokele) was six years old and started to study at the Tarbus School where everything was taught in Hebrew. Along with Jewish history, the Bible, mathematics, and geography, the children learned Lithuanian history and language as required by the government. It was there that the teachers implanted in the hearts and minds of the children a love for the Zionist ideals and for the Hebrew language. Two years later, Hirshele began his studies. They had been there just a short time when the school committee succeeded in buying a building that was suitable for a new school. Although it was far from the center of town, it was very close to where we were building the mill. The children had been waiting impatiently

for our house near the mill to be finished in order to be close to the new school. Not only that, but nearby was a meandering creek where one could skate in the winter, and behind the mill, spread like a carpet, was a green meadow where it was possible to play with friends. But, in the meantime, it was still necessary to live in the old house on Bozhnitcheh Street, not far from the Catholic church.

Summertime I loved taking the children for a walk in the church park. I would put Leyele and Moishele in the perambulator, and Boruchl and Hirshele would help push it. The perfume of the flowers that grew in profusion spread through the park. The children liked to play in the grass, and I enjoyed listening to the organ and choir music that would come from the church where they were rehearsing for Sunday mass. No one had heard of radio yet; at that time only Shimonovitch, the landlord, had a record player in his store where he would play cantoral records. He would set up the Gramophone, and the voices of Yosele Rosenblatt, Kvartin and other famous cantors would be heard echoing through the marketplace. The people congregated near his store, and the town's Jews savored the melodious voices and sometimes joined in the singing. But of worldly music we knew very little in Utyan. And so I appreciated the opportunity to listen to the music from the church with the children in the park.

Finally, the day for moving into the new house arrived, but again, as if for spite, everything was topsy turvy. Worst of all was Boruchl's sudden illness with scarlet fever a few days before the move. The mortality of children was then very high. When a child got sick one was simply devastated. The proper medicine was not available and the two doctors in the town did not always know the best treatment for some of the illnesses. They were unable to manage the frequent epidemics that would break out and spread like wildfire. The Jewish doctor, Dr. Etingoff, was a good friend of ours, and he applied all possible means to prevent the spread of the infection to the other children.

Although the other children did not get scarlet fever, Leyele developed diphtheria a few days after we moved into

the new house. We watched life slipping away from the child. We did not have to ask Dr. Etingoff to use everything he knew to save her. He applied absolutely all his medical expertise, but nothing seemed to help. Then we learned that scientists had recently discovered an injection against diphtheria. But the results were not always successful. When Dr. Etingoff saw that the child was in great danger, he suggested using the injection. Naturally, we agreed. When you are drowning you grab at a straw. The Doctor sat with us all night long near Leyele's bed and, with a heavy heart, we watched the child hovering between life and death. The night passed and at dawn her coughing stopped and she fell into a restful sleep. We saw, in fact, that science had triumphed. The crisis passed, and from that night on she began to improve.

Not until then did we finally start to put our new house in order. We thought that we had finally settled down. Here we would raise our children and here we would live out our years. We never imagined otherwise. For several years, actually, life went on as usual; in the new house life was better and more comfortable. The older children, especially, liked it. They enjoyed the spaciousness of the place, where they could play undisturbed among the piled boards that the sawmill had cut from the old pine trees, and build castles from the sawdust. Boruchl was close to finishing Tarbus School and was preparing to enter the middle school which had opened by then.

Boruchl and Hirshele had also studied the *Talmud* and *Torah* at a small *yeshiva*. We wanted to instill in the children a love and knowledge of Jewish studies. New teachers arrived and our circle of friends grew. Nison and I were very active in community matters despite our heavy schedules—he was busy worrying over financial matters and running the business, and I was busy with the children and the household. Often Zionist and cultural meetings took place in our home. We frequently brought talent from Kovneh, even from abroad, to give concerts, recitations and often a play.

The town's Jews were hungry for cultural undertakings,

and enough money was raised from these events to support the schools and enlarge the library. At that time, two teachers, both women, arrived in town, one in the Tarbus School and the other in the Yiddish one.

Since I was more inclined toward Yiddish, I was involved with the Yiddish school where I became friends with the teacher Soreh Tankl.

It was a while before it became known that she was a divorcee and had a child. When we were closer she confided in me her sad life story—the story of an intelligent and talented woman who was divorced while she was pregnant, and, in order to study at the university and train for a profession in Russia, where she lived, she had left her child with her parents in another *shtetl*. She was depressed and disturbed, and her situation touched me so that I suggested she send for her child, who by then was a fairly big boy, and move into our house and live in the study. In our house she really felt better, and her depression disappeared. She lived with us for several years, and during that period our friendship ripened and deepened. She was, and remained, one of my most devoted friends.

The other teacher, Soreh Silber, was a good and sincere woman. She was not as worldly or as well educated as the other Soreh. She had not graduated from a Russian university, but she had great virtues. She was devoted to her profession body and soul. The only dream in her life was to go to Israel and become a pioneer. She very much envied the pioneers-to-be who came to work in the mill and sawmill where they did all kinds of heavy work in order to prepare themselves for life in Palestine.

In the years between the two world wars hundreds of Lithuanian Jewish boys and girls formed *Hachshara* groups dedicated to getting ready to emigrate to Palestine and live in a *kibbutz*. Over the opposition of our parents back in Shirvint, my brother Malkiel and sister Esther joined up and worked in different places at hard labor, for they, too, had decided to go to Palestine and live on a *kibbutz*. I recollect

how proud our children were when Malkiel, aged seventeen, came to Utyan to say goodbye before departing for Palestine. The children, especially Boruchl and Hirshele, looked with such admiration upon the tall, handsome young man who had finished training and was going as a pioneer to a *kibbutz*. They really envied him. I was proud of him too.



Almost every summer, despite our financial struggles to keep our business enterprises solvent and our large household going, I would take the children to the country in the nearby resort of Vizhun. The town was known for its pine forest and an old prayer house said to be several hundred years old. Deep in the forest were an inn and a lake which had no fish in it but was good for swimming. The children always waited impatiently for the day when Yerachmiel the coachman would come with his wagon and mare and take us to Vizhun. The distance from Utyan to Vizhun was short, but the trip would take a number of hours. Arriving at the inn, the children hardly knew what to do first: to swim, run in the forest, or eat the tasty food that the guests of the inn enjoyed.

Going to the country meant gaining weight, and during the two weeks that we would spend there the children would indeed gain. What I wanted mainly was for Boruchl's health to improve because he was the weakest and was frequently sick. We wondered where a child as weak as he was got the strength to study so well and, especially, to read so much. Nison, busy as usual, and even more involved in business than ever, would drop in for sabbath.

One time in 1932 he arrived on sabbath eve, and I knew instantly that something of importance had happened. The partner of his brother Philip (Feivel) had arrived in Kovneh from America and wanted Nison to go to Kovneh and get regards from the *mishpocheh* in the United States. I could not understand why it was necessary to go all the way to Kovneh

just to get regards when it was possible to communicate over the telephone; but there was a reason. We spent just the sabbath together, and at sunup on Sunday he went off.

We had to wait out the entire week to receive the news. On the eve of the next sabbath we learned what Philip's regards consisted of and the purpose of Nison's trip to Kovneh. Philip wanted Nison to go to America with his partner for a visit and at the same time explore business possibilities there. And Nison was supposed to make up his mind quickly. We all were flabbergasted at such news and did not know how to react to that startling proposition.

In our eyes America was a distant and foreign land, somewhere near the North Pole. In the twenties, the large Jewish emigration to America had nearly stopped altogether. Its gates had all but shut, and the strictness and difficulty in obtaining a visa made it impossible to get there. Nevertheless, occasionally someone from a village or a couple from a town were favored with a visa. The locked gates of America could not stop the drive of the young to tear themselves away from the *shtetl* and from the hopeless ghetto life. The emigration took a different direction—instead of going to America they headed for various other countries that would let them in. Lithuanian Jews had mostly emigrated to South Africa, Argentina, Mexico and Cuba. They went with the hope that eventually they would succeed in entering the Golden Land —America.

Now, here, suddenly Nison could go freely to the closed land on a visitor's visa, which was easier to obtain. But because of his complicated business dealings he had to postpone the trip. The mill was operating and serving the peasants who came from all over the region with sacks full of grain to be milled. It was the electric station that gave us a lot of trouble. Every time the motor broke down and there was no electricity for twenty-four hours the governor of the county, not Jewish of course, would immediately impose a huge fine on us. This was like a knife at our throats, considering our troubled finances.

Anyhow, we got through the winter, and right after *Pesach* of 1933 Nison embarked on the long trip to America. His first letters were naturally full of descriptions of the wonders of the great and beautiful country. Nison was not given to exaggerating and was rarely excited or overwhelmed by unusual things and events, but the longer he spent there the more enthusiastic he became and the more often he began to indicate that perhaps it would be a good idea to settle in America. His brother Philip, who had been living in America since 1907, had great influence on him, and kept telling him that the best plan was to leave Lithuania. "What will become of your children in Lithuania? What will they achieve there with their abilities, since they will not be allowed to study in the university? And even if they were to open a store, that too comes with many difficulties, so what kind of a future do they have?"

The arguments definitely convinced him that America was actually created to protect all those who were hunted and oppressed, pushed and driven from all corners of the world. He was made to see the good aspects of America, and the best proof was his own brother Philip and sister Alice, who had gone to America several decades earlier and had prospered so well in the shoe business. He was shown the spaciousness and beauty of the land by going to Chicago to the World's Fair that took place at that time. So, it was no wonder that he returned home after three months with a firm resolve to leave Lithuania and emigrate to America.

How strangely clear and precise is my memory of the day of his return. It was a beautiful summer day. The family and all our friends came to welcome him home. It was no small matter for a local Jew to return from a voyage like that and from seeing such a great world. One would soon hear of the wonders of America. The children were impatient, and every once in a while they would come to the house from their play to see if the bus had arrived.

In the dining room the table was set as for a wedding, with all kinds of goodies, and in the meantime the crowd enjoyed themselves. All the windows of the house were opened, and

the aroma of the flowers from the garden around the house had reached the dining room and spread throughout the house. All of a sudden there were shouts, "They have come, they are here." Everyone in the house surged to the entrance, and from a distance we could see Nison accompanied by his niece Lucy. She had come with him from America to visit us for a couple of months, to get well after an illness and to absorb the fresh air of Lithuania. We looked at each other—he was the same but somehow different. America had left its mark.

He was flooded with questions. Everyone wanted to know how one lived in the golden land, what was going on in Jewish circles, and particularly, how it was there with anti-Semitism. But he was much too tired from the trip to satisfy everybody and answer all the questions.

The Separation

It did not take long to find out that Nison no longer had any interest in the business or in anything in Utyan. He suddenly felt how restricted life was in such a small town and what a struggle it was to make a living. His only goal was to liquidate his business as fast as possible and get out of Lithuania. But that was easier said than done. Who would want to buy such an undertaking in such unsettled times? It was 1933, the first year of the Nazi regime. We started to live in fear, since even at the very beginning it was possible to see what the Nazis were aiming at, but it was not yet possible to believe it all—that the cultured German people would fall so low. Every day there were rumors as to what Hitler, may his name and memory be erased, was going to do to the Jews. And every day the fear and terror increased, especially when, without warning the Lithuanian government, the Nazis marched in and took over the Lithuanian port city of Meml. Meml was not far from Kovneh—who would be next?

So who would buy any business at a time like this? All anyone seemed to be thinking of was how to get out of Lithuania. But where does one go when the doors of America are closed and the British government makes it ever more difficult to go to Palestine? It was clear to us that Jews would not buy our business since they did not have the money, and even if they did they would not buy it in these troubled times. The gentiles would gladly take over the business but why should they pay for it when they would get it for nothing as soon as Hitler occupied Lithuania?

We then spent hard days and sleepless nights. What should

we do? How could we get out? Besides, a thought kept recurring to me. What would it mean to leave Lithuania and abandon my father and mother, the rest of my family and all our devoted friends forever? My distress was sharpened by the idea of leaving the cradle of Jewish learning and culture, Lithuania, for the materialistic and business-oriented, uncultured America—such was our perception of that land.



Several weeks after Nison's return, Father and Mother came to visit. They were especially anxious to get the news of their son Chaim who had left Lithuania in 1928. Chaim had been studying philosophy in Berlin when the Yeshiva College of New York brought him to the United States to teach.

The distance between Shirvint and Utyan was short but since Moishele's tragic death, Father had not made the trip, and so he had not seen the empire that Nison and his partners had erected. He was astonished to see such buildings, such great businesses, and such a home! (How was I to break the news that we were about to give it all up, take the wanderer's staff in hand, and go off to a distant, foreign land?) They were glad to see it all, but even more happy to see how well the children were studying, in particular Boruchl, who had just finished the *yeshiva* with distinction. On his diploma the head of the *yeshiva* wrote: "He will be a great man in the world." That gave them their greatest pleasure. In his dreams, Father could already see Boruchl grown up, a great scholar, a rabbi, a leader of the Jewish people.

As the sabbath came to an end we decided to break the bad news, and tell them about our plans. The first impact was very severe. How come? To give up such an estate and go to such a *trayf*, materialistic country? Father complained, especially over what would become of the children. They would leave Judaism, and would forget the little that they knew, and in time they would become *goyim*. The issue of Jewishness surpassed even that difficult parting. My heart ached to see with what elation they had arrived and with

what disappointment they were departing. No matter how little we used to see them, I would still take the children to them every summer for a few weeks, and that was the greatest pleasure for them. Their downcast spirits were difficult to bear.

Back home in Shirvint, in addition to my youngest sister Esther, was my sister Luba. She had graduated from the *gymnasieh* in Vilkomir and returned home. She was the most educated and the quietest of the five sisters. She was by nature gentle and submissive. When a matchmaker came to propose a match for Luba, and Father discovered that Zundl, the prospective groom, was a scholar and God-fearing, the rest was unimportant. In short, it did not take long for the engagement party to take place, and very soon for the *chuppa* to be erected.

The young couple remained at Father's table, living in his house. Zundl was preparing to take Father's place while Malkiel was saving money to bring Father and Mother to Israel. Zundl was truly a great scholar, and an even greater God-fearing person, but too much so. He was a fanatic and wanted all Jews to follow his ways. Even Father's piety was not enough for him. He held that Father was not following the strictness of the *Halacha*, that he was a compromiser. My Hirshele, a sensitive child, was very influenced by him, but not Boruchl. Zundl could no longer win arguments with him, for by then Boruchl had already read all sorts of books, worldly and Jewish, whatever books were to be found in the Utyan library. Zundl would say that Boruchl was a born heretic and could no longer be helped.

Zundl sat in the synagogue for days on end studying out loud and constantly preaching to the children whenever we were in Shirvint. Every time we visited there Hirshele would become a little more pious. He prayed three times a day without question. More than once he was late getting to school because of his prolonged prayers. When I would plead with him to shorten his prayers he would look at me as if I had committed the most grievous sin. In America, I thought, all this will be forgotten and the little Jewishness that was im-

planted in the children will disappear. Always the nagging question was whether to remain in Lithuania or go to America. What should we do? What path should we take?

The situation grew more serious and more strained, the wild behavior of the Nazis continued to become worse and more flagrant. Uncle Kalmen, who had been a resident of Berlin since World War I, who had over time succeeded in building a banking business with connections in different countries, who was known for his open hand and fine style, and whose generosity was well known in Berlin, was arrested by the Nazis in 1934. He managed to escape. His plan was to come to Lithuania and attempt to collect the debts owed him by various Lithuanian and Polish banks. He came to us in Utyan. It was so good to see him and have him as our guest. He was not, however, the uncle I remembered from the time I spent in his house in Berlin before I was married in 1920. He was a disappointed man whose life of labor had gone for naught. What made him even more frustrated and desperate was that he was not able to collect a single penny from his dozens of debtors. He went to Palestine a bitter man, all alone, leaving his family behind him in Berlin. Uncle Kalmen's situation made a very severe impression upon us. It showed us that we were sitting upon a volcano, and that we had best get out of Lithuania before the scourge of Nazism spread and swallowed up the country.

For seven months we suffered and tried to sell all our earthly possessions, but in vain. We had to conclude that to sit and wait for a miracle, for a buyer to come along, was foolhardy. As long as the threatening situation remained as it was, no one would dare to buy. So, hard as it was, we decided that Nison and the two older children, Boruchl and Hirshele, would go to America and leave me with the two younger children, Leyele and Moishele to follow, as soon as the fury was over.

It was a frightening and courageous step to take, to leave half of the family at such an uneasy time. It required an iron character and a strong will to withstand all the obstacles and carry out our plan when everyone felt that a war might break

out any day. And so it was. Italy's dictator Mussolini, Hitler's pal, attacked Ethiopia without warning. And with that act World War II had actually begun.

It is not hard to imagine how we felt as we started to get ready for Nison's and the boys' departure. As the moment of parting approached it became harder to bear. However, it was not so hard for the two older boys. They were excited about the voyage. It is no small matter to travel to the great and distant world, and the closer the time to leave Utyan came, the greater was the enthusiasm of the thirteen-and-a-half-year-old Boruchl and twelve-year-old Hirshele.

As we were making the preparations, Utyan started to get ready a farewell evening for Nison and the children. The townspeople felt that they had an obligation to somehow express their appreciation for all our years of activity in the *shtetl* and in community affairs. And so they threw a banquet for us. It took place in the house of our partner and neighbor Moishe Kutchgal.

In the living room, many tables and benches were placed, for the large crowd that was expected. The tables were laden with all kinds of food which many of the town's women had prepared. Practically everyone came to say goodbye to Nison and wish him well. It was an evening full of emotion. They all wanted to express their feelings about how hard it is to part and what the town would be losing. Many speeches were made that evening, but none more touching than that of our good friend, Mayor Dzhurat. He himself was so moved that he nearly broke down in the middle of his speech. At that time people lived with the hope of meeting in the land of Israel some day. By no stretch of the imagination could anyone know that in a mere seven years there would only be a remnant of the entire group, that Lithuanian Jewry, the ornament of the Jewish people, would almost be entirely destroyed.

No one has yet adequately described the Lithuanian Jewish community as it really was, its rabbis, those learned in the *Torah*, the landowners, and the plain folk, young and old. Jewish Lithuania was often compared to a tree that struck its roots deep into the Lithuanian mother earth for a thousand

years, and spread out more and more branches covered with thousands of green leaves, which basked in the sun's warm rays, and after many years, towered mightily over all the other trees. Then evil men came and chopped down the tree, and trampled the branches with all the beautiful leaves. Where is the pen that would describe the spiritual giant that was Lithuanian Jewry? I, who had to leave Lithuania but had been fortunate to have sat under the tree, can only feel its greatness but do not have the appropriate language to describe it.

Finally, the day for Nison's and the boys' departure from Utyan arrived. I will never forget that day in March of 1935. One episode stands out above the others. The bus on the street was ready to drive off, and when we looked around Hirshele was not there. There was a commotion and we started to look for him. We found him standing in the house saying his *Amida*. It was time for the afternoon prayer, and how could he leave on this journey without *davening*? Words could not convince him to hurry and finish lest he be late for the bus and, by being late for the bus, miss the voyage to America altogether. It did not help. The bus and all the passengers had to wait until he finished the afternoon prayer. Only then could we be on our way. I traveled with them up to Kovneh, in order to be with them at least for a few more days.

Kovneh was a beautiful old European city. It nestles between the river Nyehman on one side and the river Vili on the other and is surrounded by the green mountains of Alexot. This was the first time the children had seen a metropolis of that size. It was the beginning of spring and everything was green on the Leisvis Alee, the main avenue, which in retrospect looked like a Parisian boulevard. The street was wide, flanked by trees and flowers. On both sides of the street stood ornate stores. At the head of the street stood the majestic Russian cathedral which added beauty to the scene. We spent a few days in Kovneh walking about; Boruchl and Hirshele could not get enough of the beauty of the city. Finally, the time came to board the train that would

take them across the border to Berlin. Many of our *mishpocheh* lived in Kovneh, and they all came to the station to bid farewell to Nison and the children.

I was as in a trance. I could not believe it—that the hour of parting had actually arrived. A painful question kept torturing me. Is it forever? Will we see each other again or is this the final farewell? I was so petrified that I could not find the right words to say. The train started to move slowly, then faster. In the window of the car stood Nison, Boruchl and Hirshele, and their lips formed the words, "Be well. We will see you soon." None of us could imagine then that they would never again see any of the *mishpocheh*, soon to be so brutally cut off, erased from the earth. I stood a long time, paralyzed, in the station, and looked after the speeding train that took away my dearest and most beloved.

I returned to Utyan, spiritually broken and grieving. Every corner of the house was filled with emptiness and loneliness. Leyele and Moishele went about as if orphaned. They lost interest in playing with their friends. Moishele, by nature a lively and happy child, suddenly changed. Leyele was quiet and shy and from early childhood had rarely shown her emotions. But one could see the vitality leaving her—and me—because of our deep longing and the fear of not knowing how long the separation would be. I was filled with doubts as to whether we would ever escape from this vale of tears.

Now the troubles really started for me with the business. I was not a businesswoman and not much involved in Nison's complicated dealings—constantly borrowing, paying bills, and getting in over his head, but never letting up. Suddenly that heavy load was squarely on my shoulders. Most difficult of all was dealing with the partners. I could get along quite easily with Kutchgal, but the partners from Progress, the Goldfines and Zahck, were difficult people. The most important thing in their lives was to make money, the more the better. But every cloud has a silver lining. Mine was that our

bookkeeper and good friend Libovitch had been managing the business since it started. From the very beginning, he looked for ways to make life easier for me. So I no longer had to be concerned with the daily running of the business.

Then there was the pain of constantly waiting for letters. Although Nison wrote every week the letters seldom arrived on time. When they were delayed the house was as if in mourning. However, when a letter did arrive the atmosphere in the house was immediately transformed. Nison told us how impressed he was with the tremendous country where everyone spoke English. He was also impressed by how well Philip and Alice lived. He described his experiences learning the shoe business in Philip's factory, the Lown Shoe Company.

During those difficult months I was helped tremendously by my good friends, especially Soreh Tankl and Soreh Silber, the teachers who now both lived in our house. Soreh Silber moved in after Nison and the children left Utyan. When we agreed that Soreh Tankl should move into our house a few years earlier we had her needs in mind. I could not have predicted then that she would pay me more than double for the friendship.

The *Pesach* holiday was approaching. Time does not stand still; it keeps running like the eternal streams, and it floods the good as well as the bad days. The arrival of *Pesach* bolstered our spirits somewhat. Generally *Pesach* is considered the most beautiful holiday of the year. It is not only the holiday of liberation but also the holiday of spring. The long, hard, cold winter was again over, the sun shone warmly, and the snow melted. Overnight, it seemed, the surrounding fields turned green and everything about started to sprout and flower. Then we could take walks along the banks of the flowing brook. The children and the two Sorehs drank in the beauty of the Lithuanian landscape.

Nison's brother Zalmen came from Kovneh to visit us for the holiday. He, too, was getting ready to go to America. He tried to lift our sad mood and bring out a little of the holiday spirit. The children did perk up a bit during the short time he spent with us. Zalmen was a devoted Zionist and had always

hoped and wished to go to Palestine. His decision to go to America instead was a disappointment for me. It was hard for me to understand. He had his reasons apparently. He was a Hebrew teacher by profession and was considered among the best teachers in Kovneh. He combined secular and religious learning and he was a great secular scholar and intellectual. He was also remote from the materialistic world. Therefore, I found it difficult to understand his decision to go to America, the country where the dollar plays such a dominant role. But who can understand the ways and decisions of a person—after all weren't we also headed in the same direction?

The first letters from Boruchl and Hirshele were full of excitement and enthusiasm for the Babel of New York City. My brother Chaim, who had lived in New York for six years, and his wife Sophie, whom he had recently married, did not tire of guiding them around and showing them the wonders of the fabulous city.

My father's hopes for Chaim never materialized—that his son who was steeped in *Talmud* and Jewish law would become a rabbi and leader in Palestine. He could not imagine that after seven years of study in Telzer *Yeshiva* and being an instructor in Rabbi Elchonen's *yeshiva* in New York, he would change direction altogether. He left the *yeshiva* and began to study social work and in time shook off the pious world. For Father and Mother, if they had known, it would have been a great sorrow and a deep disappointment that their son Chaim, the ornament of the family, broke the golden chain of rabbis and scholars which had continued for generations in our family.

After a few days in New York, Nison and the children moved into Philip's home in Lewiston, Maine, where the boys started school and Nison began to work in his brother's shoe factory. The letters were not so enthusiastic then.

Life in Utyan somehow went on. Summer passed and winter, with the cold and frost, arrived again. With the arrival of winter another disaster descended upon me. I began to bleed and I kept it a secret for a while, hoping the bleeding

would stop. But when Dr. Svilis warned me that it must not be ignored, and that I must undergo an operation for the removal of a tumor of the uterus, I became desperate and felt that there was no end to human suffering. Utyan did not have a surgeon and it was necessary for me to go to Kovneh for the operation. How could I leave the children and the troubled business? But, as with all my difficult problems, my dear friends stood by and helped me out. When Dzhurat, our good friend and mayor of Utyan, became aware of my predicament, he proposed without hesitating that he go with me to Kovneh and consult a specialist to determine whether an operation was really necessary.

On a cold winter day, and with a heavy heart, I left the children with the teachers and went with Dzhurat to Kovneh. I hoped the Lord would have mercy and, for the sake of the children in America and the abandoned children here, I would not have to undergo the serious operation. But after the examination, the specialist told me that not only did I have to have the operation, but it was advisable to undergo it without delay. I remember how downcast Dzhurat looked when he heard what the doctor had to say. He returned to Utyan by himself. It took several weeks before I was able to travel. Then Dzhurat came to pick me up, happy that I had weathered the operation so well.

Upon arrival home my happiness was unimaginable to find that Leyele and Moishele were well and hearty. The house was full of good friends who came to welcome me. This time the dining room was decorated with winter greenery instead of summer flowers and the table was covered with a variety of baked goods and other kinds of goodies that my friends had prepared. Nicest of all was to see their happy faces, beaming with satisfaction that I was alive and feeling much better. From that day on and for weeks a different friend would come daily to take care of me. They divided up the work, and neither the cold nor winter blizzards stopped them from doing their "holy mission," as they called it. Every day they came and brought prepared food and stayed until the two Sorehs returned from school. I remem-

ber those very good friends with a deep longing. No chore was too difficult for them as long as it helped get me back on my feet.

Among those friends Rochel Katz particularly stood out. She was a unique personality; aside from being very intelligent, she was a painter and a sculptor. She came from a family of artists. Her two brothers were famous painters in Russia and had remained there. Our friendship commenced during the first years of my settling in Utyan and continued, like a golden thread, throughout the sixteen years we lived there. When we arrived in Utyan, Rochel, with her father and husband Moishe Katz, had just returned to Utyan after spending the years of World War I wandering through Russia. She had attended an art institute there. Because of the civil war and chaotic conditions, they left Russia and returned to Lithuania. She never gave up the hope that the time would come when she would return to Russia and resume her studies. But, in the meantime, two children were born, and she sank deeper and deeper into the day-to-day life of the housewife. But, throughout all the years, she had never given up her studio, and almost every day she would grab a couple of hours to mold sculptures out of clay. Many of her sculptures were recognized as works of art and were exhibited in the Kovneh museum.

Rochel lived far from us, but neither the distance nor the severe Lithuanian winter deterred her from coming daily and bringing tasty dishes for me. It was a pleasure for both of us to be able to chat, and we always turned to the subject of my leaving Utyan. We both knew, and felt, that it would not be long before the separation would come. It was a painful subject to consider, but I wanted to prepare her and convince her that my departure was inevitable and that I must be ready as soon as possible. I could not wait around indefinitely hoping for a miracle that the business would be sold.

There was no miracle. The mill, electric station, and sawmill simply could not be sold. The partners had decided to

take the business over without paying anything for it, but would cover our debts. This would free me from a heavy yoke and thus enable me to go to America. But it was easier said than done. The negotiations took twenty months. And, finally, we came to an agreement of sorts. After all the years of sweat and toil, Nison and I were left penniless. I did not even have enough money for travel expenses. In addition to financial difficulties the process of obtaining all the necessary documents such as passports and visas was overwhelming. All this dragged on until the summer of 1936. Then I began seriously to get ready to leave Utyan. I parcelled out most of our household possessions to friends and packed only the most necessary items in a large wicker trunk to take with us so that there would remain some mementos of a life lived in Lithuania.

The hardest and most painful part of leaving, of course, was the act of saying goodbye to family and friends. The thought of having to say goodbye to Mother and Father never left me. Guilt never left me. How does one go away in such troubling times?

Everyone wanted to escape, but where to run? The gates of America were sealed with seven locks, and the British government did not admit anyone into Palestine. The desperation deepened even though it could not be imagined that the Nazis would practice what they preached. It was beyond belief that such terrible destruction would come and erase the culture of generations, wipe out thousands of settlements that were rooted in a life of religious and cultural values. It was impossible to believe that these were the same Germans whom the town's Jews remembered from the First World War as polite and not malicious. Although they confiscated most of our food, they did not touch our bodies or souls. It was impossible to believe that the cultured Germans of Goethe and Schiller would become killers and murderers and destroy a third of the Jewish people. It was impossible to imagine that old, stable settlements of hundreds of years, where so much spirituality was created and where the Yiddish language could be heard throughout Europe, would be obliterated. In that Yiddish language culture had been created, the culture that gave

the Jewish masses wings and helped them rise above the greyness of everyday life. This same culture helped to inspire the Jewish people and let them dream and long for a better life. It was impossible to believe that all that would be wiped out, silenced forever. However, the Jewish people, as the great poet Leivik said in one of his poems, "has the virtue of continuity; after every destruction it rises again and marches on."

Among our extended family I felt closest to Aunt Sorel and Uncle Dovid of Meretch. I decided that I must go to say goodbye to them. I took Moishele and Leyele with me and went on the long journey from Utyan to Meretch. First we had to go to Kovneh and then to Meretch. We traveled along the Nyehman River, where the landscape was probably the most beautiful in Lithuania. We passed by many towns and settlements that had a special meaning for me. Among them was Balbirishok where my grandfather Boruch, may he rest in peace, had been the town's rabbi many years ago and with whom many of my memories are connected.

I had not been in Meretch for eighteen years, but its external appearance had changed very little. There were the same streets with the single-story brick houses, the same marketplace with the Russian church in the center. Everything appeared as it did years ago. Only the people had changed. How my aunt and uncle had aged! Their two sons had wandered off, Yisrolik (Al) to America and Yankele to a *kibbutz* in Palestine. This had added wrinkles to their prematurely aging faces. Their main fear was the encroaching horror of no possible way to escape with the two children that were still at home.

Everyone tried not to mention the strained situation and to enjoy the brief period we were together. It was beautiful end-of-the-summer weather, and we took a walk to the Nyehman through a nearby grove. The water of the Nyehman was flowing quietly and calmly to the Baltic Sea many miles away. The forests around it seemed, and perhaps in reality were, thicker than in the past, and the trees that day were standing still and immobile. From a distance we could see green pastures where flocks of sheep were grazing and cows

were chewing their cud. The region around the Nyehman had a quiet pastoral beauty. Whenever I think of Meretch, that picture rises before my eyes. My visit to Meretch was brief, the parting difficult.

From Meretch we retraced our route to Kovneh, and from there we turned to Shirvint. In Shirvint nothing had changed. The same long street that dragged on, as we used to say, as long as the Jewish exile. The same large marketplace with the stores. The same green meadow with the meandering brook. But friends and acquaintances, whom I used to see nearly every summer, had changed. They were worried and troubled. Father and Mother had changed dramatically in the two years that I had not seen them. They had aged, their faces sunk in deep sorrow. They walked around the house like mourners who had lost someone near and dear. Esther was at home, having just returned from *Hachshara* full of ideals and lofty plans about a future in a *kibbutz* in Palestine. Luba gave the impression of a small town *rebbitzin* with a wig, and her quiet modest demeanor made her appear older. Outwardly it appeared that she had made peace with her fate and submitted to her husband Zundl's fanatic behavior.

As usual, he studied aloud, without interruption, oblivious to the strained situation, as if he lived in another world in the upper stratum. His first question directed at me was, "Do the children, that is Boruchl and Hirshele, study in a *yeshiva*?" "Do they put on *tefillin* every day, and what about the Jewishness and *kashrut* where they are?" Anything else about their life in America was of no interest to him.

Father, on the other hand, did ask those more mundane questions. He wanted to know if they were satisfied and able to adjust to the new environment in a foreign land, and finally, he asked about Nison and how he was making a living. Mother only wanted to know if they were well and felt well. I spent an entire week, for the last time, in Shirvint. All in the house tried to maintain control and not betray their true feelings.

At least the weather was warm and beautiful during my visit at the end of the summer, and we were able to take

many walks. There was a desire to walk again in the old places, which were tied up with many memories of the years of my youth. There was the desire to pass, for the last time, through the meadow by the Shirvintel River where, toward evening, sounds of the church bells would carry from a distance, and where a bunch of boys and girls would break out in revolutionary songs of liberation and a better future. There was the desire to walk again in the well-trodden paths of the forests around the town, where the young would gather and utter fiery speeches about casting off the shackles of slavery, and striking out into the great, big world.

Often it seemed to me that I could hear the courageous voices of our group. Very few of them had remained in Shirvint. They had spread all over the world—South Africa, Palestine, Cuba, Mexico and Argentina, but very few were able to break through the locked gates of America. It was good to hear that they had been able to escape, but my heart ached for those who remained. What would become of them? What awaited them?

Esther always accompanied me on my walks. Actually, I hardly knew her. When I married and left Shirvint she was only seven years old. Now I saw a beautiful, grown-up girl, with radical ideas which did not at all fit into a rabbi's household. She was getting ready to go to Palestine to a *Shomer Hatzayir kibbutz* which was *trayf* and unholy as far as Father and Mother and even the more liberal Luba were concerned. On our walks she confided that despite all the protests, she wished to leave it all and go to Palestine. But something had happened that she was unable to control. She was hopelessly in love with Mottel, Itzik Yaffe's son.

He came from one of the important families of the town. They were considered rich, for they had a general store and, in addition, had built a mill that brought in a sizable income. Mottel was involved in both enterprises, and to leave such a *shmaltz groob* for a life in a *kibbutz* was far from his thoughts. She had tears in her eyes as she told me this and asked for my advice. What should she do in this dilemma? Should she marry Mottel and forget about her *aliyah* or give up Mottel

and go to live on a *kibbutz*? Who could give her the right advice? I told her that only she could decide what to do.

Sometimes, though, I wish I had advised her to forget Mottel and go live in a *kibbutz*. I doubted very much whether her ideals could have overcome her love. But had she chosen the *kibbutz* she would have remained alive, rather than be cut down at such a young age by the murderous hands of the cursed Nazis, along with the family and the rest of the Jewish community.

Father, Mother, Esther, Luba, Zundl, and their little daughter Chayeleh and many friends from the town came to see us off at the bus, which stopped in the middle of the marketplace. It was like a funeral. From all sides there were quiet whimpers and sighs; only the *tzedaka pushkeh* that always accompanied a funeral with the cry "Charity saves from death," was missing. There was the ominous feeling that we were walking the last mile as it was said of a dead person carried in a casket to the cemetery, that we would never see each other again.

Father, who wept easily, stood as if petrified, unable even to cry. He stood in the crowd, shrunken, his large brown eyes burning with desperation, and in them was something of a reproach that I was abandoning him. I have been unable to forget the expression in his eyes. Guilt pursued me for years, and the question of why I saved myself and why they all perished went round and round in my head. It is still hard, so many years since the Holocaust, to divert myself and not have nightmares in which the faces of my dear ones, my own flesh and blood, stand before my eyes and demand an accounting. There is still no comfort and no peace.

I returned to Utyan distressed and downcast, overcome with uneasiness and a reluctance to leave. It was no small matter to leave a place where we had lived and raised our four children, gone through the hot and cold of their numerous illnesses, and seen them finally stand on their own feet. It was particularly gratifying to watch them grow and develop, and especially to observe their abilities and their interest in learning. Also, I had been surrounded by a large and devoted

family as well as loyal friends ever ready to help. One cannot deny that there were many hardships and much greyness experienced over the years—difficulties with partners, financial insecurity and never being sure about tomorrow. But at the same time there was much of the holiday richness spilling over into our weekday life.

The arrival of spring and the celebration of *Pesach* was unforgettable in the *shtetl;* we spent almost all winter anticipating and preparing for the holiday of freedom. One would work and wait for spring. It seemed to us that in no place was spring as beautiful and full of splendor as it was in Lithuania. As soon as the snow melted, the fields were covered with that new greenness that shimmers in the sun. These were the fields that were sown in the fall with winter corn, and at the first ray of the sun and a warm breeze they sprouted forth, carpeting the entire landscape in green.

The people, too, were renewed along with the surrounding nature. We saved pennies all year to be able to buy something new for the holiday—shoes, a dress. I remember how delighted the children were when the tailor brought the new clothes on the holiday eve. They would quickly dress up, their faces beaming brightly. Who was their equal when seated at the *seder* with the beautifully set table and the house full of the aromas of *Pesach* dishes? And the children read and sang the *Haggadah* with much excitement; and Moishele, our youngest brother, asked the four questions in his beautiful little voice. Who, really, was our equal? All the worries and concerns of the entire year vanished and the labor and toil of preparing the holiday was truly worthwhile. At the same time one should be cautious about idealizing life in Utyan. It may be colored by nostalgia, by a feeling people had for the years of their youth that had passed and who were now in the autumn of their lives. One cannot deny the poverty and concern for the future that existed, but in spite of this, there was something unique and beautiful in the life of the *shtetl.*

But now back to our preparations for our journey to America. We returned from Shirvint to an almost empty house.

The large packed wicker trunk stood in the middle of the living room, as if waiting to be taken on the long trip. Every day, from early morning until late at night, the *shtetl* Jews came to say goodbye and wish us a good voyage. Who was not among them? From the most important *balebotim* to ordinary folk—something like a large extended family come to part from a member who is leaving the tribe.

My brother-in-law Mendl, our friend Dzhurat, the mayor of the town and my friend, the teachers Soreh Tankl and Soreh Silbert simply would not leave the house. They tried to help in whatever way they could, for I was incapacitated, as if in a trance, and did not know what was happening to me. They wanted to squeeze in a few more hours with us. The only one who did not come to say goodbye was my dear friend Rochel Katz. The very sensitive and emotional Rochel could not accept the fact of our separation. She had not the courage or the strength to say goodbye. I understood and sympathized with her, for her loss was my loss, and the bright memory of her, perhaps more than that of all my other friends, will never die in my heart.

We left Utyan in October, 1936. I could not go through the same traumatic ordeal leaving Utyan that I underwent when I left Shirvint. To avoid it, we boarded the bus that left first thing in the morning and went on our way. It was a cold, rainy autumn day, and the heavens seemed to be shedding tears for the fate of the town. For the last time I glanced at the surroundings. Here was our entire world, here was the five-story mill, the electric station, the sawmill, and our home on the nearby hill. The large yard was already full of peasants, with wagons loaded with sacks of grain, who had arrived at the crack of dawn to grind their grain into flour. No one seemed to be concerned that we were leaving the place where so much toil, drudgery and energy had been invested. We were leaving Utyan and our family and devoted friends to go off to a far and alien country, to an unknown future.

America

THE FIRST STOP was Kovneh where we boarded the express train to Berlin. The train flew as rapidly as an arrow, similar to the speed of my thoughts. Leyele and Moishele, exhausted from the long bus trip and from the agitation of the final days before our departure, slept serenely, but I could not shut an eye. I kept wondering: Will I ever again tread on Lithuanian soil? Will I ever again see Father and Mother, the rest of the family? I wanted to look out of the window and see the German landscape which I remembered so clearly from my childhood and from my voyage to Berlin sixteen years before. But, it was too dark. I spent a long sleepless night, full of anxiety.

Finally, the day dawned and I saw the German landscape, so green and beautiful, as if nothing had changed over the years. Here and there were scattered small villages, with their typical German cottages—beautifully built, made of brick and painted, each with its own garden and surrounded by trees. In the fields grazed flocks of sheep and cattle—a real pastoral picture painted by a great artist.

The closer we got to Berlin, the more nervous I became. The train stopped at the Potsdam station, and a group of Nazi soldiers with their swastikas boarded the cars with the exclamation "Heil Hitler!" and began to examine everybody's passport and luggage. When they saw our passports with the American visas they became somewhat polite. I took courage and asked when the train left for Paris. When I heard that we would have to wait for four hours, I asked them whether we could leave the train and sightsee in Berlin.

They gave me a permit. It was a bit risky to do that, but I wanted the children to see the beautiful orderly city of Berlin.

We went by subway, and in ten minutes we were in the center of the city. Unter den Linden was considered one of the most beautiful sections of the city, but everything looked different. The streets that had always been full of civilians were now full of the military, as if the civilian population had disappeared. The beautifully decorated shops, which in large part belonged to Jews, were closed. It gave the impression of a military camp, and I was frightened. We returned swiftly to the station and waited impatiently for the train to depart.

As I stood on the platform, surrounded by the children and the luggage, we were suddenly approached by two Nazi soldiers. They greeted us with "Heil Hitler" and, in their polished high German, asked us to contribute some money to their Fatherland, to make a contribution to the Nazi movement. When I heard their request, the world darkened before my eyes. Where I got the courage to turn them down I will never know. I told them in their own language that I could not permit myself to fulfill their request.

I believe that if it were not for the American visa we would have landed in jail. We had heard that to refuse a Nazi request so bluntly would bring serious consequences. The train finally left the beautiful but cursed city of the Nazis. We felt that we were freed from a prison and had come out from the lion's den uninjured.

The trip to Paris was an overnight one. The train compartment that we entered was almost full, and that meant we would not have room to stretch out. We would have to spend a long night sitting up. When the conductor came by I slipped him some money and asked him if there was an empty compartment on the train. He told us to take our luggage and follow him. But before I gave up our seats I told the children to go with him and make sure that the compartment was really empty. Soon the children came running back looking somewhat frightened. They told me that as they were following the conductor he told them what nice German children they were,

to which Leyele replied, "We are not German. We are Jewish." The conductor said that they could not be Jewish since they spoke such perfect German. Again Leyele responded, ignoring Moishele's nudge signalling her to be quiet, "We are not speaking German. We are speaking Yiddish." At that point the conductor became very irate and the children ran away. Needless to say, we ended up sitting up the whole night.

When we arrived in Paris, we were greeted by Nison's *mishpocheh.* At the train station were Chaneh Gorchein, her daughters Elkeh, Rochl, Leah, and Necheh, and her son Yitzchak, as well as Rochl's husband. The Gorcheins were the cream of Nison's *mishpocheh,* generous, loving and devoted, and even talented artists. They were proud of the art and culture of France and the beauty of Paris, which they shared with us during the five days we were there.

The children were enchanted with the museums, the cathedrals and the beautiful, wide boulevards. But most of all they liked the different foods and fruit that we had never seen in Lithuania. Moishele especially liked the subway. We preferred to travel by bus so we could sightsee, and even after we threatened to leave him on a street corner by himself, Moishele stood there stubbornly until we gave in and went down to the subway.

When the time came, it was difficult to leave that wonderful family, but we were hopeful that we would see one another again. In one's wildest imagination, no one could conceive of what would happen to all of them in a few years. Only Necheh, Chaneh and Leah survived the Holocaust. I still see them before me, alive and vibrant, all full of hope and with the confidence that we would meet again.

By train again, we went to Le Havre where we were to board the ship, *Ile de France,* and where we saw the Atlantic Ocean for the first time. We boarded the ship by elevator and walked about the grand halls all decorated in elegant French taste. We were satisfied with our comfortable and spacious cabin. After unpacking and washing up, we heard the call for dinner.

The dining room was large enough to serve the hundreds of passengers on board. There was a kosher table, and we sat there. When the children saw the different dishes that covered the table and the large trays of fruit, fruit that we tasted in Utyan only once a year on *Erev Rosh Hashonah* in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Shehecheyonu*, they hardly knew where to start.

The first evening on board was the best of the four days that we spent on the ship. Music played and couples whirled about in the large ballroom and danced to the rhythm of different tunes. It was like being at a grand wedding, but the bride and groom were missing. Moishele kept imagining all evening what a great time we would have on the ship and what wonderful dishes would be prepared for us. Leyele was silent as if the whole affair did not matter to her. The joy and excitement did not last long, unfortunately—early in the morning we all were very seasick.

The seasickness lasted for three whole days. Then, just as we began to come to life again, a storm broke out. The waves rose higher than the ship and threw the *Ile de France* about like a toy. We feared we would never see America. But the storm gradually abated, and the sun began to shine again. The sky was peaceful and blue, as if nothing had happened.

We celebrated Moishele's tenth birthday on board ship on the 24th of October. At the kosher table, the waiter brought an extra bottle of wine and everybody drank and wished for Moishele to become a good American citizen.

Only one woman at our table spoke Yiddish, and she became our interpreter with the others at our table who spoke a broken Yiddish. She became interested in us and wanted to know where we were going to settle in America. When I told her that we were going to the state of Maine, she was stunned. Jews, she said, settle in the large cities, not among gentiles in such an out-of-the-way region. "Do me a favor," she kept saying to me, "Settle in New York and your children will remain Jews." Since I saw that she was a *yente* I decided to ignore her.

On the last night of the voyage the captain and all the

passengers had a grand celebration. The music played and people danced and revelled all night long. I, and even the children, became uneasy. In a couple of hours we would arrive in Columbus' golden land. What kind of welcome awaited us there?



As dawn broke the next day we were on deck to watch New York harbor materialize before us. That day, October 28, 1936, was the fiftieth birthday of the Statue of Liberty, and the majestic statue was one of our first sights. Beyond the statue, the city of millions, with its tall buildings, looked beautiful. Hundreds of small and large boats plied the waters around the city. The ship finally anchored in port, and the passengers began to disembark.

The real nightmare started with the checking of passports and visas and locating our baggage, but finally we were cleared. We were not held on Ellis Island like the immigrants of earlier years, but we still were not permitted to move about freely, nor were we able to look for our relatives in the large crowd waiting below. But who could hold back that rascal Moishele from running throughout the port area which was packed with people of different races, speaking dozens of languages?

Suddenly Moishele came running—he had spotted Nison. I grabbed both children by the hand and hurried off in the direction that Moishele indicated. I was flabbergasted to see all the relatives who had come with Nison. I recognized them from the pictures that they had sent us years before. Most of them I had never met, but I felt I knew them from having heard so much about them.

Here was the eldest brother, Philip, tall, slender and so much like his mother in appearance. Here was Philip's wife, Anne, a rare beauty, her face radiating goodness. Here was Nison's sister Alice, beautifully dressed, and her husband Louis who several decades before had been a poor immigrant and was now very wealthy. Here was Nison's half sister Kayleh and her husband Shimen and their children, Bertha, Lucy

(who had visited us in Utyan) and Isidor whom I well remembered from Utyan and Malat. And finally, last but not least, I saw my brother Chaim and his young wife Sophie. I looked at all of them and could hardly believe that it was not a dream.

And here, at last, was Nison. Twenty months had passed since he and I had separated. He seemed different, somehow, but I was too confused and excited by the meeting to think about the reason for the change.

We all went in cars to Kayleh's house in Brooklyn. The streets were filled with the noise and confusion of the boiling city of millions. The endless streets were full of automobiles and the sidewalks were full of people. My first impression of the giant city was disturbing—it could not compare to the clean and beautiful streets of Berlin. I didn't know how one could make a life in such a city.

I was impatient to go to Maine immediately, the sooner to see Boruchl and Hirshele who, because of their studies, were unable to come to meet us. Nison persuaded us to stay on a few days, since who knew when we would have the opportunity to come again to see the wonders of New York. He returned home to Lewiston and we stayed with Chaim and Sophie, who were our guides.

Despite being distracted by my desire to see the children and being overwhelmed by New York City, I was glad for the opportunity to get to know Sophie and to become reacquainted with Chaim. My parents would have been shocked that their son had become not a rabbi but a professor—it would have been a terrible disappointment to them. The separation from the *shtetl* life was not only physical but spiritual as well.

We took a train to Boston and saw for the first time the landscape of the new country. It was autumn, and the trees were changing color. We were enchanted by the scenery racing by the train windows, strange though it was to see fields without the familiar crops planted in Lithuania. I must confess that the natural beauty of New England made a better impression on me than the city of New York.

Boston was more like a European city. We stayed briefly

with Nison's sister Alice, at her grand, palatial house. A cool reception from Alice's children, who looked down on the greenhorns who neither spoke nor understood their language, helped to shorten our visit.

Finally we boarded a train for Lewiston, Maine—the final destination of our journey. Only a few years before I did not know that a city by the name of Lewiston existed anywhere in the world; now it was to be our home. I was anxious to see Boruchl and Hirshele. Did I hear birds singing over the noisy wheels of the train or was it the song in my heart celebrating the long awaited reunion? We would live together and would never, never again experience the pains of separation. And then I heard the conductor call out, "Lewiston, Lewiston!" After so much suffering and so many changes, we had finally reached our new home, and a new life was to begin for all of us.



Nison and the children had been living with Philip, my brother-in-law, his wife Anne, and their two daughters, Dorothy and Louise. The experience that is most clearly etched in my memory is entering my brother-in-law's house and seeing the children.

I stood at the entrance, unable to take another step. I looked at them and they at me as if it was impossible to believe that it was no longer a dream, but the reality, that we were seeing each other. My God, how they had changed and how they had grown. Only twenty months had elapsed, and what a change had taken place! They were now fifteen and thirteen years old, no longer small boys but tall young lads, quite grown up. Their behavior and demeanor had also changed. We were barely able to say anything to each other, literally speechless with emotion. Gradually, we recovered, and a flood of words poured from our mouths. They asked about their friends, about life in the *shtetl*, and what changes had taken place there.

Before long I noticed that their Yiddish was mixed with a lot of English. It was surprising to see how little time it had

taken for them to forget their mother tongue. The reason was evident since few in their surrounding spoke Yiddish.

At dinner that night I did not know which way to look first—at our four children or at Philip's and Anne's two lovely daughters. Dorothy, the older, was blond with chiseled facial features, but a little wan in appearance. Louise had black hair and bright brown eyes shining with goodness and understanding. The girls were almost the same ages as Boruchl and Hirshele. Their relationship with the boys appeared to me as if they were brothers and sisters. Right from the first moment I felt an unusual closeness to Louise. Not only her extraordinary beauty but her gentle goodness also made a vivid impression on me. We had received many photographs of them over the years, but none had brought out her real character.

That same evening we moved into our first home in America. The house, which Nison and Anne had rented before our arrival, was a two-story stone building. It was on a quiet street, Sabbatus, not far from the high school that Boruchl and Hirshele were attending.

My adjustments to the new life soon began to be painful. While the Maine winter reminded me of Utyan, the spring was quite different. Instead of the blossoms of winter wheat and the green corn spreading for miles around the *shtetl* in the gradual warming of early spring, it suddenly turned from cold to hot. I missed my family and friends and was worn out by my chores and my evening English class. Moishele and Leyele began to converse in English after only three months. I struggled to learn out of daily necessity and because the children seemed ashamed of me when they accompanied me to the store.

It was difficult, too, to realize that where we had been important people in Utyan, here we were only ordinary lower class immigrants struggling to make a livelihood. It was not what I had imagined.

I had noted from the start a big change in Nison. I soon came to know the reason. We thought that Nison, with his business and management experience in Lithuania, would not have to start over from the very beginning. Right after

his arrival in this country, in order to get acquainted with the manufacturing of shoes, which was his brother's business, he spent many months in Bangor, Maine, where one of the shoe factories was located. There he learned both a vocation and the English language. Always having been a hard and diligent worker, he learned quickly and thought that he would obtain an appropriate position upon returning to Lewiston, where the second factory was located. He was very disappointed when his brother did not offer him the job he expected. Instead, Philip arranged for him to work in the factory restaurant selling sandwiches and hot dogs to the workers. Not only was it a blow to his self esteem, but the income was pretty meager. I had known nothing about it in Utyan, nor when I arrived in Lewiston. I only knew that I had to try to get along on his small income.

The only consolation during the early period of my new life was my sister-in-law Anne. Despite her severe heart disease, she would come almost daily, and she helped a great deal with her advice and her words of comfort. It was Anne who finally convinced Philip to find a better position for Nison.

The summer arrived with its great heat. The children were on vacation from school and had nothing to do. There were no forests or gardens nearby where they could cool off in the shade of a tree. Everyone was bored and did not know how to fill the empty time. The public library came to the rescue. The children never tired of reading, and a new world opened up for them, not a Jewish world, but a foreign one and an interesting one of which they knew little. Gradually, they became acquainted with other young people, made friends, and became interested in and started playing American games.

It was a bit difficult for Leyele who was by nature bashful and withdrawn and, not knowing the language well, was hesitant about uttering a word lest she make a mistake. Then she met Arline Tankle, a Jewish girl of the same age. Arline noticed Leyele's embarrassment and, sensitive child that she was, befriended her. I was very relieved and happy when Leyele brought me the news that she had a new friend.

Slowly we began to adjust to the American life. Upon arrival in this country the children's names were changed—actually they chose their own names—Boruch became Bernard, Hirshtzvi became Harold, Leah became Lillian, and Moishe became Milton. The children overcame the difficulties of the language, excelled in their studies, and even surpassed their American friends. Nison, who now had a managerial position in the factory, started to earn more money, and we were even able to buy a car. The day the car was delivered was a real holiday for all of us. Now we would not have to sit home and be bored. We could go off to the nearby woods and lakes, go swimming and cool off on hot days. And now we could travel about and explore the surrounding region.

Life in the new country became more satisfying, despite the hard work. Letters from the old country came regularly. Father and Mother tried to write comforting letters and hoped that a war would not break out. Mother's letters were loving, full of affection and longing. Father's letters were full of moralizing and warning that we must try to keep a kosher Jewish home and not desecrate the sabbath, and, especially, that the children, however busy they were with their lessons, must find time to continue with their Jewish studies.

There was no good Jewish school in Lewiston, nor were there any trained teachers. The town's rabbi and a teacher taught a little Hebrew and the Bible two hours a day, which was not adequate for the children, since they knew so much already. I must confess that it was partly our fault as parents not to have shown more interest, nor tried to organize a good Jewish school. Gradually, the study of Yiddish was neglected altogether, and the Judaism I was accustomed to have about me withered. This has pained me greatly all these years, but I was not strong enough to influence the children.

In the summer of 1939 the New York World's Fair opened. The children were curious to see all the described wonders of the fair, with the dozens of pavilions representing various

countries of the world. It was vacation time, and because they had all studied well, they earned a visit to the fair. The closer the time for the trip approached, the more excited they became. But excitement turned to disappointment when, just before the departure date, with all preparations in place, Nison came with the news that he could not go because new orders had arrived at the factory and it was important that he be there to supervise the work. The disappointment was great, not only because he could not come with us, but also because we had no one to drive us to New York. Nison was the only driver in the family then. But we did not have to give up our plans. It was our luck that Philip had a worker in the factory, Gillis, who agreed to drive us. The children were overjoyed. This was the first time since our coming to the country almost three years earlier that we were able to allow ourselves the luxury of such a trip. And to travel to New York in a chauffeured car, at that.

We enjoyed the ride on the beautiful highway, the Merritt Parkway. It meant a lot to me to see the children bursting with excitement and happiness. We came to Hy and Sophie's apartment, where we stayed a whole week. They lived, at the time, on the East Side in the very heart of the Jewish ghetto, the likes of which we had never seen. The day we arrived Hy and Sophie had to go to Chicago and we were left in the apartment by ourselves. We were very comfortable, but who would take us around the city and show us the fair?

This problem was soon solved. Alter Zyman, my mother's youngest brother, had lived in New York for many years. Very little was known about Alter in our family. When he was still a young lad he ran away from home because he did not want to serve in the Czar's army. For a long time he wandered through different European countries until he succeeded, after the First World War, in getting to New York. He never married and lived a lonely, poor life. Hy and Sophie saw him occasionally, and it was their idea to ask him to substitute for them as our guide. He gladly agreed.

He came to see us the day we arrived. I remembered him as a young blond lad, and in came a gray-haired elderly man

saying, "Beile Hinde, don't you recognize me? I am your Uncle Alter! What a nice bunch you have here! Do you remember our estate in Zaiyenchkoveh? The large house and fruit orchard, the green fields and thick forests? You probably forgot how I taught you to ride on the brown nag. Oh, what a beautiful quiet life we had then!" An avalanche of memories of our youth poured out of his mouth. His deepest pleasure was to leaf through the years of long ago.

He and the children became friends right off. He came every morning to take us to the fair, never tiring of showing us around the various, decorated, international pavilions. I liked the Russian pavilion the most. The children's and my interests were not the same, so Alter took the children wherever they desired, and that enabled me to go off by myself to see what interested me most. We did that for a whole week, with Alter dragging about the length and breadth of the fair with four children. He was very pleased to be with family, and the children were happy that they had found a devoted uncle who spared no time or money to give them pleasure. He was a dear and lonesome person who sought friendship and family. The children would long remember the New York World's Fair and their newly found Uncle Alter.



In September 1939 darkness descended upon the world and a great dread enveloped many countries. World War II broke out. Even now, after so many years, I shudder to think of it. It is even harder to write about the moment when the news came over the radio that Hitler, may his name and memory be eradicated, attacked Poland. The mighty German Army kept marching and conquering city after city, destroying and burning everything in its path. What was to become of our family, friends, the Jewish people? There was no respite from that thought, ever. In the first few months of the war, it was impossible to imagine that Hitler would deliberately do what he wrote in *Mein Kampf*, what he kept preaching, to destroy and annihilate all Jewish people. Here,

in America, life proceeded in the usual manner, and the great danger was not perceived. The unemployment of the 1930s vanished overnight. People worked and earned money, and that was the most important thing.

That was when Nison's back trouble started. No medical or old wive's remedies helped to reduce the pain in his back, and after a few weeks of suffering we decided to take him to a hospital in Boston where a well-known neurosurgeon operated on him to remove a ruptured disc. The operation was successful, but on the fifth postoperative day he developed an infection and became deathly ill. He remained in the hospital for six weeks with me at his bedside all the time. Thanks only to the good medical care and his young, strong body was he able to pull through. He got better gradually and, finally, he was brought home, a semi-invalid, and was unable to return to work for another seven months.

I spent that period of his illness, while he was still in Boston, by his bed and felt like a bird without wings. I wanted to fly to the children in Maine and to Father and Mother on the other side of the ocean. While in the hospital with Nison terrible thoughts pursued me, and all kinds of nightmares tormented me. Would he get well? What was happening to our family in Shirvint and Utyan, and to all the Jews in the villages and towns of Poland and Lithuania? Was there anyone still alive there? Was anyone left alive to tell the world of the terrible destruction? No word came from the family in war-torn Eastern Europe. The letters stopped coming in 1940.

Somehow, we got through the first cold winter of the war years. The news became worse all the time, and we were helpless to do anything. And life proceeded as usual. The best event of that gloomy period was that Bernard finished high school and was accepted to the University of Maine without difficulty, and off he went to Orono, Maine. Summer arrived bringing vacation from school for the children. Bernard came home for the summer months. He had grown taller and seemed handsomer to me. In my eyes he looked like a Russian student, a character in a Russian classic. As soon as he would come home for a school vacation Louise

would appear and spend more time in our home than in hers. I noticed from the very first encounter that the two were not indifferent to each other. They spent hours together reading and discussing, but no one took it seriously. What if children play?

Since the children worked hard in their studies during the year we wanted them to be able to rest up during the summer months in the country where the air was fresh and fragrant. By a stroke of luck, we were able to rent a summer cottage in the nearby town of Monmouth, just about fourteen miles from Lewiston. The house was on a small lake and the surroundings were beautiful. The slopes of the hills were filled with all kinds of wild berries which we would pick for making jam.

There we spent four summers; the children waited impatiently for summer to arrive in order to spend it at Monmouth. They often invited friends, male and female. The lake was big enough for them to go swimming, boating and fishing. In the peacefulness around the lake it was hard to believe that thousands of young lives were being snuffed out in the terrible war that raged in the world, that Hitler was ravaging the Jews.

We bought a spacious house on a large lot on Nelke Place, which was almost out of town. That summer we spent a longer time than usual in Monmouth while waiting for the new house to be readied. All that took until late fall. Meanwhile the children scattered. Harold started to study at the same university as Bernard. The younger children were already in high school, and every morning they would leave Monmouth with their father—he to work in the factory and they to attend school—and every evening they would return to the cottage. I was alone with my thoughts the entire day. I was not lonesome despite the stillness. One could hear the murmuring of the water in the lake, the noise of a bird and of the leaves falling from the trees. The eye could barely take in the beauty of the changing colors of the leaves; only a great artist or poet would be able to describe the beauty of a sunny autumn day in Maine.

In the first winter in our new house, the winter of 1941, after being in this country for five years, I started to get more involved in the local life. The language became easier, and my shyness in expressing myself in English had started to diminish. I decided to become a member of the town's Jewish organizations and get acquainted with the women. I sensed that they still looked down on me—I was still the greenhorn who spoke English with a heavy accent.

On the scene arrived a woman from Israel who represented the workers council, that is, the working women of the country. This woman wanted to help the working women of Israel. Her visit led to the beginning of the Pioneer Women, a labor Zionist movement.

When I learned of this woman's presence in Lewiston, I invited her to my house, along with several women who were in accord with the liberal idea of such an organization. We worked out a program of activities designed to influence and attract the other women of the community who were mainly involved in Hadassah or the Sisterhood of the synagogue. After several months of work, we managed to get a number of women interested in the ideas of our group, and to obtain a good speaker for the first meeting. A large crowd came, interested in finding out what the Pioneer Women stood for.

After the initial meeting the organization grew and developed, collecting sizable sums of money to be sent to Israel. This money was used to open kindergartens, teach different vocations to the older children, and build schools, libraries and centers for the poorer classes of the population. Years later when I visited Israel for the first time, I saw as I traveled through the country how important the work of the Pioneer Women was, and how much they accomplished in helping working women. That was my reward for the years of work that I had devoted to the Pioneer Women.

America really did not feel the horror of war until the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese on December 7, 1941. The eighteen-year-olds were mobilized and quickly trained and then sent off to both sides of the front—to the Atlantic and the Pacific. We began to hear of Pacific Islands that we

did not know existed. Hazy rumors began to reach us that something terrible was occurring in the territories occupied by Germany. But, it was impossible to imagine or believe that the cultured Germans would become evil beasts and mass murderers. Life here proceeded almost at a normal pace, except for the parents who had to part with their dear ones and send them off overseas wondering whether or not they would return. For them it was a hard time.

Bernard was about to finish the University of Maine. We knew that he excelled in his studies, but we did not know to what extent until his graduation when he earned the highest honors that the university could offer. It is superfluous to say how proud and happy we were with his achievements. The whole family came to the graduation and was as proud of him as we were. Of the 700 students, he was the only one to graduate with *summa cum laude*. Even the Lewiston paper wrote an article about him—an immigrant boy who had been in the country for only eight years was able to excel in every area. Lewiston did not stop talking about him for quite a while.

In 1938, while we still lived in our first house in Lewiston, a family who obviously was not American moved across the street from us. I waited until they got settled before paying them a visit. Max and Helen Hirschler were Jewish refugees from Germany. From our first meeting a lasting friendship developed between us. They were both physicians who had lived in Mannheim, Germany. They had no license to practice medicine in this country. Before getting a license one had to intern and pass examinations. Max did this and practiced in the local Catholic hospital. We soon realized how great a doctor he was, and he became very popular in town. Helen never passed the examinations and had to content herself with tutoring students at Bates College who wanted to improve their German and Italian. Both were very educated and highly cultured people. They were knowledgeable not only about medicine, but about art, music and literature. It was a pleasure to be with them and I learned a lot from them. They became my mentors.

When we became more friendly I introduced Bernard to them, and he became a frequent visitor in their home. On his vacations he spent a lot of time with them. Dr. Hirschler strongly urged him to study medicine since he excelled so in college. He applied and was accepted at Johns Hopkins Medical School.



It is as if it happened yesterday. Bernard was standing before my eyes dressed up in a light beige suit with a necktie (which he almost never wore), his face flushed with excitement. He was leaving his home for Johns Hopkins Medical School. It was no small matter for him to go out in the world and truly achieve what he strove for. And, he strove to learn how to heal not only the body but the soul of human beings. At that time he was absorbed with liberal ideas. And with his youthful fervor and idealism he hoped that not only he alone, but thousands of young people like himself would help to heal and change the corrupt and sick world.

It was very lonesome in the house when Harold took off to study at the University of Maine. Louise, who was so close and dear to me, left Lewiston to attend Tufts College. Soon Lillian and Milton also left the warm nest. Thus, they all scattered and nostalgia filled all corners of the house.

Because of the war students attended college the year round and thus were able to graduate earlier. Thus Harold's graduation took place in January instead of in June. His graduation was not so greatly celebrated because the war was raging on all fronts, and we knew that directly from their college desks young men were mobilized and taught the science of war quickly and then sent to the front.

Harold was assigned to the Navy, and he soon departed for a naval training camp. From there he was to be shipped to a fighting zone. Before leaving home Harold put on a record of Mendelssohn's Italian Symphony. The house was filled with the sounds of the wonderful music. And Harold said that the sounds of this heavenly music would improve

everybody's mood and that I would stop crying. As the train started out slowly and then speeded up, I stood on the platform as if paralyzed and looked at the window of the train where our tall, handsome son was standing and thought, "Will I ever see him again? Will he come out in peace from the blood-bath?"

Lillian was very studious and was always first in her class. It was no wonder that she finished high school with the highest honors and was accepted at Tufts College in Boston where Louise was attending. During her years in high school she developed nicely and grew up to be beautiful. Despite her modesty and reserve, she had many girlfriends who were devoted to her. She was always ready to help them with difficult problems, and they all seemed to be glad that she received all the honors.

Milton was not as diligent a student as his brothers and sister and did not excel in his studies, but he possessed many great qualities. He was good-natured and full of life and made friends wherever he went. He was also blessed with a sweet tenor voice and loved to sing. When Milton entered the house it would fill up with the sounds of sweet music and joy. He was really the beloved favorite of the family.

Like the other children, Milton attended Lewiston High School. Since he turned eighteen in October during the first semester of his senior year in high school, he would be drafted before his graduation. We decided to send him to a private school—Mercersburg Academy in Pennsylvania. They had a summer session there which would enable him to complete his high school graduation before being drafted.

All of a sudden the big house became empty and desolate, and the lonesomeness cried out from every corner. We impatiently waited for the Christmas vacation when the children came home. Bernard had changed a lot in the several months he was in medical school and appeared sickly. The studies were hard, but even harder was the work on the cadavers. He picked up during the four weeks he was at home and became his old self. It was Louise who helped a lot in his recovery; she stayed close to him the whole time.

When it came time for Milton's graduation, Nison could not get away from the factory, so I went alone to Pennsylvania. After the graduation ceremony and before his impending induction into the army, we decided to spend a few days with Chaim and Sophie in New York for a little enjoyment before Milton left civilian life. Milton loved music, especially the opera. *Aida* relieved us of our worries for a few hours.

Milton was drafted immediately and sent for basic training for three months. At the end of this period he was given leave to come home for a few days before he was sent, with thousands of other young lads, to the front overseas. He had changed so in this short period that we hardly recognized him. He was exhausted, thin like a pole, his beautiful young face darkened so that my heart ached when I looked at him. After his short leave he was sent to the Pacific.

At that time Harold, too, was sent off to some island in the Pacific to fight the Japanese, and our fear and worry for the lives of our two sons doubled. From Harold we received a postcard or letter from time to time, but we did not hear from Milton for five weeks—as if he had disappeared in the water. I would sit and look out of the window and wait for the mailman every day. The mailman felt guilty when he did not have any letters from our sons who were fighting somewhere in the mountains of darkness against the cursed Japanese.

Bernard, too, was drafted, but he was not sent to the front. He was able to remain in medical school with the rank of lieutenant. It was patriotic to have stars in the window (one star for every son or daughter in the service) instead of sons in the home. The stars were looked at with great respect, but the inside of the house was full of sadness and mourning. I looked at the three stars that appeared in our window and could not control my tears. Nothing interested me and nothing was important, only to hear at least a few words from the children. Different thoughts would pass through my head—who knows what is happening to them? How much do we have to suffer? Will there ever be an end to the fighting and killing?

For years we waited and hoped to hear from Mother, Father, and the rest of the family from the other side of the ocean, but to no avail. Now we waited and hoped to hear from the children. It was our good fortune that the war was over before our boys reached the actual fighting areas. The tremendous surprise and joy that seized everybody when the news of peace arrived was indescribable. People danced in the streets. At last there was an end to the terrible nightmare that occupied the world. And the children came out untouched by the great war. We had to wait a few months before we saw them, however. It took that long for them to be discharged. How different they looked! When they were drafted they were young carefree boys full of life and energy. Upon their return they were changed, as if their youth had disappeared, and the impression of the war had left a deep effect on their spirit. It took time for the nightmare of the war to gradually evaporate so that they were able to rediscover their interest in life and begin to think of their future.

At the end of the war we began to find out about the horrors of the Holocaust. We finally learned that when the Nazis occupied Shirvint, they killed all the Jews of the area, including my father, my sister Luba, her husband Zundl, and their ten-year-old daughter Chayeleh Belinke, my sister Esther and her husband and many other members of the family. We do not know how they were killed. (My mother did not live to experience the Nazi brutalities. She died in 1939 of pneumonia.) We heard rumors from my one surviving friend, Sarah Klatchke, who made her way to Israel after the war. She had had an estate near Shirvint. Speaking fluent Polish and able to pass as a gentile, she fled to a nearby town and got a job as a maid. She told us two versions of the family's death. One version is that they were herded into the synagogue which was then set on fire. The other version was that they were taken out into the woods and were shot. My tears finally dried up, for can tears bring back the days that have passed forever?

During these difficult days after the war, there constantly

appeared before my eyes the lively and vibrant life of the *shtetl*, with its joys and sorrows. The struggle for survival and the bitter experiences of the diaspora constantly purified the Jews, like fire purifies gold. What they never forgot was that every Jew is a link in a chain of Jewish continuity, the continuity of previous links from which the links of the future will emerge. Upon the destruction of such a large part of the Jewish people, the remaining survivors have to become emissaries who will carry on to the next generation the strength of Jewishness and the responsibility for the Jewish fate.

When the war was over and the children returned home in peace, we hoped that we could now begin to lead a normal, quiet life. The children would study in different colleges and would hopefully achieve what each one of them had been striving for. But our life did not remain quiet. Because of a disagreement with Philip, we decided to move to Boston. There Nison had to start all over again. He bought a small shoe factory, but it failed after two years. He then went to work in a shoe factory in Pittsfield, a small town in Maine, a seven-hour drive from Boston. There was one advantage to our moving to Boston. Lillian had just started to study medicine at Tufts Medical School and was able to live at home which was a great comfort to me, since Nison only came home for weekends. Despite all these changes, we gradually adapted to city life. I believe that one of the greatest qualities that we Jews possess is the ability to adjust to the various difficult conditions of life.

Bernard and Louise had been devoted to each other almost from the moment they met. After many obstacles they finally got married on December 29, 1946. The wedding took place in Hy's and Sophie's apartment in New York where a small number of our family and Bernard's friends from medical school came to celebrate the occasion.

In September of 1947 our first grandson, Fred, was born. Our joy was unimaginable. We went to the *bris* in New York where Bernard was an intern at the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital. They presented us with two more grandchildren, Anne and Naomi, who gave us great joy. A few months after Fred

was born, Louise took him to see her ailing mother in Lewiston, Maine. By then, however, Anne was too ill and too weak to be able to enjoy her grandson. A short time later she was freed from her suffering and left for her eternal rest. About her it can be said, "She is lost, but she will never be forgotten." I certainly will never forget her.

There existed in Boston, at that time, a Jewish Literary Cultural Society called *Ikuf*. It consisted of many groups who met and read Yiddish literature. By accident I discovered the existence of a group in Newton, a suburb of Boston where we lived. I joined this group and was pleased to find that intelligent and liberal people who loved Jewish literature belonged to it. Every week we would meet at a different home, read Yiddish classics and discuss the readings. After the discussion the hostess would serve refreshments and we would spend an interesting evening. On some occasions we would invite Jewish writers who would lecture on different themes, and this greatly enriched our lives. These groups, or circles as they were known, existed for thirty years, but gradually they thinned out. People got older, and one by one the members died out and younger people did not come to replace them. Thus, a beautiful chapter of Yiddish culture terminated.

Lillian studied medicine diligently and was too involved in her work to leave time for social activities. She rarely went out with friends. How surprised we were when, in passing, she told us that she had become acquainted with a student in medical school and would like to invite him to dinner. When I saw Harvey for the first time I was disappointed. He knew little of, and was far removed from, Jewishness. However, when we got to know him better, we recognized his abilities and fine character. They decided to get married before they finished medical school.

We arranged a large wedding in the garden of our home on June 25, 1950. The garden was adorned with dozens of bushes that were in full bloom. There was a holiday spirit among the guests, whether family or friends, who came to celebrate with us. Philip, who had recently married a beautiful woman by the name of Sally, was among the guests. It

was a wedding that was long remembered and talked about with fondness.

Lillian and Harvey lived with us for one year until they finished medical school and then went off to Los Angeles for a year to do their internships. Upon their return they again lived with us until their son Peter was born two years later. It was good to have them in the large house, since Nison had become a partner in the shoe factory in Pittsfield, Maine, and came home only for weekends.

At that time Milton graduated from Bowdoin College and did not have a particular profession. He possessed a beautiful, melodious voice and loved to sing. But it was very difficult to become a professional singer. After many struggles and much doubt, he decided to accept his father's proposal that he learn the shoe manufacturing business. Thus, they would leave the house late Sunday afternoon and would not return until later Friday night, for barely two days at home. It would take them about seven hours to get to the factory in Pittsfield. The Maine Turnpike had not yet been built, and the road went through one town after another. The trip was especially difficult during the winter months when the roads were covered with ice and snow. For seven years this hard life continued, *shlepping* back and forth from Boston to Pittsfield and living in a small apartment right in the factory. One could write a book about the travels of Nison and Milton. Summertime was easier for them since we rented a cottage on a lake near the factory, and they could come home every evening.

We were not happy with Lillian's and Harvey's decision to do their internships in Los Angeles, but we knew that they would be back in one year. We could not imagine that they would eventually make their permanent home there. After three years of being a resident in radiology at the Beth Israel in Boston, Harvey convinced Lillian that Los Angeles offered more opportunities and that they should make their home there. I had hoped that with Peter's birth they would change their minds about the move. It was hard for me to believe that they would have the courage to carry out their plan.

How could they abandon their families and friends and wander away to such a distant and foreign place?

Until the last minute we continued to hope that a miracle would occur and that they would not punish us with such a separation. I felt that as difficult as such a separation would be for us, it would be even more difficult for Lillian. Here, in the Boston area we had our children—Bernard, Louise, Harold and Milton—and our grandchildren, Fred, Anne and Naomi, who gave us such happiness. But they had no one in Los Angeles. They would be alone there, and their children would grow up without the love of grandparents and would be strangers to the *mishpocheh*.

The day of their departure was like a day of mourning. It was very distressful for us to have our only daughter leave us and live so far away. But despite the difficult events that take place in one's life, life goes on and gradually one adapts and makes peace with them.

About the time that Lillian and Harvey left for California, Bernard and Louise and their children returned from the West and settled in Boston. This gave us great happiness. It was very satisfying to have them nearby and be able to spend time with our grandchildren. Not a day would pass without my spending time with them. I would sing for them the same songs that I sang for my children. As soon as they would see me they would say, "Grandma, sing us a song, tell us a story," and I would sing to them and tell them stories of years gone by. It was also a great satisfaction for us to see Bernard quickly rise in his profession, and we were sure that in time he would become a world-famous doctor and healer. I fully believed what the rabbi of the small *yeshiva* in Utyan had said of him long ago—that he would be a great person among the Jewish people.



The years that we lived in Maine we devoted much work to Zionist causes. Nison established there the *Keren Kayemet* (Jewish National Fund) to raise money in order to buy land

and plant trees in Israel. He devoted his little free time to this organization. I succeeded (as mentioned earlier) in organizing the Pioneer Women. We worked hard to expand these organizations and to make them successful. For many years we dreamed about and hoped to be able to make a trip to Israel and actually see the fruits of our labor. But more than that, we wanted to meet with our family after so many years of separation and also see the country. Finally, in June of 1954, we succeeded in realizing our dream.

I will describe here a few of my impressions of the country and the meeting with the *mishpocheh* whom we had not seen for almost thirty years. We landed at Lud, a suburb of Tel Aviv, on a beautiful, warm, sunny day. The approach to the city made a bad impression on me, for the entire area between the airport and the edge of the city was covered with thousands of huts. These were the sadly infamous *maabarot* where thousands of immigrants had to make their homes.

Tel Aviv itself was a Babel. The streets were full of people speaking different languages—refugees from all corners of the world. It was a noisy city where building was constantly going on. New neighborhoods grew overnight, like mushrooms after the rain. The character of Tel Aviv was as varied as the residents of the city. People came there from all parts of the world, and each one had tried to bring with him something of his country and culture. The city had several parks with different tropical plants and flowers. Modern hotels could be found along the seashore. Generally Tel Aviv gave the impression of a European city with an oriental backdrop.

Walking through the narrow streets of Tel Aviv one could get acquainted with and learn a bit of Jewish history. Every section bore the name of some Jewish epoch, and every street the name of some great Jewish personality, beginning with the prophets of antiquity and ending with the names of thinkers and writers of modern times. Thanks to my extended family that consists of over one hundred members and who belong to various strata of the population, we were able to learn how one lives in present-day Israel.

A very small percentage of the population belonged to the

well-to-do class, and the largest percentage worked hard to make a living. Most families lived in two rooms and a kitchen with a Primus stove. Although they worked hard they could hardly afford to buy a dress or a pair of shoes—no one spoke of luxuries. Earnings were low and prices were high. For example, a cousin, Benjamin Halevi, who was considered one of the best judges in the land, earned three hundred pounds a month, which was approximately one hundred fifty dollars. It was hard to exist, and they resented the necessity of having to ask for help from their rich relatives in America.

It is impossible for me to express my feelings when I first saw my sisters Reichl and Chanah, my brother Malkiel, uncles Kalmen, and Yosef (Kalmen's brother) and their wives Leah and Reisl and their families. Every one of them went through so much and lost so much. We looked at each other and barely recognized each other; everyone had aged a great deal. I was barely able to utter a word. Malkiel looked at me, and, as if unwillingly, quoted the Biblical question from the Book of Ruth, "Is this Naomi?" Is this the beautiful Beile Hinde?

We spent six weeks in the country, and every day we visited another relative. The warmth that everyone showed us is hard to describe. We usually gathered at Uncle Kalmen's house where about forty members of the family, young and old, would come together to talk with the American relatives. Many languages were spoken, especially Yiddish and Hebrew, but also German, Russian, Polish and even French. Everyone tried in different ways to relate their various experiences and, incidentally, unload their heart's burden.

Of all the members of our family, Shaul, Uncle Kalmen's son, made the greatest impression on me. He was a doctor of medicine and health minister of the government, but besides his medical knowledge he was a highly cultured person, knowledgeable in art and music. He spoke five languages fluently and would effortlessly switch from one language to another. It was no surprise that he was the ornament of the family. Thanks to him we were able to see the exceptional beauty of Jerusalem. He was our guide.

After spending some time in Tel Aviv, we left to see the countryside. Uncle Kalmen's youngest son, Yosef, took us on a *tiyul*. We wanted to see and find out for ourselves if the country was really so beautiful and attractive that it justified the two thousand years the Jewish people yearned for it, and prayed three times a day "and our eyes will witness the return to Zion."

We took off to see the *kibbutzim*, the *moshavim*, the towns and cities, as well as the landscape of the country. We traveled in the direction of the Emek along the Mediterranean Sea. Away from Tel Aviv the landscape became hilly and beautiful and the air more clear. It is written in the Scripture that ten measures of beauty were dropped upon the world, nine of them on Israel and one on the rest of the world. It is a bit exaggerated, but one cannot dismiss the beauty of Israel. Our car kept winding higher and higher until we reached the top of Mt. Carmel, and from there we viewed the entire Emek Valley where many *kibbutzim* were located. From a distance the settlements appeared like dots at the edge of green expanses. Small ponds surrounded by young forests sparkled at the foot of the mountain. It had recently rained, and everything looked fresh and green. On top of the mountain we saw a Christian monastary with a statue of Elija, the prophet. According to legend, it was from this place that Elija disappeared into heaven.

Our first stop was at an old *kibbutz*, Ein Charod, which was established about forty years ago and had a population of about two thousand. The *kibbutz* is in a valley surrounded by the historic mountains of Gilboa. Whoever is acquainted with the Bible knows that this is the mountain where King Saul lost both the war and his life and where the future monarch of Israel, King David, used to walk with his friend Jonathan and create poetry, that is, the Psalms. Every road and path in Israel is full of history.

The *kibbutz* was a swampy area where the first pioneers suffered from malaria until the swamps were dried out and the whole area was transformed into an agricultural center. Nearly every *kibbutz* had a mixed economy—besides farms

and orchards, they had small factories. At Ein Charod they manufactured metal tools. Everybody worked equally, men and women.

It is worth making a few remarks regarding the role of women in Israel. The labor leadership of the country included a significant number of women. Most of them belonged to *Moetset Hapoahlot*, or the Pioneer Women, as they are called in the United States. They really helped to lay the foundation of the present state with their sweat and blood. They suffered malaria and various other illnesses along with the men and were an integral part of the country's pioneers. They made contributions in all areas, practical as well as cultural. Ten percent of the present 120 members of the Knesset are women who came from the workers movement. Long before the establishment of the state, women sat on various committees, studied the laws of other democracies and were influential in passing laws in the Knesset pertaining to human rights.

In order to get more closely acquainted with life in a *kibbutz* we decided to spend a few days at Kibbutz Mizra, where my cousin Yankele and his wife Chavah were among the founders. Mizra was thirty years old and had a population of 600. Theirs was also a mixed economy. They had ponds where they raised fish, and they also had sheep and cattle. Every couple lived in one room and ate in a common dining room. Mizra had one of the most beautiful dining rooms and modern kitchens where the food for the whole *kibbutz* was prepared. The children of the *kibbutz* were raised by trained nurses in separate houses. When the children got older they moved to larger quarters where their schools were also located. The lion's share of the *kibbutz* budget went to the education and upbringing of the children. Every *kibbutz* had a cultural center with a library and, even, a museum. In almost every *kibbutz* that we visited we met friends, acquaintances and *landsleit* from Lithuania, Poland and Russia. Each one of them was very proud of his or her achievement.

Life in the *kibbutz* was involved with many hardships, and the appearance of the women attested to this. They did not have the time to pay attention to their appearance and they

aged prematurely. But one of the greatest problems in the *kibbutz* life was the conflict between political parties. There was a bitter struggle between the *Mapai* and *Mapam* parties. *Mapai* was the party in power, and its government depended almost entirely on America. Israel was practically Americanized, and if this dependence were to continue people feared that Israel would become an American colony. *Mapam*, the labor party, wanted the rudder of state to turn more to the East. The situation became so strained that *kibbutzim* with mixed party affiliations had to split, and this caused incalculable damage to the economy.

From Mizra we went to Haifa which is a large port city with a varied industry and gigantic oil refineries. The city consisted of three sectons. The lowest section, near the port, was a thoroughly Arabic town; the mosques and stone houses were left by the Arabs when the Israelis conquered the area. The next section was Hadar Hacarmel which was built on the mountainside by the first Jewish settlers and where all the business structures of the city were concentrated. The final section, Har Hacarmel, was at the top of a mountain which was covered with grand villas and beautiful flower gardens.

Our car turned from the port and began to climb the wide paved road between beautifully landscaped white villas to the Carmel Heights, Har Hacarmel. The sinking sun shone on the golden cupola of the Bahai Temple. It was a bewitching panorama from the mountain top—below the shining whiteness of the houses partly submerged in the greenery, in the west the flaming sun beginning to sink into the sea, to the east the bluish lights of Haifa twinkling on the sides and pinnacles of the Carmel chain of hills. Soon, all of Haifa, from the tip of Mt. Carmel to the port area, sparkled with shimmering lights. This is the picture that now appears before my eyes. On such a night we walked on the Carmel Heights. We walked on paths where, as legends tell us, Elija the prophet had walked.

But the real beauty of Israel lies in the Galilee. There are three Galilees—the Upper, Lower and Western Galilee. Each part has a special charm and beauty. Our automobile again was making its way through mountains and valleys, and

suddenly we saw the Sea of Galilee, the Kinneret, surrounded by the mountains of Nazareth. The Biblical landscape had probably changed very little in the last two thousand years. The waters of the Kinneret flowed leisurely and quietly as if it had not played an important role in Christian history. We stopped in the old town of Tiberias, which served as a resort area for the country. Thousands of people come to bathe there in the warm waters that flow from the springs around Tiberias. The town looked oriental. Many Jews from different parts of the Arab countries settled there, and with their costumes and quaintness they add even more to the oriental appearance of the city.

Higher and deeper in the mountains called the Mountains of Canaan lies the ancient city of Safed. The hills around the city are covered with olive trees which add beauty to the entire magnificent panorama. For hundreds of years Safed was the center of mysticism—Kabbalah. One could still find an eight-hundred-year-old synagogue there. In the narrow alleys of Safed that extend steeply up and down the mountain, one encountered different oriental mystical types who really belonged to an era long past. The whole panorama transported one to a different world.

In modern Israel Safed became transformed into an art center. Dozens of studios opened there and artists from all parts of the country came to paint the romantic beauty of Safed and its vicinity. On the return trip we were able to see, from the heights of the mountains, the Mediterranean Sea on one side and the Sea of Galilee and Lake Afula on the other. The air was so clear that one could see for a distance of thirty miles.

Of course, one cannot go to Israel and not see Jerusalem, where so much Jewish history was written and so much Jewish blood and tears were shed on its ancient craggy slopes. The road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem leads through the famous Judean Hills. For miles a chain of bare rocky mountains extends. Now and then one did see a bit of greenery, but despite their barrenness the mountains are majestically beautiful. Between rocky hills Jerusalem appears, not the old city, but the new modern Jerusalem.

The Old City, with all of the Jewish and Christian historical sites, was in Arab hands, and no Jew had the right to enter. The new Jerusalem gives the impression of a European city, except for the orthodox quarter of Mea Shearim which is reminiscent of the old city. The streets there are narrow and paved with jutting rocks. Women sell all sorts of food from open stalls. The alleys are full of men in long coats with wide velvet hats on their heads, elders of stately appearance, young men sprouting little beards and youngsters with shaved heads and *peyes*. Posters of a fanatic religious sect hang on the walls of various buildings criticizing the government for many of its stands, especially the mobilization of women in the army. A young man on the street told us not to be angry at this small group of religious fanatics who were only waiting for the Messiah to appear. He also told us that some of the best actresses and dancers came from the pious girls dressed in long dresses and black woolen stockings, and some of the best writers and poets came from the lads in their long coats and *peyes*.

We also visited Kibbutz Yad Mordecai, known as the Stalingrad of Israel. The *kibbutz* lies on the road to the Negev and was entirely destroyed during the War of Independence in 1948. A large part of its population perished, but the frequently attacked *kibbutz* did not give up the battle. They built a new *kibbutz* on the ruins of the old one. And their first task was to erect a monument for the hero of the Warsaw Ghetto—Mordecai Anielewicz. We saw the bronze statue of the hero of the ghetto from a distance. It stood on a hill surrounded by flowers and greenery. He stood there majestically looking down on the *kibbutz* and the entire vicinity. The proud stance of this mighty figure was a warning to the entire world that the Holocaust will never happen again.

I will not make any conclusion about what Israel represented to me. Was it really the land of which the early pioneers had dreamed? Or was it a country like all other countries? Time will tell. I will only say that it is a country of light and shadows.

It is said that every person is born with his fate and destiny in life. Four children of one mother and father, but how different they were in character and how different was their fate. Bernard was fortunate in that he knew what his goal in life was from his earliest childhood. But he was most fortunate in his marriage to Louise. From her mother she inherited her goodness, gentleness and serenity, and from her father her intelligence and ability. What a rare combination this is! It was never too hard for her to help people from all walks of life and of course her family and friends. She really carried the yoke of the world on her shoulders. Bernard's brilliance, together with Louise's inspiration and constant help, gave him the courage and drive to rise and become what he is today.

Harold was very different. Despite his abilities he was never sure of himself and doubted his achievements. Upon his return from the war, after a great deal of deliberation, he decided to continue with his education and get a master's degree in engineering. He finished his studies in two years, but then had difficulty finding a position. From his earliest childhood he was a devoted Zionist, spending a few summers at Hashomer Hatzayir camps which further strengthened his devotion to the idea of "Return to Zion." Thus, when he finished his studies he decided to go to Israel and contribute with his profession to the young country that needed assistance greatly. When Harold decided on something he immediately tried to accomplish it. He arrived in Israel during the period of *tsenah*—deprivation and great want. People actually suffered from hunger. He went through a lot of hardship, but thanks to my family there he did not suffer as much as the average inhabitant of the country. After a year there he decided that he did not want to remain. He felt that he had given to the country all that he had to offer.

The happiest result of his voyage was meeting Yaffa aboard ship when he was returning home. She was an Israeli girl who was going to America to find work and to study. They became friends, but it took six months before they met again and became more intimate in their friendship. I will never forget my first impression of Yaffa. She was a real beauty:

tall and slender, with pitch black hair, green eyes and a chiseled face. I could hardly believe that Harold had finally met his intended—and what a match! I was happy when they announced their plans to get married, especially since I hoped that their children would be rooted in Jewishness, which our other children neglected.

Yaffa and Harold got married on January 30, 1955, and we celebrated the wedding in the finest manner. It was a homey Jewish wedding. We were happy that Harold would finally settle down and lead a nice Jewish life. During the passage of eight years he and Yaffa presented us with three beautiful and bright grandchildren—Daniel, Rebecca, and Jonathan.

Our family kept growing. After Peter, Lillian gave birth to a daughter, Julie Esther. She was an unusually beautiful and good child, and thus she grew up as well. We waited impatiently to go to Los Angeles and see our new grandchild. From then on we traveled there almost every year to see the children and spend time with the grandchildren. Thirteen months after Julie's birth, their second daughter Hildy was born. Their life in California proceeded normally, and our son-in-law Harvey in a short time attained professionally in Los Angeles what would have been impossible in Boston. Who knows, perhaps they were right in leaving Boston and settling in California, the land of sun and brightness.

In the meantime, the years passed and Milton had not yet chosen his intended, something that grieved us very much, until, by chance he met Naomi. She really was a young woman with great qualities. She had received a master's degree in choreography, and her ambition was to be a dancer and be independent. At their first meeting Milton fell in love with her and hoped to marry her. She, however, was quite far from making such a move and relinquishing her plans for the future. It took him quite a while to get her consent. But, gradually, Milton's pleasant personality and his other good qualities won out, and finally they set a wedding date. This was the last wedding of our children.

The wedding took place June 23, 1957. It was a beautiful summer day, among the trees in Gloucester, where the two

families gathered to celebrate. They settled in Bangor, Maine. The first years in Bangor were difficult for Naomi. It was hard for her to adjust to life in a small town after the noisy life in the large city of New York. Furthermore, children did not arrive. They spent summers with us in the cottage in Unity, Maine. The rest of the family would join us. Thus seven summers passed. Those were happy times for Nison and me since we had the whole family around us.

Finally, Naomi and Milton decided to adopt a newborn child, and they named her Jennifer. She was extraordinarily beautiful and affectionate, and we loved her dearly. Two years later they adopted a second newborn girl and named her Susannah. Naomi became pregnant and gave birth to a son, David. He, too, like Jennifer, was a beautiful and lively child and our joy was boundless. We thought that three children was enough, but Naomi and Milton decided to adopt another child. They succeeded in adopting a newborn boy. He was three days old when they brought him home from the hospital, and a *bris* was celebrated according to Jewish law and tradition. He was named Aaron.

I will not write any more here about how the grandchildren grew up and developed and how they excelled in their different professions. I leave to them, the grandchildren themselves, to describe their lives. I only hope that some of them will in the future read what I have written and add to the memories of the old generation the saga of the new generation that was born and grew up in America. My greatest reward and satisfaction will be that the young generation will not forget the old one.

Afterword

My memoir would not be complete without including a more recent episode in my family. It was 6 A.M. on October 10, 1985 when my telephone rang and woke me up. A voice said, "Mrs. Lown, are you the mother of Dr. Bernard Lown?" I began to tremble as I asked, "What happened to him? Where is he?" At that time I knew he was in Geneva, Switzerland. The caller said, "Calm down. He is fine. I want to interview you because it was just announced that the organization founded by your son, the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, was just nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize." Your son will receive the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the organization.

Within the hour a TV crew appeared as well as newspaper reporters. They bombarded me with questions about Bernard's life. That evening I saw myself on the Dan Rather show, but I was very disappointed. After all the time I spent answering questions, I appeared for a very brief time.

A week later when Bernard returned home he received a great deal of press and TV coverage. My phone did not stop ringing from family and friends who wished to congratulate me. Then, in December the journey to Oslo was planned. I had no thought that I would physically be able to make the trip, but my son was insistent. Furthermore, to ease the burden of travel, one of his patients (from Italy) volunteered to fly us to Oslo in his private jet.

In my wildest dreams I never imagined flying across the Atlantic in such luxury. Upon our arrival in the evening a

delegation from the Nobel Committee met our group with flowers and cameras and brought us to the Grand Hotel.

During our entire stay, I was virtually treated like a "Grand Lady," always escorted to events in a chauffeured limousine. The days were filled with excitement of dinners and receptions with the dignitaries of Oslo. The culmination was the Nobel ceremony itself at the Aula Hall at the University of Oslo. The auditorium was filled and the King was the last to be seated. An orchestra played beautiful music and then the speeches began by the Mayor of Olso followed by the Chairman of the Nobel Committee, Egil Aarvik, who introduced Dr. Evgeny Chazov and my son, Dr. Bernard Lown, as co-Presidents of the organization. Each in turn gave a speech. I felt that Bernard's speech was the climax of the ceremony and his words will forever remain in my memory. "We must hold fast to the dream that reason will prevail. The world today is full of anguish and dread. As great as is the danger, still greater is the opportunity."

That evening there was a traditional candlelight parade while the Nobel recipients stood on the balcony to wave to the crowd. This was followed by the King's dinner attended by over one hundred people.

On the homeward journey I kept thinking of Bernard's diploma from the *yeshiva* in Utyan where it was written: "He will be a great man in the world." Little did I realize at that time how true this prediction would be.

Epilogue

Childhood Memories of a Rich Heritage

It has been fifty-four years since I took leave of our small community of Utyan, my birthplace in Lithuania, and even though I lived there just twelve years, its memories have left an indelible impression.

Utyan represented the totality of Jewish living, its institutions, politics, and humanity all coalesced around our Jewish Heritage that Mother has so vividly portrayed in her memoirs. Life flourished there in spite of the literally nonexistent advanced educational and professional opportunities. The newly born Lithuanian State gave its Jewish population a certain measure of autonomy that enabled our Jewish community to establish its own independent school system with either a Hebrew or Yiddish orientation. Lithuanians and their language, however, were alien to us and we mixed about as well as oil in water. There were a few anomalies, though; for instance, Utyan could boast of having a Jewish mayor and judge. In the main, our contact with Lithuanians was on either a commercial or a confrontational basis, but almost never on a social basis.

My earliest recollections of Utyan are associated with our apartment on Bozhnitcheh Street, a stone's throw away from the Catholic Church that appeared to be peering down on us ominously. It is in this small apartment that I recall witnessing the celebration of the *bris* of our newly born brother Moishkeh, the baby of the family. A few years later another momentous event took place in this apartment. It was the first staging in our neighborhood of *Ali Baba and the Forty*

Thieves by my brother Bokeh with my help and that of several friends. This production was carried out unbeknown to my parents who were away. Needless to say, our paid admission theatrical feat was not well received by our parents, when upon their return they discovered a large audience of children trampling their best bedspreads and furniture. We were not severely reprimanded, however, which attests to the great patience and love of our parents.

Utyan had few avenues for pursuing a livelihood, of which being a merchant or businessman was the most prevalent. It was not an easy task, as one was continuously daunted by the oppressive Lithuanian taxation system heaped on the Jewish entrepreneurs.

Father's skill in conducting his business affairs in this kind of climate was like an able sea captain navigating his ship through the eye of a hurricane. Mother was never a silent partner. I remember the discussions and constant vigilance against the sudden raid of the account books by the Lithuanian authorities, suspicious of possible tax cheating. It was Father's impressive prowess with numbers and mathematics that also catapulted him as a tax representative of the Jewish community, and grudgingly endeared him to the district's Lithuanian governor. As a result of his efforts, Father was able to stave off financial disaster that might otherwise have befallen our Jewish community.

Vividly do I remember Father's transition from merchant to industrialist. The construction of the flour mill followed by the complex undertaking of erecting Utyan's electric power station would have been enough of a challenge, even to a professional engineer. Father, however, with only his *yeshiva* background, was nevertheless able to successfully carry out that project. What a sight it was to behold, as the massive diesel engine crankshaft was transported on a platform drawn by a team of thirty horses from the railroad station to the power station building. It was this exposure to the engineering marvels enacted before my very eyes that captured my imagination and resolve to become an engineer when I grew up.

Utyan, like many Jewish communities in Eastern Europe,

had deep pockets of poverty that had to be addressed. Mother, with her sensitivity and awareness that we have a moral obligation to the less fortunate, spearheaded a social action group designed to somewhat ameliorate the suffering of the less fortunate. During the winter months many youngsters from these poor homes were ill clothed to weather the onslaught of the bitter cold that engulfed Utyan, and I remember how Mother used to fit these youngsters with warm woolen undergarments in our house. Some of them were my classmates from the Hebrew Day School we attended.

The hustle and bustle in Utyan always came to a complete standstill on *Shabbat* and the Jewish Holidays. A peaceful stillness descended on our town, as all activity came to rest, and only the sonorous echoes of the beautiful chanting from the cantors and boys' choirs in our synagogues filled the air. In the "Big Shul" on *Rosh Hashonah* and *Yom Kippur*, standing at my Father's side together with my brother Bokeh, I could just catch a glimpse of Mother high up in the balcony reserved for women. Tears were always welling in her eyes as she peered down at us with love and affection.

It was on *Shabbat* that Father had a chance to examine our erudition in the study of *Tanach* and *Talmud*. His famous dictum to us, "If you don't study you will grow up to raise pigs" must have made its indelible impression on us, as later years proved.

Our days and early evenings were filled with study. Secular studies lasted from morning till early afternoon, followed by evening study in the newly formed *yeshiva* in our town. It was spearheaded by two highly motivated and clean-cut young men from the famous Telz *Yeshiva*. The study of *Talmud* seemed to captivate my brother Bokeh's imagination, and his penetrating and profound questions so greatly impressed his teachers that on his diploma they wrote: "If he will persevere, he will grow up to be one of the great scholars in Israel."

In the early 1930s life in Utyan centered around endless and anxious discussions of the political changes that were sweeping across Europe. The emergence of the diabolical

Nazi movement in Germany fanned the flames of anti-Semitism throughout Lithuania. Business became more difficult to manage, and Mother's and Father's thoughts turned more towards *Eretz Yisrael*. Being ardent Zionists, as were most of Utyan's Jewish community, they hoped to make *Aliyah* someday, and help in the building of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Mother's sisters, Reichl and Chanah, and her brother Malkiel had already emigrated from Lithuania to Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s.

The Lithuanian Jewish community was caught in a vise with the Bolsheviks in the east and the Nazis in the west. If there were any illusions about the fate that awaited our Jewish community if war were to break out and the Germans were to overrun Lithuania, it was poignantly shattered by the sudden arrival of Uncle Kalmen from Berlin in 1933. He had just managed to escape by a hair's breadth from the clutches of the Nazis, who were about to arrest and send him to a concentration camp. He came to bid us goodbye on his way to Palestine. Destiny, however, was soon to intervene and change our lives.

While vacationing in the summer with Mother, my brothers Bokeh and Moishkeh and my sister Laikeh near the village of Anixt, Father suddenly appeared with startling news. He had just received personal regards from his brother Philip in America via an associate of his visiting Lithuania. Father brought us watches and bracelets, gifts that were sent to us by Uncle Philip.

This sudden turn of events changed the focus in Father's thinking. Realizing the near impossibility of liquidating his business under the prevailing deteriorating conditions in Lithuania, America appeared as the only viable option.

It was with a feeling of sadness that I parted from Utyan on a grey morning in the spring of 1935, bidding goodbye to my younger sister and brother, Laikeh and Moishkeh, and the many boyhood friends. As each of our friends inscribed their parting well wishes in our memorandum book with the expressed hope of meeting in *Eretz Yisrael*, I wondered, will our paths ever cross again?

Mother accompanied us on the bus to Kovneh where Father, my brother Bokeh, and I were to take the train to France, and then board the ship, the Ile de France, at Le Havre for America. To this day I still marvel at the tremendous courage, strength and dedication Mother displayed in agreeing to stay behind to liquidate Father's business.

Mother's memoirs give us a chance to draw from her unique qualities in guiding our future lives, and equally to come to cherish a past that was full of richness, adventure, love, dedication, and understanding.

HAROLD LOWN

For My Grandchildren

WHAT IS JUDAISM?

JUDAISM is a complex web of ideas, concepts, commandments, and commentaries. At first you may stand bewildered and say, "Is there a beginning to all this?" The answer is a firm one. With the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, a new light dawned for the history of moral behavior. The Torah provides for the Jewish people a source for studying the ways of the world.



At a later time, two great bodies of work were added to the Torah. The first of these is called Prophets (Neviim) which contains the history of Judges and the early prophets, the history of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the works of the twelve minor prophets as well as the works of the three major prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The Prophets covers the period from the entrance of the Jewish people into Canaan until the destruction of the first Temple by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E



The second collection to be added to the Torah is called Writings (Ketuvim). Writings is made up of poetry, proverbs, and stories of wisdom, as well as historical books.



This whole vast body of literature is called the Bible. In Hebrew it is called Tanakh, the first letters of each of its three parts (Torah, Neviim, Ketuvim).



The Talmud is composed of two parts: the Mishnah and the Gemora. The Mishnah which means "learning" or "repetition" refers to the oldest post-Biblical code of laws (about 450 B.C.E.–200 C.E.). At first, it was passed down from teacher to student by word of mouth and so it became the Oral Law or Oral Tradition. It was probably Hillel who later gave the Oral Law its first written form in order to use it as a textbook. As it exists today, the Mishnah is divided up into Orders (Sedarim). Each order is in turn subdivided into short books called tractates. Each tractate has several chapters and each chapter is divided into paragraphs. The tractates dealing with one large area of law are grouped together as Orders. There are six Orders: 1) Seeds (Zeraim) pertains to agriculture and prayer; 2) Festivals (Moed) deals with the Sabbath and festivals and how we observe them; 3) Women (Nashim) contains tractates regarding marriage, divorce, and problems of family life; 4) Damages (Nezikin) deals with civil laws, criminal laws, and court procedures; 5) Holy Matters (Kodashim) contains laws regarding sacrifices and the services at the Temple; 6) Purities (Tohorot) regards laws of purity and impurity. The idea behind compiling the Mishnah was to give Jews a guide for following in their daily lives the 613 religious and moral obligations (Mitzvot) of the Torah.

The teachers who lived after the time of Hillel and whose work completed the Mishnah were called Tannaim from the Aramaic word meaning "teacher." The Tannaim were followed by the Amoraim, meaning "interpreters." The Amoraim were responsible for a collection of commentaries on the Mishnah, called the Gemora. You might ask, "Since

the Mishnah is already an interpretation of the laws of the Torah, why do we need the Gemora which is an interpretation of the Mishnah?" The reason for needing both the Mishnah and Gemora is that each reflects Judaism passing through important stages in the process of growth and change. All the laws were continually being viewed in new ways and were being applied to new situations and problems in the life of the Jewish people. Together the Mishnah and Gemora make up what we call the Talmud. Actually, since there were Amoraim writing both in Palestine and Babylonia, there are two such works—the Palestinian or Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. The Babylonian Talmud, however, is by far the greatest in most respects. In size alone it is about four times larger than the Jerusalem version. It is also more comprehensive and has been more influential in Jewish life.



As time went on, other commentaries were written on the Bible and even on the Talmud itself. Probably the most famous commentator of all time is Rashi of Troyes (1040–1105). The name Rashi is an acronym for Rabbi Shlome Yitzhaki. Rashi set for himself the task of making the Bible and Talmud less difficult for the Jews of his time. He wrote in a Hebrew style that was clear and extremely simple. It is fitting that Rashi's commentary on the Torah was the first book written in Hebrew to be printed in 1475 using the modern system of moveable type. Other great commentators include Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (1092–1167) who was a great poet and traveler; Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir (1085–1194), called the Rashban, Rashi's grandson; and Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (1194–1270), called the Rambam. The list continues down to the present day. Even now commentaries are being written on the Bible and on the Talmud.



It seems amazing that one small tractate of six chapters of the Mishnah can sum up the ethical teachings of this vast network of folklore, legend, law, and the Bible. However, The Sayings of the Fathers (Pirke Avot) does just this. It is an amazing book. It comes from the Order Damages (Seder Nezikin) and very early it was adopted as a regular part of the study materials for Shabbat and so it was included in the prayer books. Pirke Avot is made up of sayings of some sixty-five rabbis extending over a period of nearly 500 years, roughly from 300 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. Every one of the sayings is a brief summary of all or part of the teachings of these rabbis. Almost every saying is concerned with the way that we treat one another in our daily lives, and our moral conduct. Its sayings and advice are still fresh and useful today. If anything, they have grown more important, for as we read them we can see in them the mark of eternal truths. For the most part, however, the teachings that make up Pirke Avot have become part of both Jewish speech and Jewish life. Almost no other book in the literature of Judaism has been the focus of so many commentators.



One of the reasons why Pirke Avot, the entire Talmud, the Tanakh, and many works of Jewish wisdom have been preserved with such great dedication is to give you a chance to encounter them personally. By reading them with your own eyes, by applying your own ideas, your own mind at your special place in time, you can study them, comment on them, react to them, come to know and cherish them, and pass them on to your children as a precious heritage.

THE BIBLE AND COMMENTARIES

Bible — Tanakh

A. Pentateuch (5 books of Moses) — Torah
   1. Genesis
   2. Exodus
   3. Leviticus
   4. Numbers
   5. Deuteronomy

B. Prophets — Neviim
   1. Historical Books
      a. Joshua
      b. Judges
      c. Samuel
      d. Kings
   2. Prophetic Utterances
      a. Isaiah
      b. Jeremiah
      c. Ezekiel
      d. The Twelve Minor Prophets

C. Writings — Ketuvim
   1. Psalms
   2. Proverbs
   3. Job
   4. The Five Scrolls
      a. Song of Songs
      b. Ruth
      c. Lamentations
      d. Ecclesiastes
      e. Esther
   5. Daniel
   6. Ezra
   7. Nehemiah
   8. Chronicles

Talmud

A. Mishnah
   1. Seeds
   2. Festivals
   3. Women
   4. Damages
      The Sayings of the Fathers — Pirke Avot
   5. Holy Matters
   6. Purities

B. Gemora

Glossary

Aliyah, the honor given to a person chosen to recite from the Torah; return to Israel
Aliyas, plural of aliyah
Amida, a prayer said while standing
balibotim, community leaders
bar mitzvah, passage into adulthood at age thirteen
baroiges, angry
batlen, a man who does nothing; someone who does not take care of his appearance
Bet Hashorva, house of merriment
bimah, pulpit
bobbe, grandmother
bocher, a young man
bocksher, carob bread
bris, circumcision eight days after birth
Chad Gadya, song sung at the Passover seder, "An only kid"
chaider, a one-room school where Hebrew is taught
Chanukah, the festival of lights
challeh, white egg bread
cholnt, a traditional sabbath dish baked for twenty-four hours
chometz, foods forbidden during Passover
chuppa, a wedding canopy covering the wedding couple during the ceremony
chutzpa, brazen nerve
davening, praying
dreydlach, plural of dreydle, a spinning top used in a game
Eretz Yisrael, Land of Israel

erev, eve
esen teg, eating a meal with a different family each day
fahrsamteh, poisoned, *fahrsamteh* mouse—the equivalent of "running around like a chicken with its head cut off"
farfel, crumbled matzoh
gelt, money
Gemora, part of the Talmud
goy, a gentile
goyim, plural of *goy*
gragehr, a rattle
gut yontif, "good holiday"; a greeting
guten ort, "good place," the cemetery
gymnasieh, high school
Hachshara, training, as in preparation for immigration to Israel
Haftorah, a selection from the "Prophets" read in the synagogue after the reading of the Torah
Haggadah, the book read during the seder
Halacha, rabbinical law
Hashomer Hatzayir, socialist Zionist youth organization
homentashen, three-cornered pastries stuffed with poppy seeds or prunes
Ikuf, a liberal Yiddish organization
Kabbalah, a Jewish form of mysticism
kapores, a ritual of swinging a live chicken around one's head while reciting a special prayer
kapoteh, long black coat
kashering, cleansing in accordance with the dietary laws; for Passover additional tasks are required
kashrut, dietary laws that distinguish between foods that are kosher (permissible) and *trayf* (forbidden)
kayn aynhoreh, a phrase used to ward off the evil eye
Kehileh, the self-governing council of the Jewish community
Keren Kayemet, Jewish National Fund
kibbutz, a collective agricultural settlement
kiddush, the prayer recited over wine, bread, the ushering in of the sabbath or festivals
klezmer, an informal group of musicians, often itinerant

klezmorim, plural of *klezmer*

Kol Nidre, "All the vows"; the opening prayer on *Yom Kippur*

kosher, ritually pure things, especially food

kreplach, a triangular dumpling filled with meat and served in soup

krupnik, barley soup

ksubbah, marriage license

Lag B'Omer, the one day between Passover and *Shevuot* when a celebration was permitted, the rest of the six weeks being a period of mourning for the *tanoyim*, the students of Rabbi Akiva who died in an epidemic between the two holidays 2000 years ago

landsleit, people from the same country

latkes, pancakes

lehkach, honey cake

maabarot, temporary dwellings for immigrants

maaminim, religious fanatics

machutonim, in-laws

Maftir, verses of the Pentateuch that conclude the reading of the law on the sabbath

matzoh, unleavened bread eaten during the Passover holiday

mazeltov, congratulations

Megillah, a very long story

melamed, a Hebrew teacher in a *chaider*

Miahtezh, a Polish uprising against the Russians

Midrash, a special interpretation of the Biblical text

Mikveh, public ritual bath

minyon, the minimum number (ten) of Jewish men required for communal worship

Mishnayot, part of the Talmud

mishpocheh, family

mitzvah, a good deed

Moetset Hapoahlot, Pioneer Women, a progressive group

moshavim, agricultural settlements which allowed individual ownership of the land

naches, a feeling of pride and fulfillment, especially from the achievement of children

Nachmu, the first sabbath after *Tisha B'ov*
Neilah, the final prayer
nogid, a wealthy, solid member of the community
nosherie, finger food, munchies
panusheh, Polish for "madam"
Pesach, Passover
pesachdik, ready for Passover, festive
peyes, uncut sideburns
Purim, the holiday commemorating the story of Esther
rebbitzin, the rabbi's wife
Rosh Hashonah, the Jewish New Year
schmaltz groob, a figurative gold mine
seder, the Passover ritual dinner
shabbath sabbath
shaigetz, a gentile boy or young man
shalachmones, the sending of gifts on Purim
shammes, the sexton of a synagogue
Shehecheyonu, the blessing for seasonal food, holidays and happy occasions
sheralach, a Jewish dance
shivah, the seven days of mourning for the dead
shlepping, Anglisized conjugation of *shlep*, to drag
Shmini Hatzeret, the seventh day of *Succoth* when the year-long reading of the Torah is completed
Shomer Hatzayir, a socialist-Zionist youth organization
shtetl, a small European town where Jews followed the traditional ways
shtreimel, a broad-rimmed hat trimmed with velvet or fur
Shvat, a Jewish month
Shevuot, the holiday commemorating the receiving of the Torah
Simchath Torah, "Rejoicing of the Torah," celebrated on the last day of *Succoth*
succah, a booth decorated with tree branches, flowers and fruit; meals are eaten in it during *Succoth*
Succoth, the Feast of Tabernacles
talaysim, plural of *tallis*
tallis, prayer shawl

Talmud, the body of Jewish civil and religious law and related commentaries

Tanach, refers to the major sections of the Bible—Pentateuch, Prophets, and Writings

tefillin, small boxes containing scriptural passages used in prayers

Tisha B'ov, the ninth day of the month of Ov, the day commemorating the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.

tiyul, a tour of the country

Torah, the Five Books of Moses (Pentateuch)

trayf, not kosher

tsenah, austerity

tsimmes, a side dish of mixed cooked vegetables, usually carrots, and fruit

tzedaka pushkeh, a box for collecting donations

yarmulke, skull cap

yeshiva, a rabbinical college

Yom Kippur, Day of Atonement, ten days after *Rosh Hashonah*

yomim noroyim, "Days of Awe"; the days between *Rosh Hashonah* and *Yom Kippur* when it was said that God was deciding every person's fate—life or death, wealth or poverty, etc.

zshyd, derogatory name for a Jew

zmires, religious songs sung during holiday meals

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All this ended when the turbulence and violence of wars, pestilence, and pogroms, pushed the Jews into flight from one place to another, fleeing Russian, Polish, and German armies who, each in their turn, plundered them, leaving the *shtetls* ravaged, impoverished, and even starving.

The flight continued, some, with Zionist fervor, to Palestine; others to the safe haven of America. Some held back from this safe haven because of fears of the extinction of their distinct Jewish life and language. But the real extinction they could never have imagined—the Holocaust.

Joseph Simon Pangloss Press

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In the years covered in this book the borders separating the countries often shifted and sometimes disappeared altogether. The map serves primarily to illustrate the places named.

ISBN 0-934710-27-9