LEAH'S LEGACY

This book is an autobiography

by

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This book will be dedicated to the blessed memories of my dear mother and my devoted sister Rachel, who had the courage to find a way to bring us to America.

I will honor the memory of Eva Shevell, who was the Executive Director of the HIAS of Philadelphia at that time, for giving me the incentive to write this book.

Most of all, this book will be a legacy to my three beautiful children and their spouses.

They are: Bernice and Rabbi Shlomo Balter, Ronald and Brenda Orenstein, and Carole and Rabbi Nason Goldstein, and my nine precious grandchildren whom I dearly love.

They are: Ariel, Yoel, and Ranon Balter, Avi, Adam, and Jonathan Orenstein, and Deena, Arnon, and Hana Goldstein.

INTRODUCTION

My family and I left Russia, from our town of Lutsk, Voliner Gabernia, in the spring of 1918, and arrived in the United States of America, on September 22, 1920, a journey of almost two years.

With the help of The Hebrew Immigration Aid Society, we were united with my father and my two older brothers, who had left Russia in the spring of 1916 to avoid serving in the Russian Army. We settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

During that time, Mrs. Eva Shevell was the Executive Director of HIAS of Philadelphia. Mrs. Shevell would visit us often, to see how we were adjusting, and advise us about the various problems we might encounter. She particularly took a great interest in me.

One day, Mrs. Shevell asked me to write a book about everything we had experienced. I asked "Why me? Why don't you ask my mother or oldest sister Rachel? They could probably write volumes."

She replied, "No. I want you to write this book, because I can't believe that I am speaking to a young child. You are so matured, even though you are not yet eight years of age."

I then realized why she visited us so often.

I was very flattered and thanked her for the honor and confidence that she had in me to be able to handle such a task. I told her that I couldn't handle this at that time. It was like pouring salt on an open wound. I needed time to heal and go on with my life and make plans for my future.

I told her that I wanted to shut the door on my past, but promised that I would never forget my experiences.

Mrs. Shevell understood how I felt, and gave me her business card, and told me to keep in touch with her. I promised her that one day I would honor her request, and write this book.

My children asked me, "Why are you writing this book in longhand instead of taping it?" My answer was, "I can write and cry, but I can't tape and cry."

I find it much easier to write this book at this time in my life, because I have accomplished a great deal. Therefore, I find it less painful to write this book.

CHAPTER II

I was born May 1, 1913. My Hebrew birthday was Lag-ba Omer 5674 according to our Hebrew Calendar.

Our birthdays were remembered according to special events, or our Jewish holidays. It would be so many days or weeks before this or that holiday. So were our customs at those times.

Both my mother and father were descendants of rabbinical families, stemming back for generations.

In those days it was a custom for the parents of the bride and groom to select mates for their children.

It was very important that the parents of the bride and groom were compatible, and liked each other. The bride and groom would usually meet each other for the first time on their wedding day, under the chupah.

My mother was born in Russia in the town of Lutsk, Voliner Gabernia, a town with a large Jewish community, not far from the Polish border. My father was born in Russia, in the town of Rovno near Lutsk.

My mother was engaged to be married at age thirteen, and my father sixteen. Three years later they were married. They met for the first time under the chupah.

My mother told me that during their wedding ceremony they looked at each other, and liked what they saw. It was love at first sight!

To them it was a great romantic experience. They were a very handsome couple.

After their marriage they remained in Lutsk. Many years later, my father became the religious leader of that town, and represented the Jewish people in

civil and religious matters.

My mother and my oldest sister, Rachel, knew many secular languages and were able, therefore, to help the Jewish townspeople by reading and writing letters for them, and helping them with their many problems.

The Jewish community of our town was like one family. We shared each other's joys, which were very few, and sorrows and problems which were many.

Our house was a constant gathering place for the Jewish townspeople, and we were always aware of the political climate. We were a tower of strength to our Jewish community.

We lived in a large home near the outskirts of the town next to a Jewish cemetery, in Yiddish (dos hailecken ort) the holy ground.

It was a huge single wooden square frame house; one story with a slanted roof. On the left of the house was the Jewish cemetery.

In front of our house, flanking our front door, were two wooden benches standing on a platform.

Before entering our house we would remove our boots (in Yiddish, shteevel) because they would probably be muddy from unpaved sidewalks, and in the rural areas, the streets were also unpaved.

As you entered our house you found yourself in a huge foyer, and at the end of the foyer was a huge dining table flanked by two huge wooden benches.

Beyond the dining table was a door that opened out to the rear of the house.

The inside of our house was tee shaped, and towards the end of the tee it would angle out according to the square shape of the house.

Our entire dwelling was one huge family room and five bedrooms.

My brothers and sisters would double up so that the five bedrooms would

be sufficient for our family.

On the right hand as you entered our family room was a huge open fireplace, and a large woodburning stove. Next to that was a huge baker's oven that extended into the wall (in Yiddish, a reeba). Between the stove and the oven was a storage place for firewood.

Toward the end of the oven wall was a dropped shelf from the ceiling, built in towards the wall. It was called a pekalock. Many things were stored in the pekalock.

The five bedrooms surrounded our family room along the rear of the house.

During the winter weather the baker's oven was used a great deal for cooking and baking. The huge wall from the oven would create a great deal of warmth which provided the heat for our living quarters.

During the winter, the first thing you would do when entering the house, was to remove your heavy overcoat and stand with your back and the palms of your hands against the oven wall, to warm up and take the chill out of your body.

We always had a steaming samovar of water, ready for anyone to partake of a glayzele tay with home made jam.

We had plain wooden floors, and in our bedrooms we had a piece of carpeting near our beds. Our house was lit by oil lamps, and we constantly washed the glass globes from the lamps to remove the soot.

At that time we were a family of eight. My father Yitzhak, my mother Doba, my brother Abraham the eldest, followed by my sister Rachel, Joseph, Miriam, David and I, Leah Dvorah. My mother was pregnant with my youngest sister Bayla.

Actually, my mother had ten children. Three of them died when they were

quite young, all of which happened before I was born.

In those days, they had large families, in the hope that most of the children would reach maturity. Life was very harsh and the mortality rate was very high. By the time the younger children were born, the older children were old enough to be their parents.

CHAPTER III

My father was very pious and strict with us. He laid down the rules as to how we were to conduct ourselves.

We spoke the classic Yiddish at home, and on our Sabbath and holidays we were forbidden to speak Yiddish, instead we spoke Hebrew, the holy language (Lushen Kodesh) because the Sabbath and our holidays are holy, therefore we spoke the holy language.

Unpleasant subjects were forbidden to be discussed at mealtimes. My mother would always hover over us in a pleasant and protective manner to see that everything ran smoothly, and all our needs were fulfilled in a very quiet and efficient manner.

During meals, my father sat at the head of the table, and because I was the youngest, I sat next to my father at his left; my mother at his right hand side. It was also convenient for my mother to sit at his right, because she was able to serve the food without disturbing anyone. The rest of the family sat flanking the dining table according to the sequence of their ages.

During the Sabbath and holiday meals, my father would point to all the items on the table and ask me to name them in Hebrew. Whatever item I didn't know my father would tell me, and made sure that I remembered. My father was so strict that it frightened me, but my mother would smile at me, and encourage me to answer my father's questions and not be afraid.

The rest of the family would eat their meals in silence. I assumed that my older sisters and brothers had been through the rigors of learning, and now it was my turn to learn.

That evening, when my mother was getting me ready for bed, my father said

to my mother that it is time now for my mother to teach me the evening and morning prayers (krishma and modeh ani), etc.. My mother agreed with my father, but thought I needed a little more time.

When my mother began teaching me Hebrew and our Jewish heritage, at the conclusion of each lesson, I was given candy and delicious treats. It made learning a very sweet experience.

I remember our walks to the shul. We were always together, my father and two older brothers and my sister Rachel in front, and the rest of the family following in the back. My father's face glowed with pride. He was so proud of his family. As I think about it, I believe they were the happiest times of his life.

Along the route to the shul, we would often encounter hoodlums who would throw stones at us, and shout anti-Semitic slogans in Russian ("Zjid parhata") lousy Jew. I would cling very close to my mother for protection.

We learned at a very early age that we were never permitted outdoors alone, unless we were with parents or older sisters and brothers.

These rules were imposed by our parents. In order to survive, these strict rules were laid down from the time we were infants.

There was no protection from the government, under the Tsar, especially for Jews. We were the targets for pogroms, and persecution, or whatever they, the Cossacks and criminals, wanted to do to us.

In spite of our lack of freedom, we enjoyed a very special and loving family life, full of education and knowledge, and the practice of our Jewish heritage to the fullest.

Aside from the religious texts, our house was stacked with the books of Sholom Aleichem, I.L. Peretz, Hershel Stapolier. The stories about the

"Chelemer Yidden" who did silly things in such humorous ways, kept us laughing, and helped bolster our morale in an environment that was very oppressive.

Every evening my mother would read to us. She was a great teacher with lots of patience and a great sense of humor. She tried to teach us everything she ever learned.

Her conversation was steeped with quotations from books she read to us, or quotations from the bible, or the Ethics of our Fathers. You really had to be knowledgeable to understand her remarks. It was a subtle way of testing us to see how well we listened and learned and how well we remembered what we were taught. It was done in a very loving and acceptable manner.

One of the funny stories in the Chelemer Yidden always remained in my memory.

There was a woman who had eighteen children. One of her younger children was named "Aytsa Melech" meaning "advice to the king."

Who in their right mind would give a child such a silly name? That name alone would evoke a great deal of laughter.

One day "Aytsa Melech" was missing. His mother looked everywhere, and couldn't find him. Three days went by and still "Aytsa Melech" was missing.

One day his mother was looking for an item that was stored on the peckalock, the shelf at the end of the oven wall that was used for storage. There was Aytsa Melech sound asleep. It was so nice and warm up there, that he slept there for three days. How he ever got up there was a mystery.

That funny story was always referred to whenever we would look for something, and couldn't find it. We would say, "It is probably lost like Aytsa Melech oifen peckolock."

Other humorous remarks regarding a lost item would be funny names of towns from the Chelemer Yidden, like "Trohenbrod" or "Petchehvas," or else my mother would create her own silly names, just to add some humor in our conversation.

Another example of my mother's wit was, the day I saw a very stout person, and told my mother about him. My mother said, "Nu, fin al-het is dere mench nit fet." Al-het is the Hebrew prayer that is recited many times on Yom Kippur, and on Yom Kippur we also fast. In other words, if that person wouldn't eat so much he wouldn't be so fat.

I remember expressions she used like "Ere laht mit yashchevkas - he is laughing with cynicism."

I am so grateful for having had the advantage of this beautiful Yiddish culture. It has so enriched my life. I have told these stories to my children and grandchildren many times.

CHAPTER IV

My mother was the youngest and only daughter among twelve brothers. In those days it wasn't the rule for girls to be educated. However, my mother was very fortunate in having parents who were concerned about their children's education. They employed private teachers (melamdim) to come to their home and teach their children. Therefore, my mother benefitted greatly from such an arrangement.

Some of those teachers were great scholars of Eastern Europe. Such an education made my mother quite unique.

As an adult, and looking back at the time when I was a young child, I remember that I took my mother's knowledge and her educational background for granted, thinking that because she is a mother, she is supposed to possess such knowledge. I thought that all mothers were alike. Later in life I realized that it wasn't so.

In addition, she was a very sweet, humble and sensitive person, devoting her life to serving her family, and everyone involved with her without reward or personal gain.

Her personality made it so easy for a child to take her for granted. You would have to be an adult to realize how special she was.

I thank God that my mother was alive for a good many years, and I was able to shower her with love and affection, and tell her how wonderful she was.

The practice of employing private teachers was not unusual for people who had the means to pay for their children's education. In many cases, those teachers were paid with a salary and board, for they probably travelled great

distances. As a matter of fact, every Jewish male had to have a Hebrew education. They would usually start heder at age three.

Women were kept very busy in their homes. Everything had to be done by hand. Baking bread and cakes, cooking, washing clothes, knitting and sewing their own clothes, etc.. We had wood-burning stoves and ovens, and no running water ~~for~~ in our homes. We had no electricity, and gas lines were not available in that part of the world.

The first thing a young bride had to know is how to clean and dissect a chicken according to kashrut.

She would select a live chicken at the market and have the shochet slaughter it. At home the hard work would begin.

The women would then remove the feathers and singe the chicken over an open fire to burn off any fine hairs or feathers that were not visible. Then she would dissect the chicken. Pour hot water over the chicken parts, scrape with a knife to make sure it is thoroughly clean. Then soak it in cold water, and salt it, and let stand on draining rack for one hour. Then quickly rinse with cold water, and the chicken would be ready to be prepared for cooking.

If you purchased a goose, the feathers from the goose would be stored in a sack. When the women had any spare time, they would peel the goose feathers from the quills to have goose down for pillows and quilts. The quilts were called "peranees" in Yiddish. Those pillows and quilts would also become heirlooms.

For large families, several chickens had to be prepared for the Sabbath meal. You can pretty well have an idea how difficult it was for a woman to prepare food for the Sabbath and holidays.

On Friday afternoon, a cholent would be prepared for our Sabbath meal

when we came home from shul. It consisted of meat, barley, lima beans, assorted vegetables and seasoning placed in a huge pot, with water covering the entire combination. It was placed in the oven and was cooked slowly and thoroughly and be nice and hot for the following day.

Two days before Yom Kippur my mother would purchase the chickens for our holiday meal. She would bring them home alive for the ancient custom of "shloogan kapporos."

An exercise in expiation in which one symbolically transfers one's sins to a chicken.

To perform this ancient custom my mother would line up the children together while she recited these Hebrew words, and we would repeat after her, while she swung the chicken over our heads three times. "Ze halefoosi - ze kaperoosi - ze hatarnegol." In addition, in Yiddish we would say -- "meer tsum leben un deer tsum toit." "This is my substitute, my vicarious offering, my atonement; this cock (or hen) shall meet death, but I shall find a long and pleasant life of peace."

The chicken was then slaughtered by the shochet and donated to the poor for the seudah mafseket, the last meal before the fast.

In modern times, for the traditional Jew, kapparah atonement money has taken the place for the chicken.

One ties the money in a handkerchief and swings it around his or her head three times saying, "This is my charge, this is my compensation, this is my redemption, I shall enter upon a long, happy, and peaceful life." The money is then donated as tzedakah to the poor.

Many years later when I was married and had my own family, I continued with this ancient custom for as long as my mother was still alive.

I wanted my children to experience some of these ancient customs that I was brought up with.

Running a home properly was very difficult, and each child according to their ages had to pitch in and help. There was nothing else to distract us.

Children behaved like adults and acted responsibly. Life was very serious. As a matter of fact, you rarely saw a child from Eastern Europe smile. Because of the pogroms, we had to try to learn to cope and try to stay alive from day to day.

CHAPTER V

My sister Bayla was born in February of 1916. I was no longer the baby of the family. After a few days my parents allowed me to hold my new sister in my arms.

She was so tiny and looked like a "kukliya" or "laylka" (a doll). I noticed that below her shoulders, she was rolled in bands of cloth like a mummy. I asked my mother why she was dressed that way. My mother told me that for a couple of weeks, infants are dressed that way to support their spines, and make sure that their legs would be straight, and that their stomachs would be flat. So was the custom in those days.

CHAPTER VI

One evening, I sensed a strange excitement in our house. There were a lot of discussions and whispering and planning among my parents and sisters and brothers. I was excluded from those discussions at that time. Instead I was playing with something near the window facing the cemetery.

Suddenly I saw a face peering at me from the darkness. I began to scream, and my parents ran to me. I told them what happened.

While my parents were trying to calm me down, in walked my sister Rachel's boy friend, Getzel. He admitted that he was the one who peered through the window, and didn't realize that it would frighten me. Of course he received a terrible scolding, and promised this would never happen again.

A short time later I realized that my father and two older brothers Abraham and Joseph were no longer at home.

I asked my mother where they were, and was told that they had left for America, to avoid being drafted into the Russian Army. All this had to be done secretly, otherwise their plans of escaping would not materialize. This was in the spring of 1916.

Before my father and brothers left for America, they had photographs taken. My mother gave them to me and I would look at them often so that I wouldn't forget them.

Not too long after my father and brothers departed for America, we moved into the center part of the town, in an apartment of a huge building on a ground floor.

It was a three story building and considered tall in comparison to other buildings in that town.

The entrance to our apartment was on the far left of the building.

The interior of our apartment was arranged the same way as our previous house. It was tee shaped. We brought with us our furnishings, and it was placed in the same way.

We had a small foyer, our dining table stood at the end of the foyer, and at the rear of our dining table was a door leading to the rear of the building.

On the right of the foyer was a wood-burning stove, and a baker's oven built into the wall, and at the end of the oven wall was a peckalock, that was used for storage.

We had four bedrooms surrounding our family room along the rear of our apartment. As I stated before, the oven supplied us with heat for our living quarters. We had plain wooden floors, and oil lamps for lights.

It happened that the officers of the military occupied that same building. Their entrance was to the far right of the building.

My mother owned two stores directly across the street from our apartment. One was a general store that my mother operated and next to that a coffee shop, that my sister Rachel managed. They provided a good income for us.

My maternal grandmother, Malka, would visit us quite often. We were very fond of her and my mother loved her dearly. My mother's oldest brother and his family lived in my grandmother's house with her.

In those days it was understood that the oldest son would inherit his parents' estate.

It would have been fine if my uncle had married a pleasant person. Instead she was just the opposite, and created a very unhappy situation for my mother and the entire family.

One day my mother received word that my grandmother was seriously ill. The entire family went to visit her. Upon arrival, my mother immediately ran to my grandmother's bedside, while my brother David remained outside to show me the house and the surrounding area.

It was a beautiful huge house built on a slight hill. The rear of the house was built on a slope leading down to a lake. There was a barn in the rear of the house that provided shelter for three cows. There were also vegetable gardens.

We entered the house, and much to my surprise, my cousins and Aunt Faiga greeted us warmly.

My aunt Faiga admired my hair. "My, what a beautiful head of blond curls you have." Of course I was very flattered. "Come," she said, "I want to show you something." She gave me a hand full of cookies and escorted me into her bedroom.

Before I knew what was happening, she took a pair of scissors and cut off all my curls, (In Yiddish, "crazelach").

Seeing what she had done to my hair, I became very frightened, and immediately ran out of her bedroom, crying.

My mother left my grandmother's bedside to see what was going on. My mother, and the entire family, including my uncle, were horrified when they saw what she had done to my hair.

Very casually my aunt told the family that she will take these curls to a wigmaker (in Yiddish, "parrick macher"), to have hairpieces made for her to wear.

Well! My mother flew into such a rage of fury, the likes of which I had never seen. Even my uncle scolded his wife. "How dare you take advantage of

a three year old child, you miserable woman!"

In those days, girls never had their hair cut. They just allowed it to grow. It was a girl's crowning glory.

Even boys' hair wasn't cut until they were about three or four years of age. It was done according to Jewish custom and in a religious ritual.

Years later as I thought about this incident, this outburst of my mother's anger went back for many years before I was born.

First of all my mother was the youngest and only daughter among twelve brothers. They were a very loving and close knit family. When her oldest brother married, he remained in my grandparents' home because he was the oldest son and heir.

I believe that my mother's visit to her parents' home were very few, because her sister-in-law, Faiga, did not make her feel welcome. Therefore my grandparents would visit us instead.

My mother learned to live with this situation all these years, and a lot of anger and resentment had accumulated, until this incident. It was the straw that broke the camel's back.

CHAPTER VI

A short time after our visit my grandmother died.

My mother went to my grandmother's house to help with the preparations for my grandmother's funeral, and took me with her.

There were no funeral directors, but a religious society, (In Hebrew, chevrah Kadesha). They prepared the body for burial according to Jewish Laws. My mother was a member of that society.

My mother told me to remain outside, while she went in to help. After a while I became restless, so I went in the house to see what was going on.

No one saw me enter the house. Very quietly I sat down in the opposite corner of the room. I saw a group of women preparing my grandmother's body for burial.

My grandmother was lying on a white sheet on the floor, her head in the direction of the entrance of the house.

The women were busy bathing my grandmother's body with water (tara vaser). They then dried her body. Finally they dressed her in a white shroud, called tah richim. From where I was sitting, I was able to see everything that was taking place.

I was stunned! It was the first time in my life that I saw a dead body, and particularly that it was my grandmother's. Tears started to flow from my eyes. I realized that I would no longer see my grandmother again.

Suddenly, one of the women saw me, and very quietly and gently, took me outside and gave me a hot baked potato and a hard boiled egg to eat. This was an act of kindness so that I shouldn't feel too bad about the loss of my grandmother.

My grandmother's death left a great void in my life. I remembered her visits with us, and her loving embraces. She would bring me candy (in Yiddish, tsikerkes).

On sunny days she would sit outdoors with me, and tell me funny stories. She was the only grandmother I had; the other died before I was born.

To my mother, the death of my grandmother was an even greater loss. They were very devoted to each other. It marked the end of an era.

CHAPTER VII

The war was getting greater and coming closer to our town. Our entire way of life underwent drastic changes, especially for the younger children. We had to learn the identity of each and everyone in our family; their names, their ages, our parents, our relatives, where they lived, where to run for help in case of a disaster.

We each had hiding places in our home, during an attack on our town. My mother would rehearse with us every evening the instructions that she had given us and to make sure that we did not forget anything, and come what may, we must stay alive.

She led us in the recitation of our daily prayers, and told us not to forget our Jewish heritage.

The rigid program that my mother told us to follow, in regards to our responsibilities for one another, did not frighten us one bit. Instead we accepted this situation as a way of life. It drew us closer together and helped us to mature faster, and to be on the alert at all times.

My brother David was five years older than I, and tall for his age. In those days, boys who were ten years of age were taken into the Russian Army.

Because of his height, and even though he wasn't yet ten years of age, for his safety he had to stay in the house, and when he was permitted outside, he dressed in girl's clothing with a kerchief (a "babooshka") on his head. We always travelled in a group.

My sister Miriam and my brother David remained in the house. She did the cooking and laundry and my brother helped her with the work. My mother took care of my sister Bayla in the general store, and I was with my sister Rachel

in the coffee shop.

We rarely saw each other during the day, for each of us had our work to do. In the evening we would be together for dinner, and share our thoughts and experiences.

My mother did her best to hide her fears and frustrations about the war and if we would live to survive it. Therefore our evenings at home were very special.

She would read to us and teach us the works of our great scholars.

I liked Thursday night best of all. My mother would be cooking and baking challah and rolls, and cakes, getting ready for the Sabbath. The house was permeated with the delicious aromas. She turned our home into a haven, and for the time being it made us forget the dangers that we had to cope with each day.

Even though my father and brothers left for America, my mother and Rachel continued to serve the Jewish community in our town. With the war going on, their problems and needs were greater than ever.

The Cossacks staged many pogroms on the Jewish people, robbing and murdering us whenever they pleased.

Jewish men were afraid to walk outdoors with their beards exposed, because many had their beards and chins cut off. To avoid this, they wrapped themselves in scarves, hiding their beards and faces.

One Sabbath during a pogrom, the Cossacks poured kerosene around the synagogue, bolted the doors from the outside, and set it on fire. Many Jews were burned to death.

Lutsk, the town I lived in was a very strategic town for the military. During any Eastern European war the armies of Europe would march through it,

in order to get wherever they were headed.

Leon Uris, the author of his book "Exodus" that was published in the late 1950's wrote about the town of Lutsk in the book. He mentioned exactly as I did about the armies of Eastern Europe marching through Lutsk.

We lived on the main street of our town, which was paved with cobblestones. In those days there were no motorized vehicles in Russia. Everything was horse drawn.

All day long the armies of Europe were marching through our town, together with their horse drawn military equipment. The horses were beautiful and high spirited.

Those troop movements and caissons and the horses on the cobble stone street, created an unbearable noise. It was almost deafening. This went on daily, without an end. It was impossible for anyone to cross the street. At the same time it was a sight to behold.

We saw troops of Turks dressed in gray caracul fur coats, ballerina style, topped with tall caracul turbans. Chinese, in their native outfits with long pigtails almost reaching their ankles.

While the troops were marching through our town, it created a great deal of excitement among the residents. They came from far and near to watch this spectacular military might marching through our town.

Even the store keepers would stand outside viewing this spectacle and wondering what impact all this would have on us.

It was one of those days when my mother, my sister Rachel and others in the town were standing on the sidewalk, talking to each other about the war and the troops in our town.

I suddenly decided to run across the street to our apartment. I was in

the center of the street, when a team of horses reared up on their hind legs ready to crush me. In a split second, my sister Rachel's boy friend, Getzel, dashed out and grabbed me in the nick of time and saved my life. I was so thrilled; I always had a crush on him, ever since that episode.

These troop movements created a lot of problems for the townspeople, especially for the Jews. We were in constant danger. We lived from day to day.

Whichever army appeared in our town we had to honor the currency of that army. The Russian rubles had no value, they were lying in the streets blowing in the wind.

My mother would immediately take sacks of money and invest in merchandise for the stores, and in that way she was able to handle the monetary problem.

Several times our stores were broken into during the night and lots of merchandise was stolen.

My mother wanted to sleep in the store to protect the merchandise, but we talked her out of it. It was too risky. Instead, each evening we carried most of the stock into our house and each morning brought it back. Everyone of us pitched in and helped.

One day an alert was sounded that our town would be attacked. Meanwhile, the military officers that occupied the building that we lived in, had abandoned their headquarters and moved on.

Everyone was ordered to stay indoors. All the stores were closed, and there was a strange silence all over town. I walked over and opened the front door, and I was very curious to see what it was like outside.

It was a beautiful warm and sunny day, and so quiet, not a soul in sight. It was such a wonderful experience to be able to breathe the fresh air and

feel the warmth of the sun, and not be molested by hoodlums, shouting anti-semitic slogans. I remained outdoors near my house.

Suddenly an officer on horseback came over and advised me very nicely to please go indoors for shelter, because the town is in danger of being attacked.

I proceeded to do what I was told and started to go indoors, and the officer departed.

Seconds later shrapnel struck the officer and the horse, and killed them on the spot. It was a frightening and horrifying sight to see. It made me realize what the horror of war was all about.

During that attack half of our building was shelled. Fortunately our living quarters were not affected. We also realized that because the officers of the military occupied the same building we lived in, it was also a target for the enemy.

The following day after the attack, business resumed as usual. The stores reopened.

As I stated before, I spent the day in the coffee shop in my sister Rachel's care. She also arranged a place behind the counter for me to take a nap.

That day there were troop movements through our town. I had just lain down to take a nap. Suddenly, there was a commotion, and my sister quickly removed her shoes and placed one foot on my mouth and the other on my stomach for a few brief moments.

As young as I was I quickly realized what her actions indicated. The message was to be quiet and not to make a sound. I listened!

This crazy soldier broke ranks from his troops and ran into our store to

rob or murder us.

My sister very sweetly said to the soldier, "Good morning, what can I do for you? You must be very hungry. Here let me give you something to eat and also some money. Take whatever you wish."

I thought to myself, what is the matter with my sister? Did she lose her mind? Why does she treat him so nicely? He came in to kill.

I listened and heard that he devoured the food she gave him. His anger subdued, he thanked her for the food and money, and then he left.

My sister told me that the lesson I just learned was, that in case that kindness to that soldier did not work in our favor, and should he have killed her, I should have remained silent so that at least I would live, for he didn't know I was behind the counter.

CHAPTER VIII

Our evening meals were much later than they used to be, due to the fact that our stock from the stores had to be transported to our house for the evening in case of a robbery.

After dinner my sister Rachel was quietly speaking to my mother relating the event that happened in the coffee shop that day. It seemed that my mother was having similar experiences in her store, too. My sister seemed very unhappy and depressed, and continued whispering to my mother about something and then the conversation ended.

Rachel was then getting me ready for bed. Suddenly she kissed me and said, "I want you to hug me real tight, close to your heart, and call me mother." I was puzzled, and my mother was in the background, and I looked at my mother in a very baffled way. My mother nodded to me and said, "Do what she tells you."

I hugged my sister and called her "mother." My sister said, "No, no, not like that. Do it like you really mean it." I hugged her again with more feeling and called her "mother."

Although I loved my sister very dearly I knew she wasn't my mother, and I couldn't fulfill her request the way she wanted me to do, and I think that she realized the way I felt. I was put to bed for the night.

All our bedrooms surrounded our large family room. I heard my sister Rachel crying and telling my mother that each day she is faced with life threatening danger and also faced with the responsibility of trying to get us out of Russia, and who knows if we will make it. She said she was afraid that she might not live to get married and have children, and know what it is like

to be called "mother".

My mother was trying to console her, telling her to have hope and faith and God will help us all.

I felt very sorry for my sister, and being a young child at that time, I couldn't grasp the pain and feeling that she experienced at that time. After that evening, she never again asked me to call her, "mother."

Many years later as I thought about that incident, when Rachel asked me to call her, "mother," I could understand her attachment to me.

All day long I was in her care. She took care of me just like a mother. I, too, loved her very much. If she could only have known what the future would be, that we would make it to America -- that she would marry -- and become a mother of four children -- but alas, at that time life seemed very grim for her.

The war was getting fierce, and we were constantly faced with life threatening events.

One evening, robbers set fire to both our stores. They burned to the ground.

The loss of our income did not have an immediate effect on us, for we had stock in our home and money.

As time went by we began to feel it. It was very difficult to purchase food, and hunger set in. It was terrible to be constantly hungry and to suffer hunger pains.

One cold winter, during the night, we were awakened by loud pounding on our back door of our apartment. It was a group of soldiers who insisted on coming in from the cold. We knew what they would do to us, so we refused to open the door.

They kept pounding at our door, while we were crying and pleading with them to go away. They yelled, "If you don't open that door we will break it down."

We were huddled together around my mother, for we feared that this was the end of our lives. We embraced each other and recited our prayers, and my mother recited the Psalms of David. She didn't have to read from a siddur; she knew the Psalms by heart.

The pounding on the door continued, and they shouted all sorts of threats and obscenities. We trembled with fear.

Suddenly my sister Rachel cried out to them that she would let them in, but that we were all stricken with small pox. She pleaded for them to go away, lest they too, would be stricken with small pox. We continued praying and pleading that God should help us.

Gradually the pounding on our door stopped, and the soldiers went away.

Years later, as we thought about that terrible event, we could only say that it was a miracle that they should believe that we had small pox, and our lives were spared.

In those days when anyone had to travel on a dangerous mission, some people would take that precaution to paint red spots on their faces and pretend they had small pox. It happened to be a common practice among our Jewish people. Many times it saved their lives.

One day my mother had to go on an errand, and before she left our house, she embraced me, and said, "You are my mother and my judge." I said, "No, what do you mean by saying this? I am your little daughter, and no judge." She replied, "Your name is Leah Dvorah. Leah was the mother of our Jewish people, and Dvorah was our Jewish Judge. Therefore, I challenge you to live

up to your name. Never stray from your Jewish heritage. Teach your children, and they, in turn, will teach their children, from generation to generation."

I embraced my mother and told her that I would always remember what she said and try to do just what I pledged.

During the war, each time that my mother had to go out of our house on an errand, or for whatever reason, she was obsessed with the fear that she might not live to return home. If there was any message that she had to convey to us, she did so.

The most important and meaningful message during situations like those, dealt with our Jewish heritage. She made sure that we were constantly mindful of that.

CHAPTER IX

One Sunday during a lull in the war, the entire town of Lutsk was invited to the formal garden in the village square. It was a beautiful warm sunny day. Naturally, everyone went to see the beautiful flowers.

The garden was surrounded by a high iron fence, and a heavy iron gate.

When the gate was unlocked we were told to walk in a single file on the pathways and look at the flowers, but forbidden to touch. It was the first time in my young life that I saw so many beautiful flowers.

After we walked through the garden, hundreds of people gathered in the village square. There, on the balcony, were speakers, rallying the people gathered in the village square, to throw over the government, and start a revolution. They were the Socialists and radicals who wanted a new government.

It was early in the summer of 1917.

I believe that those Revolutionaries, somehow, arranged the garden tour for the people of Lutsk, because, ordinarily you never saw hundreds of people milling around in the village square.

They wanted to be sure of having a large audience to speak to. They wanted to arouse the people and bring them the message to revolt against the government.

Emotions were running very high, and the people were very responsive to the speakers. Everyone was caught up in the events. It was so exciting! The people were shouting and responding to the speakers in unison.

They shouted in Russian "daloy Nickolai -- down with Nicholas the Tsar!" The people responded, "Hurrah! Hurrah! Bravo, Bravo!"

When the speeches were finally over, everyone broke into song, singing, "The Internationale."

"Arise you slaves wherever you are, From hunger and from strife, etc., etc.."

There was a great deal of shouting and excitement, and here I was in the village square, witnessing the groundwork of the Russian Revolution.

Even though the First World War was still going on, those revolutionaries travelled from town to town. Other speakers in the large cities were doing the same thing everywhere, bringing their message to the people.

On November 7, 1917, the Russian Revolution began.

Here we were, saddled with two wars, Pogroms, and starvation. Food was very difficult to buy. It was so painful to be constantly hungry. The situation was very grim.

One day my brother David was asked to go out and gather some firewood. At first he refused to go because he thought that while he was gone, we might eat some food and not share it with him. When he returned, he questioned everyone of us if we had eaten anything while he was out.

Hunger was so painful to endure that it caused you to distrust others and act irrationally.

CHAPTER X

During the First World War no mail was received from my father and brothers. As a matter of fact no mail was delivered at all to anyone. The postal service was shut down during the war. We didn't even know if my father and brothers arrived in America.

One day my mother ran into the house with a stack of letters in her hand, and announced in Yiddish "kimpt kinderlach, meer gayen kein America. Come children we are going to America!!"

The letters that my mother held in her hand were the mail that my father had written to us during the war, but not delivered to us until now.

It was a miracle to have received this mail at this time in spite of the two wars raging through Russia. It gave us hope.
We were so happy and full of joy, for we finally knew that my father and brothers had reached America safely.

Although, those letters that my mother held in her hand were not visas or passports, they couldn't have reached us at a better time.

Our stores had been burned, food was getting very difficult to buy, and everyone suffered the pangs of hunger, gnawing at the pit of our stomachs. It was so painful!

We seriously started to make plans to leave Russia. We gathered all our personal possessions, hired a horse and wagon and started to leave our town of Lutsk. It was early in the spring of 1918.

Somehow the news quickly spread among the Jewish townspeople. They ran after us while we were riding on the wagon to the train station. They were pleading -- "Please don't leave us. Take us with you. What will become of us

without you?" They were crying and tripping over the slippery cobblestones that paved the street. Many of them fell flat on their faces. It was a horrible sight to see.

My mother was standing in the wagon, and replied, I really don't know where we are going. All I know is that I must leave Russia. I will go wherever my eyes will take me."

My mother couldn't say we were going to America. We didn't know what problems we were going to face, and who knew if we would ever make it to America. We also knew that all trains were for military use only, but we had to take that chance.

As long as I live I will never forget the dramatic scene that took place when we left our town of Lutsk.

When we arrived at the train station we had to wait a long time for the train. There were many people at the train station, all civilians. They, too, were carrying all their personal possessions just as we were, evidently trying to leave Russia. We finally boarded the train. It was the last compartment on the last train.

We were travelling for quite awhile, when suddenly the train stopped on an open field.

We looked out the window and saw many soldiers with bayonets attached to their guns ordering all the people off the train. Because of the war, trains were for military use only.

Some people dutifully got off the train and were herded like cattle into one area on the field.

Most of the people resisted, and they were brutally yanked off the train. The soldiers struck them with their guns and bayonets, and dragged them like

animals towards that area on the field.

Because of the people's resistance to leave the train, it took quite a long time to empty each compartment. It was getting very late in the afternoon, and the sun was setting.

My sister Rachel told us not to move and to remain on the train. We all huddled together in fear around my mother. I noticed my mother's lips were moving in silent prayer. She was probably reciting the Psalms of David.

Suddenly there was a loud banging on our train compartment. The door was flung open and a young soldier with a gun and a bayonet attached, ordered us off the train.

My sister Rachel stood there facing him defiantly, and we were all standing in back of my sister.

I looked at the soldier and realized that he couldn't have been more than ten years of age. He looked a little nervous, because we did not comply with his orders.

He had large blue eyes, blond hair and a sprinkling of freckles on his face.

My brother David at that time was also ten years of age, and looked very much like this young soldier.

I stood there, eye level with him, for the soldier was standing on the first step of the train.

For one brief moment, our eyes were locked, staring at each other. That look is ingrained in my mind forever. I often thought about him, wondering what happened to him, and how long did he live being a soldier at such a young age, serving in the Russian Army.

Looking back in time, I could well understand what must have gone through

my sister's mind when the soldier ordered us off that train.

Here we were, finally on the train that was headed for Warsaw, Poland, our final chance to leave Russia. We had survived so many life-threatening events, and now we were faced with the most crucial moments of our lives. How was she going to deal with this problem? She must have been desperate, as we all were.

Suddenly, things began to happen at the same time. All the people that were off the train suddenly decided to make a mad dash to get back on the train. All their hopes and possessions were on the train, and this was their last chance.

At that moment, my sister Rachel took advantage of the situation. She waved her hand at us and we quickly dropped to the floor of the train, and at the same moment she kicked the soldier off the steps from the train, slammed the door shut of the train compartment, and miraculously the train began to move.

The day was ending and darkness enveloped us. The train was riding across a battlefield. Bombs were exploding on both sides of the train.

We lay on the floor the entire night, crying and praying and trembling in fear of our lives. It was terrifying! As long as I live I will never forget our train ride to Warsaw, Poland.

Many, many years later I would often tell my children, and later my grandchildren about the life threatening events that I lived through. Especially about our last chance of leaving Russia.

If that train had <u>not</u> miraculously begun to move, I would not live — my children and grandchildren would not be born. I told them that it is often said, "that if one person is murdered, generations are murdered."

Finally at daybreak, the train drew into the station in Warsaw, Poland. My mother and all of us joined in the prayer of thankfulness to God. We were joyful that we had finally left Russia.

CHAPTER XI

In Warsaw, we had to arrange for living quarters. We were driven to the Jewish ghetto of Warsaw. Jews were forbidden to live anywhere else in the city.

When we came to the ghetto, we realized that it was surrounded by very tall brick walls, and we entered through a very heavy iron gate. The gate was always locked and under heavy guard. They called them "gendarmes" or the local police.

We entered the Ghetto into a very huge courtyard. Overlooking the courtyard were apartment buildings, three and four stories high. There were also apartment buildings beyond the courtyard. It was a city within a city.

The courtyard was the main thoroughfare of the Ghetto. It was paved with yellow slippery bricks. There were hundreds of people there at all times, adults and children, and of course it was very noisy.

We rented an apartment on the third floor, overlooking the courtyard.

We noticed that the Polish Jews were different from the Russian Jews. They dressed in black clothing and white stockings, and everyone almost looked and dressed alike.

Their Yiddish was spoken with a different dialect, and they spoke in a sing-song tone. All this was a culture shock to us.

When we were settled into our apartment, my brother David, my sister Bayla, and I went down to the courtyard to meet and play with the other children.

Some of the children came over and began to speak to us. We found it difficult to understand them, because of their dialect and their sing-song

manner of speech. My brother David gave one of the boys a shove, because he was annoyed with their manner of speech.

Suddenly, the boy yelled up to his mother from the courtyard, in Yiddish, "Mameloo, mameshee, er harget meer -- he is killing me." We were shocked to hear him accuse my brother that he was killing him. We discovered that not only did they sing-song when they spoke, they also exaggerated a great deal.

We were also puzzled by the fancy salutations when they addressed their parents. Couldn't they call them mother or father, instead of "mameloo, mameshee," or "papeloo, papeshee"?

After we settled into our apartment we decided to tour the city of Warsaw. The Jews of the Ghetto were permitted to go into the city on a special pass, but they had to be back by a certain time.

We went into the central part of Warsaw, in the business section. We saw huge department stores with large windows, and fancy merchandise on display. Hundreds of people were shopping and walking freely wherever they wished. The streets were wide and bustling with horses, carts and people.

The beauty and size of the city was breathtaking. We had never experienced anything like this before.

After an exhausting day of sightseeing and a little shopping, we returned to our apartment in the Ghetto.

While discussing our impression of Warsaw, we realized that people were enjoying the freedom of movement, and there didn't seem to be any concern about the First World War going on.

We then realized that Warsaw didn't seem to be threatened by the war. In contrast, living in the town of Lutsk was a very dangerous area. People were safer living in Warsaw.

CHAPTER XII

Our problems of trying to travel to America were just beginning. First of all, we didn't have my father's address. We knew that they were headed for Philadelphia, but we weren't sure that they were still there.

Second, my father and brothers didn't know where we were or even if we were still alive.

Each day, my sister Rachel would go into the city to try to find information, how to contact my father and brothers, and let them know that we were alive and ready to come to America. At the end of each day my sister would come home exhausted without any favorable results.

We explored the entire Ghetto and discovered that just like any other town, it had its market place, stores, shoemakers, tailors, etc..

Not too long after arriving in Poland, I developed a very high fever. My mother did all she could to make me well again. When all else failed, she managed to get a doctor.

After examining me, he prescribed a medicine, and told my mother that if this medicine didn't control my fever by daybreak, I would have to be admitted to a hospital.

After the doctor left, I began to cry. I was frightened. I told my mother that my illness had created a problem for the family, and a setback for us to leave Poland, and get on our way to America.

My mother comforted me and told me not to worry. She will pray and with God's help I would get well.

That evening my mother gave me the medicine, and in no time I was sound asleep.

I dreamt that my grandmother, Malka, came to me and said "Mein kind, " my child, I know that you are gravely ill. Here, I brought you something. Eat this juicy pear, and when you awake in the morning you will be fully recovered."

In my dream, I ate the pear; it seemed so real, and it tasted so delicious.

That morning, when I awoke, I felt great! The fever was gone. My mother was so happy. I told my mother about the dream, and the pear that my grandmother gave me to eat, and how delicious and juicy it tasted.

My mother told me that her prayers were answered; that this was a sign that God was watching over us, and that everything would turn out well for us from now on.

CHAPTER XIII

We lived in the Warsaw Ghetto for about nine months. The information that my sister finally obtained was to travel ~~from~~ to Danzig, Germany. The purpose was to get in touch with the International HIAS. They would ultimately be instrumental in locating my father and brothers. The goal was to move closer to the Western part of Europe.

After leaving the oppressive and frightening life in Russia, life in the Warsaw Ghetto, by comparison, seemed a lot freer and more relaxing.

When we boarded the train to Danzig, Germany, we knew that this train ride was not going to be a repetition of the horrors that we experienced on the train to Poland.

For the first time in our lives we were privileged to see and enjoy the countryside, the hills, the lakes and rivers as the train speeded on its way. It was exciting! As I looked at my mother I saw her lips moving in silent prayer -- praying for a safe journey.

My brother David was about eleven years of age, and like all children, he was happy to be travelling. He began to clown, which provided entertainment for me and my sister Bayla. My mother and sisters Rachel and Miriam looked on and smiled.

David pulled the brim of his cap to the back of his head and pointed his forefinger and thumb, pretending it was a gun and shot at the hills and valleys, and also provided the proper sound effects.

My sister Bayla and I were so amused, we couldn't stop laughing. We never laughed before. It was like a tonic. It felt so good to be laughing.

When we finally arrived in Danzig, Germany, and on the train platform, we

were confronted by many German soldiers patrolling the area, with huge German Shepherd dogs.

Those dogs were so healthy and tall and vicious looking, that if they weren't leashed they would surely have pounced on us, and torn us to shreds.

I can assure you that many of those emigrants travelling with us, looked at those dogs with envy. Envy - because those dogs were so well fed, and we were starved, and had suffered so much.

We and other emigrants were herded together and were taken to a large center with the emigrants, who were also enroute to America.

Every day, my sister Rachel would continue her trips to the HIAS and other authorities to seek information about travelling to America.

After living in Danzig, Germany about three months, we finally received visas to travel to Antwerp, Belgium.

Our train ride to Antwerp, Belgium, was very enjoyable, and due to my brother David's clowning, we were happy and amused. As always, my mother's lips would move in silent prayer.

When we arrived in Antwerp, we were pleasantly surprised. On the train's platform were dozens of lovely young Jewish women, from Jewish organizations and synagogues, who came to greet the Jewish emigrants and gave each of us a parcel of fruit and delicious chocolates.

This outpouring of kindness and welcome was the nicest experience since we left Russia. At that time we discovered that the World War ended on November 11, 1918.

In Antwerp, we were housed in a large center. Only this time, we were placed with other Jewish emigrants headed for America.

We got to know one another, and we helped each other in any way we could.

When they realized my mother's knowledge of languages and the bible, they depended on my mother to lead them in prayer, morning and evening.

They liked to congregate around my mother, who was able to bring comfort and hope to everyone.

When these people congregated around my mother, they ignored me, and not realizing it, they pushed me aside in order to be near my mother. I must confess that I resented their actions, but later I realized that when someone is very special, that person belongs to the world and you must be aware that you must share them with others.

As usual, my sister Rachel would leave each day for the HIAS office, to see what information she could get in order to continue on our journey.

Among the group of emigrants, was a young girl about sixteen years of age, who was travelling alone to America.

She was beautiful, and had lovely long hair, almost reaching her ankles. The people in the group would look out for her and made her feel as though she was one of our family.

In spite of this outpouring of friendship, the girl remained very shy and fearful of travelling, and we didn't know much about her.

After living in Antwerp, Belgium, for about two months, we received our visas to travel to Cherbourg, France.

From that time on we travelled with the same emigrants that we lived with in Antwerp, Belgium.

When we arrived in Cherbourg, France, again we were housed in a huge center with the same group. I believe we were looked after by the HIAS and other Jewish Agencies, who counseled us and saw to it, that we travelled under protective supervision.

While living in France, our whole family went shopping for new clothes to wear when we would arrive in America.

After living there for about two months, we were finally informed that the HIAS had located my father and brothers who were informed that we would soon be on our way to America!! We were overjoyed!

We were told that we would soon receive our passports and tickets, but that first we had to have our hair cut off for sanitary reasons, and have passport pictures taken. We were happy to do what we were told.

The following morning after we had our pictures taken, there was a lot of commotion in the center where we lived.

It seemed that this beautiful young girl with her very long hair was given the same instructions, that she had to have her hair cut off. She was very despondent, and did not confide to anyone, as to how she felt.

Rather than to have her hair cut off, she quietly managed to leave the center during the night, and committed suicide by drowning in the Atlantic Ocean. Cherbourg, France, was the port on the Atlantic Ocean.

We were all saddened by this terrible tragedy. If only we could have known, and could have prevented what she planned to do. We all mourned her death, as though she was one of our family.

CHAPTER XIV

Early in September, in 1920 we finally received our passports and tickets to board our ship. The name of the ship was "The Fatherland" from the Red Star Line. It was a German ship.

After travelling so many times by train to so many countries, we looked forward to this entirely different mode of travel, crossing the Atlantic Ocean on board a ship.

As we were waiting to board the ship, we were amazed at the enormous size of the ocean liner. We wondered how it could stay afloat on the water.

We were finally assigned to our cabins. The following day the ship was starting to leave the port of Cherbourg, France.

There were hundreds of people on the pier, saying farewell to friends and relatives, and many people came to watch the ship leave the pier, wishing that they, too, be passengers on the ship enroute to America.

After a couple of days on the ship, my brother David, my sister Bayla and I would go exploring. We even checked out the engine room. We were amazed at the size, and how it functioned. It was like a city on water.

The ocean was rather rough, and my mother and sisters Miriam and Rachel were seasick.

That evening when it was time for dinner, my mother said, "since we are seasick, why don't the three of you have dinner without us."

David, Bayla, and I went to the dining room, and dinner was served to us. While we were eating, our steward who served us our meal said "Quick! Quick!"

Since we were eating, and we didn't realize that "quick!" was an English word, the three of us decided that the steward learned the Yiddish word

"quick," which means to enjoy your food and eat slowly and savor every morsel of it. We thought that was a very nice thing to say to us.

The steward returned, and again he said, "Quick, quick." In order to please him, we began to eat more slowly, and at the same time, we were puzzled at the way he looked at us in a nasty manner.

Finally the steward came back and grabbed the plates of food away from us, and that was that.

We realized that it must be an English word, and when we would get to America, our first priority would be to find out what the word "quick" meant.

A few days after we boarded our ship, Rosh Hashanah began. Of course, all the Jewish women lit the candles in their cabins, in honor of the holiday. The stewards ran to every cabin, and extinguished the candles for fear of a fire.

Many women were upset and in tears, but my mother told them we had to comply by the rules, and that God would forgive us for not lighting the holiday candles while on board ship.

Among the emigrants were many rabbis, and qualified people to conduct our yunteff services.

The following week, Yom Kippur was celebrated on board ship.

Our trip across the Atlantic would take about two weeks or more. During our trip, we passed the time watching the waves. Some of them were extremely high, and would splash on the deck of the ship.

My brother David would make airplanes and ships by folding papers, and the wind would blow them out into the ocean.

On September 22, 1920 we finally sailed into the Harbor of New York to Ellis Island. We saw the Statue of Liberty and everyone on board ship cried

out, "America! America!"

There were hundreds of immigrants at Ellis Island, and according to our number, we had to stay there more than a week before we were interviewed, and finally permitted to enter the United States of America.

Meanwhile we were provided with three meals a day, and nice clean comfortable cots to sleep. We were waiting patiently to be reunited with my father and brothers.

From Ellis Island we boarded a ferry to the New York Harbor.

When we disembarked from the ferry, my father and two brothers, Abraham and Joseph were there to greet us.

We had to get reacquainted again, for we had gotten older, especially the children, and all of us had changed, due to the terrible experiences we had been through. For that matter, my father and two brothers also aged.

My father and two brothers had to get acquainted with my sister Bayla all over again. For when they left for America she was only an infant, about two months of age.

CHAPTER XV

Before we arrived in America, my father purchased a house in South Philadelphia. We were well provided for, so that entering the United States posed few problems.

When we arrived at our house in Philadelphia, my brother Abraham told my mother that he was a married man, and that the day before we arrived in America, my mother had become a grandmother.

It was great shock to her. To think that such an important event had taken place in her absence.

For my father living in America without his family, he found life a great culture shock to him.

It was very difficult for him to adjust to the American way of life. He did not speak English. He also suffered a partial loss of hearing, and therefore, lacked the confidence he always had in himself.

He was no longer that proud human being who enjoyed the prestige of being a leader in his community, as he was in Lutsk.

From the time my father and brothers came to America, my brothers couldn't get along with one another.

My brother Joseph was a hard working person, very practical, who immediately went into business with my father. My brother Abraham decided to earn a living by being a house painter. My father was unable to bring harmony between my brothers.

My brother Abraham became an idealist with socialistic leanings. At that time in the United States, especially in the Eastern part of the United States, many people of the younger generation leaned towards idealism and

socialism. They were also known as the Intelligentsia.

My father was very set in his ways. He could not accept my brother's leanings toward socialism, nor try to understand it. It was a thorn in my father's side that never left him.

The first few days after our arrival in the United States, my mother and Rachel related to my father the hardships we endured and all the life threatening events we lived through.

There was a lot of information to catch up with and for the first few days my mother cried a great deal. My father couldn't understand why she behaved like that.

I never saw my mother cry before. I was always close to my mother, and very sensitive about her feelings. As young as I was, I understood why she shed so many tears. It is often said, "a heart feels a heart." It was great emotional drain on her.

During the war, she put on a very brave front for us, kept us together, took very good care of the children. She faced all sorts of dangers, and managed to hide her feelings from us.

A few days after our arrival in Philadelphia, my brother Joseph enrolled my brother David, my sister Bayla and I at the Southwark Elementary School at Eighth and Mifflin Streets. My sister Bayla's name was changed to Beatrice.

We were placed temporarily in a special class for a couple of weeks, until we learned to speak English. We learned very rapidly, and in a short time we were placed in the proper grades, and were advanced in our grades very rapidly.

When my brother Joseph registered us in school, we were unaware that each of us were registered as being two years older than we were. It seemed to be

a common practice among the immigrants at that time.

Their reason was that their children could leave school at a younger age, and legally enter the work force.

My brother David and I tried to make that correction on our school records, but were unsuccessful.

Not too long after we were registered in school, my brother Abraham registered me in The Workmen's Circle school for extracurricular work.

It was a Yiddish Folk school. We studied Jewish history, literature, grammar, and current events. Classes were held in the evening, three nights a week.

Because of my background and knowledge of Yiddish I was able to contribute a great deal in my classroom, by tutoring the students that needed assistance. I enjoyed those classes very much. As a matter of fact I enjoyed going to school, it was a very happy part of my life.

CHAPTER XVI

The anticipation of going to America, the stories that we heard that the streets were paved with gold -- was this the "goldina medina" that we had heard so much about?

My mother could see that the cohesive Jewish family life that we had enjoyed was disintegrating. Everyone was pursuing their own lifestyle. Life was changing. Now that we were finally together, she just let it all out. She had to let all of her pent up feelings out of her system.

After my mother got over her tearful and emotional reaction to all of the events that we experienced, she realized that she must take control of herself, and handle the events that were already existing.

The woman that my brother married was an orphan, and had no family.

The first thing that my mother did was to welcome her into the family, and rejoice with her new granddaughter. My mother did her best to bring love and harmony into the family.

It was at this time, that Mrs. Eva Shevell, who was the Executive Director of the HIAS of Philadelphia, visited us often at our home to see how we were adjusting, and got to know us quite well. She particularly took a great interest in me, and asked me to write a book.

I thanked her and told her how honored I was, to be asked to write this book. One day when I am ready I will fulfill that request. She gave me her business card and told me to keep in touch with her. I then realized why she visited us so often.

At this time, the most important thing to me was to be deeply involved in my school work, and try to excel in everything I did. I learned very rapidly.

Many times during my school days I was called out of my classroom, because some professors from local colleges, and a couple of professors from the West Coast interviewed me in the many languages that I spoke. They wanted to know all about my experiences.

Of course, I answered all their questions, but my personal preference was to remain in the classroom. I didn't want to miss my class work. I also didn't care to discuss the horrible events that we had been through.

At that time I couldn't understand why they were so inquisitive. There were so many things that I wanted to do. Life was like a pressure cooker.

I was very lucky to have survived, and to remember everything so clearly, and to be able to talk about it, and to remain a whole person.

Not too long after we came to America, my father became an American citizen. My mother and all the children under eighteen years of age automatically became American citizens under the law at that time.

One evening a group of men came to our house. They were strangers.

It so happened that my brother Abraham was visiting us that evening.

These men were very courteous to my father, and asked him to become their Ward Leader.

My father laughed, and said, "What do I know about being a Ward Leader? I don't even know how to speak English." They replied, you don't have to know anything. You are an American citizen, and you know how to sign your name. That is all you have to know."

At this moment my brother Abraham was very concerned, knowing how naive my father was. He told my father that these men were probably gangsters involved in bootlegging because of Prohibition.

After hearing what my brother had to say, my father ordered these men out

of our house.

The following day my brother was beaten up by those gangsters, and spent a couple of days in the hospital. He was lucky they didn't kill him.

CHAPTER XVII

Anti-semitism and discrimination existed everywhere, particularly in the public schools. It was worse for young Jewish boys, especially if they were immigrants.

During recess, bloody battles were fought in the school yard.

I remember my brother David, coming home from school, bleeding and bruised. He was attacked by hoodlums in the school yard at recess time.

To attend school was like going to a battleground. Being Jewish in those days was not very popular.

I will never forget when my brother David, upon his graduation from high school, announced that he wanted to become a doctor. We all thought that he had lost his mind.

We asked him, "How are you going to manage handling such a difficult task?"

His reply was, "Like everyone else if you are ambitious enough. With perseverance, hard work, and very little sleep."

David did in fact enroll in Temple University. He attended school, and managed to hold down two part time jobs, getting very little sleep.

Fortunately, I was able to help my brother a great deal. At that time, I had already graduated from eighth grade elementary school. I was enrolled in a two year course at Strayer's Business College, studying typing and shorthand, in a secretarial course.

I typed all his Anatomy notes, and helped him in all his English assignments. I, too, had very little sleep while my brother attended college.

He would wake me up late at night, after working at his second job, to

tell me what I had to do for him, and I in turn, gave him whatever assignments I completed for him.

In a way, I was learning his profession with him.

I didn't mind being up late, and helping my brother. It made me feel great to know that I helped him to achieve his goal. My brother appreciated it very much.

In spite of all the hardships, my brother graduated from Temple University, with a degree of Doctor of Chiropody.

We were very proud of him. His ambition and perseverance paid off. He immediately opened his own practice, and was very successful.

Meanwhile my brother Joseph married, and went into the fruit and vegetable business.

My father had to give up his grocery business, because his store was always closed on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. He could no longer run a business in that manner, and expect to profit.

My father couldn't obtain a position to be a rabbi, because he couldn't speak English, and had a partial hearing loss. Instead he ultimately became a Shamas in an Orthodox synagogue.

CHAPTER XVIII

Meanwhile, everyone married, and my sister Beatrice and I were the only ones left at home.

My parents were blessed with many, many grandchildren. That kept my mother very busy, visiting them every day.

She was like a walking candy store, bringing candy and all sorts of goodies for her grandchildren and also for the children in their neighborhoods.

The children would flock around her for treats.

I continued attending my evening classes at the Workmen's Circle School.

One day, our teacher gave us an assignment to write a Yiddish story or poem, and if it was very good it would be published in the local Yiddish papers, "The Jewish Forward" or the "Freiheit."

I composed a few poems, and sure enough, they were published in the papers. I was so delighted and inspired to write more poetry.

One day I composed a poem of about fifteen stanzas. It depicted the lives of the Jewish immigrants in Philadelphia, their problems, their struggles, and their hopes, etc.

I gave it to my teacher, and he stood near my desk and read the entire poem. He was very impressed.

He asked me if I had a copy of that poem, and I said, "no. Do you want me to make a copy?" He thought for a moment, and said, "never mind."

My teacher took that poem. Every day I looked in the paper to see if the poem was published, and to my disappointment it wasn't there.

I was very puzzled. I knew it was very well done; better than the others

that were already published.

About three weeks had gone by since my teacher took my poem. Sure enough, that poem was published, but my teacher's name was there, not mine.

I was shocked. How could this be? This was my poem. Why was his name there instead of mine? I was so upset and furious, and in tears. No wonder he asked me if I had a copy of that poem.

How could I confront him and accuse him of plagiarism? I didn't have a copy of that poem to prove that it belonged to me. Besides, I was brought up to respect our elders. How could I bring shame to this teacher? I wouldn't know how to go about trying to prove that the poem was mine.

I didn't even want to tell my mother. Instead, I decided to stop writing, and finally I became so disillusioned that I dropped out of that program. I couldn't stand the sight of that teacher, knowing what he had done to me.

During my schooling I was very good in art. Several of my paintings were exhibited at the Sesqui-Centennial that took place in Philadelphia.

When I expressed my desire to pursue a career in art and music, my father wouldn't hear of it. He said it was a lot of nonsense and impractical.

My mother was sympathetic and understanding, but she couldn't get my father to see my point of view. We were not able to communicate with my father very well. He did not possess the warmth and loving nature that my mother had.

For the sake of peace I had to abide by my father's rules. Needless to say, I was very frustrated.

To make matters worse, when my father became a Shamas, we had to sell our house and move into an apartment that joined the synagogue.

Those living arrangements made it impossible for me to entertain my

friends at home.

I could no longer have house parties, dance, and play music at home. We could no longer enjoy the freedom and privacy that we had in our own home.

When I wanted to entertain, I did that at my brother Abraham's house. He was more than happy to have my friends there. When I was dating, I stayed at my brother's house.

I had many friends, and they invited me to their house parties. In those days we entertained a great deal at home.

CHAPTER XIX

In the summer, we would go to picnics and boat rides and listen to music in the park, to hear Sousa's band. It was at one of those events that I met my future husband.

At that time, I realized that it was ridiculous to have my date pick me up at my brother's house. It seemed as though I didn't have any parents.

On the contrary, I had a great deal of pride and respect for my parents and decided that from then on my date would come to my home.

Frank and I dated for about two years, and in June 1930 we were married, during the time of the great depression.

Even though I was quite young, I decided that being married, and in my own home, I would be able to pursue and develop my life as I wanted to. I had a lot of confidence in myself. I was a bundle of energy and ambition. I wanted to soar like an eagle.

I knew that the depression wasn't going to last forever. I had a lot of courage, determination and ambition. I was also very frugal.

With God's help, I hoped that when I would have children, I would make sure that they would be well educated and be given every opportunity available to them, in this marvelous land of ours.

The depression lasted a good many years. Conditions were very difficult for us, and everyone in this country. We managed to make do with what we had.

The depression taught me a lesson that I would never forget. We must plan our lives on a good foundation. Have a decent purpose in our lives, pursue it with patience and determination.

Slowly, conditions in this country began to improve.

We began to raise a family. We were blessed with three beautiful children. A son and two daughters.

During that time, we purchased our first home. It was a very wise investment.

After a few years we sold the house at a large profit and purchased another house, in a better neighborhood. We continued those transactions a few times, until we finally achieved our goal.

It was a huge corner property with lots of ground, in a brand new neighborhood. We had it beautifully landscaped, with lots of trees and flowers.

For many years, my husband put in long hours at work, and I had the responsibility of raising our children and making very important decisions regarding our children's education and where and how we should live.

Being alone so much, it was very important for us to live in a good neighborhood and have good schools available for our children and develop nice friendships. Whatever decisions I made, I would discuss them with my husband, and he would back me up one hundred percent.

I devoted my life to my home and children, and showered them with love and concern for their welfare.

Our home was a constant gathering place for all our children's friends. Thereby, I was able to see with whom they associated.

I taught our children good common sense and to follow those guidelines.

Our children would understand that what we achieved was not handed to us on a silver platter. We worked very hard and sacrificed a great deal.

Besides helping my children in their school work, I was always interested in politics and community affairs.

We entertained a great deal and celebrated many happy occasions in our home.

Eventually, our children were married. Our daughters married Conservative rabbis, and our son is in private industry as a production manager, and our daughter-in-law produces crafts in Judaica.

Their marriages have brought us great joy and prestige.

As time went by, we were blessed with nine grandchildren. Six grandsons and three granddaughters.

At this time, most of our grandchildren are in college, and a few have already graduated from college.

As I look back and think of the time we were married during the depression, all we were filled with was lots of hope and ambition, and very little else.

Only in America could we achieve what we had accomplished.

I remember the promise I had given my mother, when I was a little girl, in regards to my name Leah Dvorah. Not to forget my Jewish heritage; to teach it to my children, who in turn would teach their children, from generation to generation.

I say, yes mother, I fulfilled my promise to you, far beyond my wildest dreams.

Our children and their spouses are my crowning glory, and our grandchildren are the jewels in my crown.

By writing this book, I have fulfilled my promise to Eva Shevell.

I also realize that I would have written this book regardless. For how can anyone live their life and experience what I had and not write about it? It would seem as though I never existed.

I felt an obligation to my family, my children and grandchildren, that they should know about their Jewish heritage, and their ancestors, and what I had experienced in my lifetime.

Although my parents and sisters and brothers are no longer here, writing this book seemed to bring them back to life again. I will always remember them with love and affection.

As for my sister Rachel, it was her courage and determination that brought us to America. She was always ready to put her life on the line to accomplish her goal. Even while facing death, her loyalty to her family never diminished.

She was a role model of what true heroism and sacrifice was all about.

I will always remember what she accomplished for us, and there will always be a special place in my heart for my dear sister Rachel.

When I began to write this book, I prayed that God should grant me the ability to remember everything clearly, and that the words should flow freely from my pen.

I thank God that my prayers have been granted to me.