Tales of Yesteryear

Volume II

by

Charles Rubinstein

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PREFACE

The following presentation lays no claim to daring deeds or heroic achievements. My life in America, after marriage, revolved in a circle common to small businessmen, with all their ups and downs. However, the description of my life here, is also the story of the average Jewish immigrant in America--his dreams, challenges and struggles, embracing the period from the turn of the century, covering the First World War, the boom years of the post war twenties, followed by the Great Depression, up to the Second World War.

With this in mind I humbly present *Volume II, Tales of Yesteryear.*

Chas. Rubinstein
Atlantic City
December, 1968

This book is dedicated to
my beloved wife Esther

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF AMERICA

The Ellis Home

On a hot morning, June 29th, 1911, I set foot on American soil in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Cousin Oscar met me and his brother Moishe at the wharf with outstretched arms and a most warm welcome!

On the same day he saw me established in my permanent home with the Ellis family, our close relatives.

My first week in the new world was a continuation of the last days on the Brandenburg--undiluted bliss. Under the guidance of Oscar and other relatives, we were taken sight-seeing, visiting such places as parks, department stores, railroad stations, etc.

Every sight, from the imposing multi-story department stores and museums, to the dense milling crowds on Market Street or South Street, fascinated me and made me feel as if I were carried on wings in a never-never land.

However, after the first few weeks in the new land, the realities of life soon brought home to me the realization that from now on I was a man standing alone against the world. It was not so much the newness of a strange land, as my difficulty in adjusting to it. A gnawing awareness of being cut off from the warm shelter of home and family cast a gloomy cloud over my sky. I began to suffer from homesickness with thoughts of going back. What sustained me then

and gave me moral courage to tide me over the difficult first two years in these United States was first, Oscar, then the Ellis home. Besides having taken care of my immediate needs, Oscar relinquished to me his lodging place with the Ellises. This was no small sacrifice on his part. But to me it meant the difference between going back home and remaining here.

The salutary effect of this home and its people upon my final orientation here can be truly gauged only when compared with the home life I had left behind in Russia.

I was born and raised in a home where, except on Saturdays and holidays, the air was tense and the mood heavy with worry and pressing burdens. We were a family of ten children. While we were considered to be living on a higher economic plane than the average ghetto dwellers, there simply were not enough of the necessities, with the exception of food, to satisfy all of our wants. There was constant contention among the children. Mother was ailing since the birth of her eighth child. Doctors had threatened her--that she would not survive a ninth pregnancy. Nevertheless she gave birth to three more husky boys. But she was always ailing and at times critically ill. Her illness affected all grownups in the family, as each one of us had to assume chores hitherto performed by Mother, but none felt it as much as did Father who turned gray before he was forty years old. Under such circumstances, our home was certainly not resounding with cheer and laughter.

In contrast, I entered upon arrival the home and environment of a happy,

well-adjusted family. Here laughter, jolly young company and good cheer permeated the air.

The head of this family was *Reb* Mordechai Eliskevitz (changed to Max Ellis in America). In Cherkassi, he was the owner of a shoemaking establishment. In America he soon became adjusted and opened a shoe repairing shop in the basement of his home.

When I came to live with them he was a man about forty-five years of age. In Cherkassi he wore a well trimmed beard and was addressed as *Reb* Mordechai, with emphasis on the *Reb*, denoting respect. Here he removed his beard but the *Reb* remained. He was of average height, well built and pleasant looking with a wide forehead and wise appearing eyes. He never hurried. In his speech and his actions he always appeared relaxed.

Reb Mordechai had no worldly education, but his Jewish background was exceptionally good. He soon found himself the leading figure among his *landsmen* (countrymen) and engaged in various activities which required not only leadership, but a sympathetic approach to the serious problems that beset the newcomers. As President of the "Corporation," (loan society) President of the Cherkassi *Farain* (Club), President of this or that society, *Reb* Mordechai stood at his bench with hammer in hand and *fleklach* (nails) in his mouth, listening to pleas for loans, to requests to act as "Uncle" to newcomers, to appear as a witness for someone, to help get the "First Papers" for citizenship, to arrange this or that affair; *Reb* Mordechai's shop turned into a virtual office with an open door to all comers. His signature and endorsement were given

to all needy, regardless of merit. His time and his sympathetic efforts in behalf of his *landsmen* were taken for granted.

I often wondered how one man could store up so much patience and remain sympathetic to all the demands made upon him. He spoke little; with a few quiet words he could comfort the most distressed. In his public dealings--his brief "yes" or "no" was not that of a dictator but stemmed from a heart filled with compassion for his fellow man. Nor was there ever a harsh word to any of the immediate family. Every word that came from his mouth as father, as husband, as relative, was couched in the velvet softness of love and understanding.

And just as time and circumstances brought to the surface men of leadership and ability like *Reb* Mordechai, his wife Beila had proved herself, in her own modest way, the needed instrument of the times as a cell in a complicated system of society. She too had contributed considerably with her charity, her selfless labor and understanding, to ease the birth pangs that paved the way to the unprecedented rise of Jewish social life and affluence on the American soil.

Beila was of medium height, delicately built with a refined pretty face and eyes that heralded her goodness. She belonged to the Rabinowitz branch of our family; in the same age bracket as my mother and Aunt Chayeh. Until they were married, they lived in the same neighborhood and in each other's company. None of these girls went to a *heider* (Hebrew school) or learned to read or write. But they were well versed in the chapter "Woman of Valor" recited by pious Jews before the *Kiddush* (blessing over wine)

on Friday nights. The three girls took the "Woman of Valor" as their ideal, and Beila as well as her two cousins personified the "Woman of Valor" both in her considerate actions towards family and kin and in her sense of duty toward the sick and needy. One can cite many instances to illustrate her self denial and sacrifice for family, the sick and the needy--a few instances will suffice.

After a couple of years in the shoe business, the pressure of public affairs compelled *Reb* Mordechai to hire a shoemaker to assist him in his work. Such men used to come and go, as they only needed orientation and know-how to establish themselves in their own business. This, *Reb* Mordechai gave them wholeheartedly as a matter of duty to his fellow craftsmen.

One time a man came to work who showed signs of illness. He was a recent arrival, alone, with no family or friends. He needed personal attention and special care. Where could he get it?

Beila noticed his predicament--she soon invited him to the Ellises' table for dinners. She provided him with milk and the other necessities he sorely lacked. Disregarding the overwhelming burdens of feeding and attending to the needs of her own family and boarding relatives, she now assumed another burden.

Reb Mordechai was aware of his overworked wife's impossible situation, but he would not order her to stop, as he himself violated all limits of his strength. Although the children disapproved of this new commitment, they too could not prevail upon her to give it up. The man who was nicknamed *Telepintza* (for the city in which he was born) remained a

member of the family at the dinner table. But Telepintza was not getting better. His condition steadily worsened.

One day one of the older children going down to the basement found traces of bloody spittle on the floor. It became apparent that the man who sat at their table and ate from the same dishes was a consumptive. The whole family became alarmed. They were all on the "firing line" exposed to the fatal disease that plagued the Jewish immigrants at that time.

Telepintza had to go immediately. *Reb* Mordechai at once alerted the proper authorities to place Telepintza in an institution, but there was a four weeks waiting list. In the meantime, the landlady where he lodged discovered that her roomer was a consumptive and had him summarily put out. Telepintza was now forsaken by God and Man. He lost his desperately needed care from Beila and now he had no place, even to rest his tired and ailing body. The day after Telepintza left, the entire Ellis family went down to the basement--they scrubbed, cleaned and disinfected until everybody was satisfied that the threat of a fatal disease had been removed.

Nevertheless, the family, particularly those who insisted on Telepintza's removal from their premises, were curious to know what happened to him during his long wait for admittance to the sanitarium. He disappeared from sight, leaving no trace of his whereabouts.

But where was Telepintza during those four weeks of waiting? No one except Beila and her husband, *Reb* Mordechai, knew what happened to him. The truth came out about two years later

when the news reached Telepintza that Beila had died. He carried on so violently, that his death followed in about two weeks. It was then that the mystery of his disappearance was disclosed. This is the gist of the story:

When it became known that he was a consumptive in the advanced stages and was denied both his lodging room and Beila's motherly care, Beila was the only person in the world who understood his tragedy and risked the good will of her children, so as not to abandon him.

She made room for him in her basement behind the large heating stove; she brought down special dishes and silver for his use only, and she arranged that he spend his days in Fairmount Park where he could avail himself of fresh air. He was to come and go undetected by her children. Every day she prepared a cooked meal for him. In addition she would pack sandwiches for the day and enclose twenty cents--ten cents for carfare and ten cents for milk.

Thus he was set up with complete accommodations until he was admitted to the Tuberculosis Hospital.

I will limit myself to one more episode of the nobility of this extraordinary woman. Charitable Jewish women, who give of themselves and their money are not rare, but when one lives in their midst and has an opportunity to catch a glimpse of the forces that motivate them, one derives a greater appreciation of their nobility!

Until the last day of her life, I was one of her financial agents in her charitable commitments. She knew I was a constant borrower at the "Corporation" where I had enough shares to cover more

loans than I availed myself of. (The "Corporation" or "Coperation" as it was more often called was a mutual loan association which played an important role in the immigrant's economic survival.)

The first time Beila asked me to get her a loan of fifty dollars from the Corporation she felt that she owed me an explanation. She needed the money for charity. She could not live here in America like a *pushite Goyeh* (a plain peasant woman).

In the Old Country there were *oorema leit* (poor people) begging alms. All day Friday they would come to the house; as many as came--thirty or forty--she would give each one either a *kopek* or a piece of bread. When she blessed the *Shabbos* candles, she felt she was entering the holy Sabbath in the spirit of a Jewish daughter. She was up early on Friday morning, she took care of the pre-*Shabbos* needs of her husband and family. She prepared the *Shabbos* cooking and baking--she cleaned the house and gave charity as is becoming a Jewish "Woman of Valor."

Here, *oorema leit* don't go from house to house panhandling--yet there was no less need for help to the sick and poverty stricken than in the Old Country.

Her grocery lady, Mrs. Milstein, had an unending list of such people and many Jewish women gave their charity the American way--that is, not with penny alms, but by taking care of "cases" with the required dollars. Her husband worked and made a nice living, her children worked and she could very well save enough for charity from the money she received every week. However, she

explained to me that all the money she received really belonged to her children; they would need it for their dowries. She could not prevail upon herself to take a penny from that money, but she could pay two dollars a week to a "corporation" and give charity the American way!

Knowing, as I already did, of Beila's charitable deeds and human considerations for others, I regarded her request as a privilege to repay in some insignificant way the many favors she showered upon me.

Two months after I brought the $47.00 to her on the $50.00 loan, Beila handed me two dollars--the weekly payment on the loan, and somewhat bashfully asked me to please get her another $25.00 loan to be paid off at $1.00 a week. Again she explained to me that the need was so great, that $47.00 could not be stretched out for twenty-five weeks. I obtained another loan.

Within the year Beila was paying the "Corporation" $4.00 a week which she saved by skimping on personal necessities. *Reb* Mordechai knew of her "operation charity" and would remark to me, "It is easier for Beila to give $5.00 to a needy case than spend fifteen cents for a hair comb that she needs, but gets along without."

Yet, *Reb* Mordechai and Beila contributed only one part of the story of my gradual adjustment and deliverance from the gnawing feeling of loneliness and yearning for home. The second force that reconciled me to my fate in America was the hearty good fellowship and the cheerful spirit that prevailed in the Ellis home.

When I came to live with the Ellises, two of the children were still in the lower grades of public school. The four older children, two girls and two boys, were all of working age and established in their jobs. Lena, the oldest, was a dressmaker--a beautiful brunette with large, wise eyes and a smile on her face with the effect of a sunbeam. Her sister Pearl, four years her junior, who at the age of eighteen had already made herself known as a talented designer, was cute and as cheerful and happy looking as Lena. Of the two boys, Morris was twenty years old--slim, straight and altogether a Prince Charming who dazzled the young set of his female admirers. He was an intellectual, without airs and at home in any company. But the one who really set the pace in this exquisite family was Charles, three years Morris's junior. He was the salt and pepper, the very spice that animated the spirit of the entire household with zest and meaning! Song and laughter from jolly company of young, spirited people was not uncommon in the Ellis home, but Charles neither sang nor was he lavish with laughter. His physical and mental characteristics were like a chiseled granite statue. He was short and frail, possessed of a sunny face, fine features with large forehead, but his eyes had a unique sparkle that could penetrate and smile at the same time.

A tragic accident in his early childhood left him with a foot handicap that resulted in an incurable scar on his soul. Fate was unkind to him. He would not, even if he could, fight it to the point of proving himself capable of overcoming his handicap. His conception of

life and its fulfillment was only as a perfect human specimen, mentally and physically; one without the other was only half a man, and that he abhored.

Charles was a born philosopher. He could see things inside and out, and call things by their names. He was bitter against society. In his sarcasm he spared no one, but he also possessed an understanding heart, capable of deep compassion. He set the tone that dominated the Ellises' abode, not by his mood of being less than a whole, perfect human specimen, but in spite of it. He injected himself as the very one who at times turned the entire atmosphere into one of joy and good fellowship.

When Charles reached the age of fifteen, *Reb* Mordechai and Beila, appraising their son's handicap and aware of his ability, decided to bring a piano into the house and encourage Charles to learn music. This would keep him off his feet and provide him with a dignified profession. Charles liked the idea and dived into the study of piano with heart and soul!

But Charles' individuality had by this time already asserted itself. He would not have anybody pay for him or maintain him. He was too proud for that. He went to work so he could pay his own way in pursuing his career as a musician. He practiced early in the morning, took his lessons in the evenings until he became an accomplished pianist. He soon emerged as a music teacher and was invited to play as an entertainer.

Suddenly, Charles had a change of heart--he did not enjoy his popularity as a teacher nor as an entertainer; he found his peace more at his trade--that of an

upholsterer. He just could not bear the thought of himself being less than a perfect human specimen and exposed to the public eye.

At home, in the living room or at the table, Charles set the style. He applied to those he loved or befriended, fond nicknames: his mother he called *"Beilke";* one of the boarders, Abe, a second cousin like myself, he named *"Unckele";* my brother Jacob was *"der roiter."* One evening I came home from work with face and hands bandaged, covering burns I received when a gas tank exploded at the shop. One look at me and Charles had a nickname for me, *"Der Tseshosener Blecher"* (the beat-up tinsmith), and that name stuck as long as I remained with the Ellises.

The Saturday afternoon cold-cut suppers and Sunday morning breakfasts at the Ellises' were celebrated in big style! Usually the girls would invite guests and the air was charged with good fellowship and cheer. Charles would come down when everybody was already seated, deeply engaged in the business of eating; he would address them something like this: "Hello Dupes--*Zeynor-Zeynor* (look here) *wee the chazeiramlach hoben zesich zugechapt* (how like little pigs have they dived into the food). *Me chleptshet --me frest ve noch a tunis* (gorging and stuffing themselves as if after a fast."

It was no secret that due to Beila's good nature and self sacrifice, there were well-meaning people who went so far as to exploit her readiness to be of service.

Reb Mordechai and the children could not convince her that she was simply killing herself, that she must

conserve her health. Charles had his own way of bringing home to her the necessity of taking it easy. He would come down to dinner with his customary "Good evening, dupes. *Noo, Beilka, vos machstdoo?* I have good news for you. Baldwin Locomotive Works advertised today for help. Here is your chance. You have been going around *nebech* without a stitch of work all day."

When in his philosophic mood he could lash away with his tongue as with a razor blade, but his bite was never a sting. In his bitterness he uttered truths that reached down deep where it hurt. However, when it came from Charles' mouth, it was not a personal afront; it rather applied to human weakness few people had the courage to face up to.

Actually, his handicap somehow prompted him to pervert his talent and the many opportunities that could have made his life meaningful. Thus, he resisted every normal drive that motivates most people. He learned to play the piano but would not use his knowledge or talent to entertain or teach. The world, he said, was full of such entertainers and teachers. He was different. He would not cover up his handicap with his talent or knowledge of music.

He would regard his female admirers on an equal footing with the males and would mince no words or be reticent in their presence. There were many young women who would have considered themselves honored and fortunate to receive his attention or accept his marriage proposals. Charles remained a bachelor all his life.

These peculiarities and his unorthodox behavior made Charles stand out as an individual different and enigmatic, but highly respected and loved. His outstanding trait was his boldness in speaking his mind, but even in his most biting extravagance he retained a sense of humor and a beaming smile that communicated itself to his listeners. However, the physical pain, the suffering and pessimism--that ate so deeply into his soul--that, he kept to himself.

I had the good fortune to share the same bed with Charles and his twelve-year-old brother Willie for a period of two years. Many were the times when a massive tirade from Charles put me back on my feet. The man who could not square matters with the world for himself could comfort and brighten the path for others.

These were the people and this was the home that comforted me during the first two years of my sojourn in these blessed United States!

Night School

Cousin Oscar's most salutary contribution to my eventual adjustment in the new country was his placing me in the Ellis home. But this was not his only effort in my behalf. Oscar lost no time in introducing me to the theater, the various lecture forums and concert halls. He also planned a school program that would set me up in the direction of my desired goal. But what sustained me during these difficult times of my adjustment in the New Land was Oscar himself. He did not disappoint me; he was really the man I had pictured him to be

in our correspondence, and I could look up to him with hope and confidence. Now, with a well-feathered nest in the Ellis home and Oscar as my guardian angel, I commenced life in the New Land.

The two important areas challenging a newly arrived immigrant were language and employment. Although neither of these pursuits seem extraordinary or exciting events meriting description, I recount these experiences because much of what followed in setting my course to the future in the United States stems from my beginnings in these two areas--school and employment.

The need for language led immediately to night school. After the day's work, I washed, changed clothes, swallowed my dinner and went off to night school where from 7:30 P.M. until 9:30 P.M. newly arrived immigrants were instructed in English. Although the classes were large and the pupils of various ages and nationalities, the predominant number of pupils were young men and women, mostly Jewish. In a class of some thirty or forty students, there might have been some Poles, some Czechs or Danes, but seldom any other nationality. For most of the pupils the two hours at night school were a lot of fun--the compensation that made up for much of the day long hardships common to the average immigrants in their employment.

After one month of preliminary instructions, the teacher, an attractive young lady, announced that all those who were aiming for a more substantial English education were advised to apply to private preparatory schools. This was in conformity with Oscar's program.

I immediately enrolled in a preparatory school for night courses where I studied for a period of two and a half years and where I made the required "points" needed to enter college. This school eventually became the place where I found mutual friends, in an atmosphere of good fellowship with young men and women engaged in the same effort and in the same direction, to reach their educational goals. Three nights a week we met here in the various class rooms. We were all, with few exceptions, boys and girls under twenty, all intent on storming the gates leading to college. We were mostly Jewish, of the same background, with the normal diversity of moods and dispositions. However, as in all human contacts, the extroverts came to the surface, banishing the gloom before it set in. As a result, our classes used to resound before and after the teacher's appearance with jokes and laughter, thus raising our subdued spirits and brightening our depressed moods. But for students who were mostly oriented in the East European culture, the adjustment to the new American culture did not always proceed smoothly.

During the two and one half years I spent in this school some seven or eight teachers came and went. Two of them, however, left vivid memories meriting mention. In personal characteristics and methods of teaching, they represented two opposite poles.

Mr. O. was a young, struggling lawyer. Teaching at night was a side line, but he was a born teacher who loved both the subjects he taught and his pupils. He spoke softly but convincingly and so effectively dramatized the subject

matter that Mr. O. had become the teacher to whom we looked up with admiration.

Mr. W., however, our English teacher, definitely rubbed us the wrong way. Besides the tense atmosphere he created in his classroom, his browbeating method of instruction was intolerably hard on the students.

He was a young lawyer, short and stocky with a prominent nose and high forehead, sporting a head covered with luxurious black hair. His method of instruction was far from conventional. Criticism issued from his mouth like salvos fired from a gun. After correcting a student's paper, he would fire several salvos that would make the student look foolish and feel humiliated. "This is not a composition"--"It is not American in thought"--"Old world stuff!" --"It is bad English"--"Do it over."

Compared with the tolerance shown by other teachers, the English teacher had become the terror of our classroom. To him it appeared as if we were trying to remove Uncle Sam's striped trousers and stovepipe hat, and replace it with the hated Russian army hat and the long Russian *Shinell* (army coat), fighting an imaginary phantom. Anyway, we were unhappy with him. Somehow, our dissatisfaction with Mr. W.'s methods of teaching reached Mr. O. who promptly relayed it to him.

The very next evening before discharging the class Mr. W. asked any students who were dissatisfied with his method of teaching to raise their hands. One girl and a young man raised their hands meekly announcing they represented the class. "What is your complaint?" Mr. W. asked. They told him.

"Well," answered Mr. W., "this is my method of beating some American sense into your Old Country heads. Those teachers who you say are more tolerant, did not read your compositions. They don't know how missled you are in your thinking of America. You regard America in terms of the old degenerate world in Russia." Strangely enough some of the students took his cue; they withdrew their complaint to the chagrin of those who were adamant that Mr. W. was not fit to teach.

In fairness to this unorthodox teacher and his unique method of teaching we should digress from our narration and point the spotlight on the cultural and intellectual world and environment that dominated the "green" immigrants, particularly the young and easily impressed ones. The flow of immigration at the turn of the century and up until the First World War, came mostly from Russia and East European countries where rebellion and revolution permeated the air. Numbers of revolutionists and intellectuals streamed into the United States, where they found fertile ground for the spread of their revolutionary ideas; they aimed at overthrowing the Czar or the old corrupt systems in Europe, but deployed their socialistic propaganda to overthrow the capitalistic system in America. To that end, the Yiddish vernacular was used as the instrument to reach the Jewish masses that flowed to American shores in unprecedented numbers.

In the year 1911, when I arrived, the socialist propaganda machine was grinding away at the height of its capacity. The Jewish immigrant was in most instances a working man, laboring under

unbearable exploitation. The sweat shops, the underpayment, overcrowdedness and disease were crying out to the high heavens.

The socialist press and their agitators called the working masses to strike and unite in union organization. In their agony, most of the workers responded. The bitterness, the suffering and the fierce struggles of the prolonged strikes make modern strikes look like picnics. The socialist oriented daily newspaper *Forward* was the leading exponent of the working class with Abe Cahan its editor and high priest. Other socialist publications and dailies carried the torch for the struggle against wanton exploitation.

But not all was well in the socialist camp. An idealogical rivalry developed, whether for circulation or scholarly difference, between the *Forward* and another progressive socialist oriented daily newspaper the *Warheit* (Truth) edited by a Mr. Miller. Each of the editors challenged the other on the true interpretation of socialism as related to unionism. This rivalry soon turned into a fierce personal confrontation with no holds barred. Theoretical differences turned into a contest of who could spew forth the most insulting venom upon the other. Other socialist scholars did not remain silent.

In scholarly tradition they analyzed the problems of the two camps, thus enlightening the eager reading public in the popular holy script of the socialist bible, Das Kapital.

But the *Forward* and the *Warheit* were not the only daily papers that competed for the minds and favors of the

immigrant. A new revolutionary movement got underway competing for the allegiance of the young Jewish immigrants.

Emma Goldman, a shop girl from Chicago appeared on the Jewish scene, as a sort of "Joan of Arc." She was going to save the world from capitalism and socialism by the new revolutionary movement "Anarchism." It was as simple as that. No capitalism, no socialism, no government and no restricted morals or laws to enslave humanity; and free love was the first step in that direction. With an uncanny oratorical surge she succeeded in building up a following among the so called intellectuals. Chaim Yanovsky became her apostle and began to publish a weekly journal *Freiah Arbeitor Shtime* (Free Workers' Voice). His weekly soon became the most read journal on the Jewish scene. His keen analysis of current world events and contemporary philosophies placed his journal among the best in the Jewish vernacular, but it also played its part in confusing many young immigrants by following in practice a Utopian ideology that left in its wake a streak of tragedies that still serve as a grim reminder of an era abandoned to irresponsibility and literal anarchy.

On the religious front, the picture was even more chaotic. The *Forward* devoted a full page of atheistic propaganda to liberate the blind masses from their religious opium. William Feigenbaum, an over-ripe scholar in Tora and Talmud who went sour, edited this department. Day after day until the First World War, he poured out the worst anti-Jewish and anti-religious venom. Not all of his readers could stand the insults and crudeness of his daily tirades

against Jewish tradition and high moral standards. They gave up the *Forward* in disgust. But it was W. Feigenbaum's day while it lasted.

This was also the sadly remembered time when the infamous Yom Kippur balls were staged with ham and bacon refreshments during the chanting of the Kol Nidre in the synagogues. A sorry spectacle indeed but this was the prevailing wind that was blowing in the ranks of the young immigrants.

It was in such confused states of mind, saturated with such reckless ideologies, that we wrote English composition. In retrospect, the picture emerges much clearer now. With students so oriented, our English teacher had good reason to be hostile towards some of his outspoken students. It appeared to him that they were sadly missled by destructive and Utopian ideologies. His usual outburst "BE AN AMERICAN" and "WRITE AMERICAN" can only be looked upon sympathetically in retrospect, but at that time we regarded him in the same light as we did the reactionary politicians and the hated capitalists.

EMPLOYMENT

My first week in the United States was both exciting and revealing. While I was out sightseeing with Oscar and other relatives I received my first lessons in American economics:

1) Every adult has to work to sustain himself (in the Old Country one needed so little that he could afford to be idle).

2) Every Saturday is pay day (in the Old Country pay day was once a month or once a year).

3) The story, that there is gold in the American streets may be true, but there were no short cuts in either time or effort to reach it. It takes years of hard work and sweat, first, to find it, then to scoop it up, and every newcomer aspires to work himself up to the point when he can share in the wealth of the *Goldene Medina* (Golden Land).

However, I did not come to America to scoop up gold. I arrived in search of an education, with a profession as my ultimate goal; and working to sustain myself, was the first principle of American economics. Within a week of my arrival, I was working at a bench in a sheet metal shop. My first employer was a *landsman*. He once worked for my father's Uncle Berle in Ekaterinoslav. He immediately made it clear to me that, "This is America! There are no favors. If you will be a *mentsh* (man) and try to learn the trade, I will give you every opportunity to advance yourself."

Within a week I knew most of the tricks, applicable to this particular line of sheet metal work, and enjoyed the good will of the other workers.

Knowing that I was working for one dollar a day, the men kept urging me to ask for a raise. It took a couple of weeks before I mustered up enough courage to ask for the raise. The boss graciously consented. The next week after counting out six one dollar bills for six days work, he also counted out twelve nickels. "This is your first raise--two nickels a day for carfare. When you will have learned a little more, you will get another raise."

I was somewhat disappointed, but not to the extent of giving up the job. This was the time when the constant flow of immigrants practically deluged the labor marked with skilled craftsmen. As a result, when a skilled immigrant worker, particularly a married man, obtained a job, he held on to it, tenaciously, under the worst exploitation and abuse.

The shop in which we worked was a converted horse stable surrounded by other stables; a dusty, ill-smelling place, unsanitary, unhealthy, and unbearable in the afternoon heat. No one dared complain. I soon became aware of this miserable situation and decided to stick it out as long as I could. When the summer was over and severe weather set in, all building activities came to a standstill. As the sheet metal trade hinged on the building industry, all workmen were laid off. I was the sole survivor, at $7.50 a week.

I knew the reason why and it made me quite uncomfortable. My boss also knew that I was not too happy about it.

He wanted me to work for him--first, because of the low rate of wages, and secondly, because he knew that I was attending school and my knowledge in figuring and estimating could be useful to him. To that end, he would call me into the house, show me blueprints, specifications, etc. It was altogether new to me and engaged my interest. Meantime, his wife's sister, a seventeen-year-old girl appeared. She was a very attractive and intelligent young lady who also attended night school. Everytime the boss called me in to discuss blueprints, the girl was there. Usually there were refreshments and friendly chats, made particularly pleasant by the presence of this charming young lady.

Nevertheless I was unhappy. A steady job, a girl, blueprints were not what I was interested in. What I needed and was determined to attain at any sacrifice was a job in a shop where I could learn the English language. After a couple of weeks of soul-searching, I left the job to the amazement of the boss and all my friends and relatives.

I was now on my own, in quest of a job to fit my specifications. I became acquainted with the "WANT ADS." I searched the columns of the various newspapers, missing no opportunities, no matter how remote the chances.

After several days of concentrated effort, knocking at doors, searching far and wide, I found an open door in an English speaking shop where I was hired at better pay and shorter hours. The first day on the job I was received rather sympathetically by the English speaking employer. As a "greeny" I was,

after a day's trial, assigned to a mechanic as his helper.

The man, a first class craftsman, was as "green" as I was. The only language he understood or spoke was Yiddish or Rumanian. After one week I quit in disgust.

Winter was now at its worst, with few openings for jobs. Nevertheless, I did not stop trying. Finally my efforts were rewarded. I actually got the job I thought would answer my prayer. It was in a tin factory.

The hours were rather long and the wages low. We worked from 7 A.M. to 5:30 P.M. at $7.00 per week. However the entire establishment, both workers and management, was non-Jewish. The shop was located an hour's ride from my home. The entire shop was studded with benches manned by men and women eight feet apart. I was placed at a bench and shown what to do. As usual, the first day was testing day. There was a lot of soldering to do, and consequently, fire pots were burning all day long, causing a blue smoky pall to constantly hang in the air.

Amidst the din and noise of the turning power wheels, the filing, grinding and hammering--the loud coughing and sneezing completed this ungodly nerve wracking symphony. On the first afternoon, the foreman came over with the boss of the floor, a big, well fed, well dressed man, towering over me, a little frail youngster looking even younger than my 18 years. He wanted to know where I learned the trade and how many years of experience I had. My work was satisfactory and he said that they would raise my wages to nine dollars per week and if I stayed until the next year, he might

even give me a promotion to the next floor.

I had hit the jackpot. It seemed too good to be true. However, it was the promise of a promotion that created the compelling incentive for accomplished craftsmen to brave the hazards of this "hell-hole."

After the first week, the poisonous air began to take its toll, but I was in English speaking company and that was the price I was determined to pay. However, I noticed that the big boys were all working near open windows, which made working in this punishing place more or less tolerable. I began to sneeze, my eyes became red and I must have looked as I felt. A German mechanic working near my bench noticed my predicament. Knowing I was Jewish, he tried to speak to me in German of his sympathy for my plight.

He advised me to ask the foreman for a bench near an open window. I did, and to my surprise, that afternoon I was transferred to a bench near a window. The next day I felt quite comfortable. I did not sneeze and my eyes did not bother me half as much as before. I was grateful to the foreman, the German, and my lucky star!

A couple of days passed at my comfortable place at the window. I began to speculate about the job the management offered after one year at the bench. Surely, more money and other inducements were involved. Suddenly, I heard shouts in my direction, "Shut the window--shut the window!" I could not imagine that the shouts were directed at me. I did not pay any attention. Suddenly, one of the mechanics appeared, yelling at the top of his voice, "You G.D. dirty kike--

you don't belong here anyhow!" and pulled down the window with a bang. No one said a word. But the German came over, opened the window and addressed the shop, telling everyone how crudely they had behaved. The foreman then appeared and transferred the three or four men who protested my opening of the window. The German comforted me. He apologized for their rude behavior and revealed to me that he was a socialist, and come the social revolution, such incidents would not happen! That day I learned the facts of life, that every Jew learns sooner or later. I quit the job.

The next day, I called my first boss and asked if he would take me back.

He did, and I returned, but not for long. Hardly a week passed, when I again left the secure steady job. This time it was for good. The fact that I had banged the door in the face of rabid anti-Semites raised my self-esteem, but running back to the warm shelter of security at the first confrontation with a crisis, plunged me into an unbearable mood of cowardice.

That winter I picked up part-time work in small Jewish shops. It was just enough to keep the wolf from the door. In addition to my busy schedules with school, I concentrated my efforts in studying and following the "Male Help Wanted" ads.

A few weeks after the Easter Holidays, I finally hit the jackpot. I actually obtained employment in the John Bird Co., an English speaking union shop, where I worked forty-four hours a week at twenty-five cents an hour, and above all, secured steady employment. Here I remained for over two years and here I

realized my dream of tying employment with the study of English.

The shop was indeed English, both in speech and in spirit; so much so, in fact, that it had enough left over for good old American anti-Semitism. My official status here was that of a helper with opportunity for advancement.

The shop had several floors. After a few days I was relegated to the first floor to work as a helper on a power machine, where one starts to work with ten fingers, but seldom ends up with the same number. This machine thrived on human fingers. Two men operated it, a mechanic and his helper. The name of my mechanic was John McGerry. A big, fat fellow, always seething with foreboding anger garnished with a rich vocabulary of curses; he never cautioned me or instructed me. I had to watch what he did from a distance of ten feet, then place the sheet of metal at my end on a given mark on the metal. The ten ton die would come down on that dot and bend the metal to a certain shape.

To save my fingers I concentrated every fibre of my mind and body on learning this intricate machine, but the human machine I could not learn. Every morning, of every working day, in that shop, for a period of two and a half years, I would get up in the morning, look at my ten fingers, wondering how many or which ones would be missing, when I returned home. During the day I would occasionally go up to the other floors, taking my metal shapes and drawings to the drawing department. I had opportunities to familiarize myself with the works and the working people.

I discovered that, while there were Jewish workers there, they were mostly native born and they looked down upon a "green" immigrant. On the first floor where I worked there were no Jews, but during lunch hour several helpers and some mechanics would come down to eat. The younger ones carried on in the usual manner of happy-go-lucky youngsters. Communication with them was difficult and as a result, I sat alone, sometimes reading or just observing.

On the second or third day one of these helpers, sensing that I was "green" and had difficulty with English, came over to me, mimicking a Jew at prayer. He shook to the right and to the left, bending and mumbling, and then finishing this bizarre performance by spitting to the right and to the left. I was absolutely outraged. On the second day, when this performer reappeared with his ugly antics, I just stepped outside in disgust. As I was leaving, one of the older men, who also came down to eat his lunch on the first floor, rushed after me with a newspaper clipping showing a picture of a young boxer in action. "You see this man--he is a Jew. He works here on the third floor. I am going to tell him what this bum is doing to you."

The next day at lunch time, the "smart alec" appeared again--and immediately began to perform for the benefit of the onlookers. Out of nowhere appeared the boxer. He grabbed the performer by his shirt collar saying, "You did not do it right. This is the way to do it," and gave the boy a sound beating. He then turned to me saying, "When you have learned to speak English you should go to a gymnasium and learn the art of self-defense."

I worked in this shop two straight years and was promoted several times. When I was making fifteen dollars a week the management offered me the foreman's job, which John McGerry claimed as his personal property. This man, who on several occasions, actually and intentionally sought to injure me at the machine, did not realize until it happened, that I would emerge as his real competition. Few men could keep a job under him. As soon as anyone showed ability, he would find some pretext and fire him. As far as I was concerned, he somehow did not consider me competition. The management knew about his weakness, and for years overlooked it. But finally a dispute arose between the management and John McGerry who thought he was indispensable. He informed the management that if his conditions were not met, he would quit. That weekend, he was fired.

The Superintendent of the firm, a kind Pennsylvania Dutch gentleman, had his office on the fifth floor. Somehow he found it easier to send me on an errand than any other helper in the building. He knew that I was attending night school and was familiar with geometry and mensuration.

On several occasions, when he called me for an errand, he would ask me to go over the geometric problems on the drawing board with him and usually was well pleased with the results.

It was this man who twice recommended me for a wage increase. With the foreman fired, he recommended me for the foremanship. In fact, he thought that after two years on the first floor, there was very little that John McGerry knew that I did not know. The offer was made.

I was flattered and thankful, but I most respectfully declined. My reasons were: one, I was entering college in about ten weeks; two, after strenuous night study to prepare for examinations I was overworked and needed a few months rest; and three, while John McGerry did not deserve my sympathy, I would not be the one to come between him and his livelihood.

I promised, however, to stay awhile until they found a suitable replacement. They congratulated me upon my entrance into college and thanked me for my offer to run the first floor until a permanent man was ready to take over.

The following Monday morning, before I had time to get into my overalls, John McGerry appeared, baldheaded, his fat face crimson red with anger, his eyes "shooting fire" and his thin lips crackling with the wildest curses directed at me. That was the last day I worked there.

During the two years that I worked in the John Bird Co. shop, I had the deep satisfaction of having learned the language of the land among English speaking people, completed a course of studies to become eligible for college and obtained a number of life-long friends from the shop and preparatory school.

Oscar was now preoccupied with bringing and settling his family in America, and Brother Jack had been here for over a year.

After quitting my job and having registered for a course in dentistry, I fell ill. Several visits to doctors brought me no relief. I was referred for diagnosis to one of the most prominent physicians in town, who charged twenty-five dollars a visit. One must

appreciate the value of twenty-five dollars in the year 1914 as compared with the dollar's worth today in 1968.

He was Professor Anders, a doctor's doctor! Two doctors and their nurses examined me first. They took my life history and that of my parents, before I was confronted by the distinguished looking Professor Anders.

His diagnosis was physical exhaustion and my inability to tolerate the dusty polluted air and the screeching noises in Philadelphia. He recommended that I leave the big city and try to locate in a small community, preferably at the seashore.

I was now faced with the choice between college and health. I chose health.

With this decision, the first period of my life in America came to an end.

RELATIVES IN NEW YORK

During my first three years in this country many incidents and events intervened that made my life bouyant and meaningful. Most salutary in this respect were Oscar's efforts to introduce me from the first day I touched American soil, to the rich, cultural world in which he revolved.

During weekends and evenings, when I was not attending school, I was usually in the company of Oscar and his friends, who were mostly aspiring singers, amateur actors, musicians and intellectuals. Over and above all activities, the theater was our shrine, a way of life, stirring and elevating. Nothing during that period of my life brought me greater spiritual fulfillment than the theater. And this was not all. With Oscar, I seldom missed any of the prominent celebrities associated with lecture forums or the concert halls.

This blessing I enjoyed during the first eight months after my arrival. During that time the then prominent Hindu poet and philosopher, Rabindranath Tagore, invaded the American scene. The press and the intellectual world rolled out the red carpet for him wherever he appeared.

Oscar, having become one of his admirers, decided to translate some of the gems of his poetry from English into Yiddish. With his various activities and distractions, he felt he could not successfully complete such a bold undertaking as translating poetry into

readable Yiddish, unless he left town. He went to Reading, Pennsylvania, where he obtained employment. He secluded himself there for a whole year. When he came back to Philadelphia, his self-assigned task was complete.

But as far as I was concerned, his absence for a whole year caused a vacuum in my accustomed daily routine. Particularly discouraging and depressing were the first few weeks. I had gone through a hard winter in struggling to avoid drifting into Jewish speaking shops. I had already had a taste of American anti-Semitism. Oscar's absence further deepened my sense of frustration.

And so, I began to look for an avenue of escape. It was then that I decided to visit relatives in New York.

With a capital of seven dollars, I arrived in the big city. A segment of the Rubinstein clan consisting of father's brother Kalman and his family lived there. Father's Uncle Berle, with his family of married sons and daughters and their unmarried youngest daughter, in her early twenties, were also there. Except for the eldest daughter, Shifra Bernstein, and the youngest son, Samuel, I had never seen any other member of this family. They had come to America in the usual manner, one pulling the other, until within a period of four years, the entire family was securely settled on the outskirts of Brooklyn known as Brownsville. To me it was New York!

I was met at the railroad station by Shifra's eldest daughter, Ida--a petite sixteen-year-old girl. Arriving at their home I was warmly received by Shifra, her husband, Israel, and the four younger children.

I soon became aware that I was looked upon as the long awaited relative who was fated to become a member of the Bernstein family. Ida was a high school student, small and somewhat pale with dreamy brown eyes, but with the intelligence of a mature person. She was the child of Shifra's previous marriage. After school, she took me to various museums, where she had never been before and pointed out the theaters where we could go, but did not. With my capital, I could scarcely finance our transportation, even at five cents a ride.

At home, Shifra could use me in her dress shop--an establishment that was located below her apartment at the corner of Pitkin Avenue and some other main street.

Shifra was Uncle Berle's oldest daughter and a truly remarkable person. I knew her well when she lived in Cherkassi. After her first unsuccessful marriage in Ekaterinoslav she came to live in Solotonosh, about twenty miles across the Dnieper, with her second husband, Israel. Sister Freidel learned dressmaking there. After a couple of years, she settled in Cherkassi, where she operated a dress shop.

Except for a few beds, a dining table, a half dozen sewing machines, and a like amount of chairs, there was not a single piece of furniture in the house. From the first day she appeared in Cherkassi, she was surrounded by willing workers; girls agreed to work for her under the most trying conditions. There were always at least a half dozen who made their home there--sleeping on the floor and working all hours of the day--*essen caduches* (starved) since food was

scarce. Even when food did reach the table, it was seldom more than stale bread with onions and radishes, garnished with oil dressing. A herring was regarded with respect for it gave the dining table the appearance and dignity befitting aristocrats!

Shifra would promise not only to teach the girls dressmaking, but also to find *basherten* (destined husbands) for them. According to her reasoning girls only had to work for pretty dresses in order to make a fine impression. She would tell them, "If you girls subsist on onions and radishes no prospective groom will ever see it. But you show him a pretty face and nice clothes and he will fall all over you." The girls accepted her promises and advice and remained with her, against all odds.

Shifra knew the secret of attracting and befriending men and women of all ages. She was thin and short, under five feet and possessed of a pretty face with blue birdlike eyes!

Her husband Israel was just the opposite. Not only was he the prodigious "tall, dark and handsome" type, he was a good hearted, forever smiling man, with no particular occupation, except what efforts he could offer to accommodate Shifra.

After Shifra had become established in Cherkassi, her establishment became an address for all those who would like to come under her benevolent influence. As a result, all kinds of freaks would come for encouragement or solace from Shifra, but there were also young men who would come in with serious intentions towards some of the girls.

I can't say how successful Shifra was in the art of match-making, but it was common knowledge that Shifra could bring together a "wall with a wall." What remained a mystery to all who knew her was that although she was an extraordinary person, who could approach high officials in power, could beg and implore, or use tricks and subterfuge in reaching her goals, she never advanced more than one step away from dire poverty in Cherkassi.

Never was there a time when she did not borrow and manipulate to keep her shop going. She was smart and capable, using people as though they were manniquins, always glorying in her ability to exert power and influence in her tight little world! Undoubtedly, she belonged to a type who draw inspiration and gratification in life from sources other than material gain!

In Brooklyn, when I first entered the apartment above the dressshop, I found, to my utter surprise the same Shifra, the same dressmaking arrangement with the girls, machines and cloth reminiscent of the Old Country, but dressed up American style. The apartment was only moderately furnished, the children not overly dressed, and Israel was still the debonair, smiling, accommodating husband.

The store was in the front and in the shop in the rear, some ten or twelve girls worked. Impressive as it looked, it nevertheless reminded me of the Cherkassi arrangement. I speculated whether Shifra could use her gifts of persuasion in America to attract willing workers for a pittance as she did on the other side? I later learned that a dress

shop on a prominent business corner in America could do very well without extra magic seasoning, but in Shifra's case, it did not hurt. She had developed a fine and prosperous business in which her talents in public relations played a large role.

In the evening, Uncle Berle and Aunt Dvora came visiting. They were followed by their sons and daughters. Uncle Berle looked like my father. He was short, thin, with a short, round, grayish beard. In appearance he seemed much younger than seventy years, as did Aunt Dvora. Most of the married sons and daughters were still young. The only unmarried daughter was Ida, who was in her early twenties. She was a miniature picture of Shifra, short, thin, light-complexioned with a sunny, pretty face, and lively brown eyes.

That evening I was enriched with a host of wonderful relatives, each of whom invited me to their homes!

A few days later, I visited Uncle Kalman and Aunt Esther in Harlem. The mere thought of once again meeting Aunt Esther almost intoxicated me with excitement! It was Aunt Esther with whom I had "fallen in love" when I was thirteen years old. I was now a grown man. I met attractive girls and beautiful women, who at times stirred me with admiration and desire, but never have I been so intrigued by an image as with that of Aunt Esther.

I had not seen her for six years, but her image, her bearing and her voice pursued me, as in the days when she used to sit on the stairs at the top of the basement entrance to my shop, talking to

me in a voice that thrilled me then and never lost its magic!

Uncle Kalman worked all day. The best time to see him and the family would be in the evening. I went alone, locating the apartment on the fifth floor in a thickly populated neighborhood in Harlem. According to old world criteria the fifth floor should have signified prosperity, for there we knew that a poor man lives in a one story house or basement, a better provider in a two story house, and consequently, the more prosperous one became the higher the location. In the Harlem apartment, however, by the time I scaled the stairs to the fifth floor, I had to revise my table of house mathematics.

My heart was beating incessantly, not knowing whether it was from the climb to the fifth floor, or from the excitement of meeting Aunt Esther face to face. I stood in a darkly lit hall ringing the bell and begging my heart almost aloud to please stop its loud hammering. A child opened the door and before I had time to see Uncle Kalman or Aunt Esther my head was wrapped in arms, chests and bosoms, being kissed and hugged. I was conscious of the good luck that I did not have to face Aunt Esther outright, but in the melee I was thrilled by hearing the familiar sweet voice of Aunt Esther, *"Oi Shaikele, Oi Shaikele."*

That evening, Uncle Kalman and Aunt Esther went all out to celebrate my visit in the best style known to them. Uncle Kalman, like most of the Rubinsteins, was short, but virile with black clipped hair and a full grown black mustache. He loved to talk and laugh aloud! That evening, he told me everything I knew

about America and our relatives in New York and much more that I did not know. They now had six children, the oldest already engaged to be married, although Aunt Esther made no secret of the fact that had she known that I was coming to America, she would have had her Celia wait for me.

Throughout the evening, I listened and learned of the life and problems of a large family in America. Uncle Kalman was already established as a painting contractor and Celia, the oldest daughter, was working. Four children were attending school and Aunt Esther was a busy housewife. But while she was as cheerful and beautiful as ever her face betrayed a suggestion that America was not too kind to her.

All evening I feasted my eyes upon her--yes, she was just as desirable, just as attractive, but her face was now pale. What had happened to that alabaster complexion, that vivacious, dance-like walk that used to linger in my mind, long after she departed from view? In contrast, I now saw a suffering glow in her eyes. In the course of the conversation, I learned that she remained in the fifth floor apartment for days and weeks at a time. She would venture down once in a while to do some shopping, but even this was an ordeal. It was not easy to take care of six children, do the housework, and all that it implied in those days. Yet, she was not the type to complain. She took it in stride. She missed the outdoor life of the Old Country. She was aware of her beauty and missed the admiring eyes of men, but she found comfort in the fact that her husband was now making a good living and could, from time

to time, present her with a diamond ring or some other such glittering piece of jewelry.

I left the house that memorable evening with a full measure of sympathy for Aunt Esther, but loving her even more than before!

My daily routine consisted of visiting the relatives accompanied by Ida, my most willing guide. We visited her Uncle Samuel, Uncle Nutel, and Aunt Rose, none of whom could offer me a night's lodging at their apartments which were scarcely large enough to house their own families.

After a week's roaming around, Ida took me to visit her grandparents, who were also my father's Uncle Berle and Aunt Dvora. It was half an hour's walk from Shifra's apartment. As we entered the neighborhood, I found myself in a setting reminiscent of the Old Country. I could hardly believe that this was also America. Up to this time, I had glorified the modernity and comforts of the American home. Here I stepped into a neighborhood of shabby, dilapidated houses, unpaved streets, partly paved and broken pavements, puddles of stagnant water in front of poorly kept store fronts; basement shops of tailors, plumbers, shoemakers, coal and wood displays on flat basement doors. There were no crowds such as I was accustomed to seeing on Seventh and Fourth Streets in Philadelphia. The whole neighborhood was slovenly kept, even as the people there were slovenly dressed. Polish and Russian churches in poorly constructed buildings were badly in need of a coat of paint and repairs. Adding to the strangeness of the scene, were the Hebrew-lettered signs on

ordinary houses used as houses of prayer and the butchers' Kosher signs on filthy store fronts.

We entered Uncle Berle's apartment, where Aunt Dvora, Uncle Berle and their unmarried daughter, Ida, received us very warmly. The apartment was badly lit and the several pieces of furniture there looked as though they had been transported from Ekaterinoslov. The two girls stepped into a side room and Uncle Berle and Aunt Dvora unburdened themselves to me of their troubles with their *gerutener* (very capable and beautiful) daughter, Ida. What was the trouble? A young man, a barber, who was handsome and a money maker, had been pursuing Ida for more than a year. They did not like him. He was too loose with money and ignorant in Jewishness.

At first she had listened to their pleas, but now they were in mortal fear that she might succumb to his persistence and marry him against their wishes. "Charles, please, we heard what a fine boy you are, go in to her room and talk to her. Maybe you can succeed in talking her out of what we know can only end in misfortune for her."

Uncle Berle took me by my hand, and led me into Ida's room. The younger Ida, my guide, stepped out, and I remained with the older Ida for the rest of the evening. During the conversation, she suggested that she would like to go to a Jewish theater with me. I blushed--my predicament was hard to explain. Not only would it be unfair to the younger Ida but even worse was my inability to finance such a massive undertaking. I told her of my financial status, but Ida said she had money. Not only would she

finance this outing, but she would immediately lend me five dollars.

Well, this all-out unconditional offer hit me like an avalanche. What a trying moment! I had to think fast, while the ground under me was burning. Somehow, I did extricate myself unscathed from my first encounter with the older Ida. Not only did I not accept her generous offer, but I left her in a state of friendly contemplation.

Young Ida did not like my all evening session with the older Ida, but except for some pointed remarks, she acted the mature and understanding friend.

During the next couple of days while Ida was in school, I used to go down to the store to read the morning newspaper, where upon Shifra would find odd jobs for me to do. She would ask me to pick up a dress for a customer or move bundles from place to place. At the same time, Shifra would begin speaking of *tachles* (the future) to me. Should I want to study for a profession, she proposed to finance me through college. She suggested that I could make my home with them and if I had qualms about earning my keep I could find something to do in her establishment.

I had long suspected that the invitation, the special room made available for me, when there was scarcely enough room for the large family, Ida's daily availability as a guide and all the other accommodations when added together assumed a definite pattern--Shifra's desire to acquire me as a *chusen* (bridegroom) for her daughter Ida. Frankly, Ida was a very attractive girl, mature and intelligent, and I began to look forward to her company with pleasure.

But to fall under Shifra's influence, was something I could never accept.

Meanwhile, the older Ida, who worked in Shifra's shop and had paid only casual attention to me during the first several days, had now, after the meeting at her house, become very persistent and almost embarrassing in her sudden change towards me.

Her constant gazing at me, her smiles, and the sweet remarks could not escape the attention of those present. In my discomfort, I felt I had to do something.

On my itinerary to New York, I had marked down Leibel Smolar. He was my playmate in Cherkassi. His father, Berle *Der Stoliar* (the carpenter), and Sura, his mother, had been our neighbors and closest friends. The entire family had arrived in America two years earlier. I was very anxious to see them. I postponed the visit for the last day so that it would be a fitting climax or dessert after the rich feast with my beloved relatives. But now that the feast had become a little too rich, I decided to go after the dessert without further delay.

I was now completely without funds and I would not ask any of the relatives for a loan. While Shifra was talking of *tachles*, I was thinking how best to extricate myself without giving offense to these well-meaning relatives. I was now confronted with the unpalatable task of answering Shifra. I told her that her proposition was difficult to reject, but I would have to go back to Philadelphia and talk it over with Oscar, whom she knew.

In the course of our conversation, I made my financial position known, and Shifra advanced me a loan of five dollars. I bade them all good-bye and left to visit the Smolar family, on the East side of New York.

I arrived early Saturday evening. Leibel was waiting for me at the elevator station. In the over three years that I had not seen him, he had changed considerably. He always dressed well, but here stood Leibel, well-groomed, well-dressed and looking prosperous. We walked several blocks through thick crowds. The neighborhood was not unlike South Street or Fourth Street in Philadelphia. The pushcarts along the sidewalk curbs, the fishy and rancid smells, the noise of the pushcart tycoons together with the loud chatter of the customers assured me I was among my own people.

We entered the apartment directly to the dining room. It was a large room with two or three long tables covered with white tablecloths, and lined with benches besides the tables.

Berle, a tall man of about forty-five years and Sura, not as tall, but slim and attractive, received me warmly. I came late for supper but Sura served me a delicious meal. I inquired about Sheindel, their beautiful daughter, who must have been eighteen years old by now, and whose beauty asserted itself even when she was only twelve or thirteen years old. They informed me that she was engaged to be married. However they were not too happy with the man she chose to marry. He was twenty-eight years old, short, stocky and definitely not good-looking, but he had made much money as a

designer and was practically showering her with diamonds and jewelry.

The other children were around, some of whom I recognized, others I didn't. All told, I had an interesting evening in the company of close friends with whom I had a lot in common and much to reminisce about the good old times in the Old Country.

About ten o'clock, Leibel and I went out for a walk. The streets were well lit and alive with humanity. We walked and talked. Leibel had much to tell me of his struggles to reach his present well-paid specialty job, and of his plans and hopes for the future. Leibel was the same age as I, but taller and heavier. The entire Smolar family was distinctly handsome. The girls were fair in complexion, with red or brown hair, blue eyes and beautiful features. They were tall, straight and slender.

Leibel told me that the future for the Smolar family looked bright, although for the first several years the burden of providing for a family as large as theirs fell heavily on the shoulders of his parents.

The boarding house that his mother was conducting was beyond her strength and his father had a serious ailment. The present situation was not the happiest but like everything else, in God's good time, it would end happily.

When we came back we found the dining room had been transformed. The tables and benches were folded and moved to the walls and about fifteen or twenty military beds and sleeping occupants filled the room. That night I slept in one of the beds near Leibel. When I awoke it was broad daylight. Leibel

while still in bed treated me to a Sunday *Forward* newspaper. I looked around, feeling as if I were in a military barrack, just like those I had seen in the Old Country; the only difference was that practically everyone lying in bed was reading a *Forward*.

After a while we got up. While we were waiting in line to use the washroom, the beds were removed, the tables and benches put back in place and breakfast was served. Although the holiday spirit and joviality of a Sunday morning breakfast at the Ellises' was not present here, it was a wholesome breakfast. While I was eating, I had a chance to observe and talk to the beautiful Sheindel. She was now a raving beauty!

The dining room, in which we ate and slept, faced the street. From the third floor window we could see drab, cheerless five story buildings faced with dark, red bricks, suggesting some forbidding government institution. When I looked through the window of the bathroom, I noticed that the building in which we were was built around a court. The walls were once stuccoed, but now half of the walls revealed ugly spots of reddish bricks. Practically every window was ornamented with clotheslines, crisscrossing from one window to another and covered with women's and men's underclothes. Most of the windows seemed like picture frames, filled with girls chatting, singing or drying and combing their hair.

This was a revelation to me. I had the impression that these apartments were like fortresses, with hundreds of people crowded into cells, waiting to serve out their sentences and once again emerge

into the bright free world. Indeed this was a disappointing new face of America. The overcrowding jolted me beyond belief. It made me feel that my letters sent home, glorifying American comforts, described only the America I saw in Philadelphia. New York was another story--the underside of America. I felt sorry for the Smolar family--Sura's hard work, Berle's illness and the overcrowdedness, but the joy of fulfillment of a cherished wish, of meeting Leibel and his family, ranked almost on a par with the excitement and thrill I experienced when I visited Aunt Esther.

At home, in Cherkassi, Leibel and I would have falling-outs, but then, we were immature youngsters. Here, I saw Leibel, the mature, intelligent, well-read man, whose friendship and association I could now evaluate and truly appreciate. I parted with Leibel and the Smolar family with a profound feeling of sympathy and respect.

I came back to Philadelphia about two weeks before the Passover holidays.

In Philadelphia, besides the Ellis and the Dubin families, my relatives on the maternal side, there were also two families, the Scholnicks and Thorns, who were my father's first cousins. These families were hard-working people, struggling to plant their roots on American soil. They were unassuming and always rather glad to have me pay them a visit and talk to them about the old home and family affairs.

Naturally, when I came back from New York I brought them greetings and regards from the Rubinstein and Bernstein families!

About two weeks after my return, the Scholnicks sent over a child to inform me that they had a visitor from New York, the elder Ida Rubinstein, and that she wanted to see me. Although my sense of social amenities was not as yet fully developed, I felt from the very first day of my return that I had to scribble a few words, at least to the two Idas; but I did not have to do it in a hurry. And now, Ida was here! Gosh, I hoped she had not come to enlarge on her designs on me!

When I entered the house, Ida, beautifully dressed, with her rosy cheeks and eyes begging and loving, embraced me and kissed me as if we had carried on a love affair of long and certain standing. I was again embarrassed. I realized that I was confronted with an unusual situation. Had I been ready to settle down in marriage, it would have probably been hard to refuse this attractive, lovable girl, even though she was four or five years older than I. But, being so young and with academic ambition the mere thought of such a possibility was preposterous! After a while, Ida told me how much she missed me and that she was going to stay with the Scholnicks a little while.

It was then that I had to disillusion her in as frank a manner as I knew, realizing full well that she would be terribly hurt.

At that juncture in my life, I felt it required courage to be blunt and cut crudely into the delicate and sensitive fabric of someone's ego or self-esteem, particularly in a situation of love, when the bitter pill of rejection must be swallowed.

But Ida accepted my story philosophically. She went home the next day. In a few months, Ida surprised me with an announcement of her marriage to a most interesting young man whom I knew from Cherkassi.

MELANCHOLY DAYS

Moving

Two years after my arrival in the United States I was fairly well-adjusted in the three areas that usually preoccupied me--home, school and employment.

In 1913 my brother Yankel arrived adding the missing link I needed to fill the void of my lonely existence. I was alone no more--an isolated twig from my family tree--I had a brother now.

However, his arrival also triggered a chain of events that jolted me out of my comfortable nest and made Yankel's first year in these United States an extremely trying one.

It started when Beila Ellis--unable to accommodate Yankel in her home, yet wishing the two brothers to live together--had arranged with her grocery lady, Mrs. Milstein, to provide us board and lodging in her home. It sounded good and I was greatly appreciative of Beila's efforts, particularly in having located quarters only a few doors from her home.

This move, as it turned out, was but the beginning of a chain of incidents which were anything but pleasant or reassuring.

My first winter in America was marked by frustrations and disappointments due to my inability to cope with challenging forces and the void Oscar's absence caused when he left Philadelphia.

Nevertheless, I was well sheltered and cared for in the Ellis home, among warm-hearted relatives.

It was not so with Yankel during the first winter of his arrival. Our stay with the Milsteins was short lived. At the end of the first month Mrs. Milstein discovered it was beyond her strength to care for her family, the grocery and boarders too. So the boarders had to go, but she would not just cast us out.

Inasmuch as her sister-in-law had a spare room and a fine family of growing girls, she regarded it a stroke of good fortune, both for us and her relatives, to place us there.

The deal was made and we moved. The room was not too warm, nor were the people or home atmosphere overheated. We were strangers among strangers and remained so for a period of over four months.

The winter of 1913-1914 was noted for its severity. The building industry was paralyzed and Yankel's trade, bookbinding, hired no help. I had a steady job, but worked four days a week instead of five and a half. I made only eight dollars a week, barely enough to keep us both in board and carfare.

During this period, a distant cousin, who went all out in his efforts to find work for us and performed other favors, was getting married. Several weeks before the wedding I borrowed fifty dollars from a "corporation" and ordered two tailor-made blue serge suits at a cost of thirty-five dollars for the two. This included white piping on the vest, in the style then worn by President

Wilson. Yankel, now called Frank, and I could not have felt less important than the President himself when we stepped out in the blue serge suits with the white piped vests.

After the wedding, it was customary to present the young couple with a wedding gift. We needed cash desperately; I tried to borrow some money without success. After a week, I decided on a desperate move. Frank and I took our blue serge suits to a pawn shop and obtained a loan of five dollars. We bought a wedding present and solved our most crucial financial crisis!

Meantime, the Dubianskys in Russia made arrangements to come to America! The Dubiansky (now Dubin) children here began to make preparations for the arrival of their parents and the other half of their family. The plan was to have all the Dubin children who were scattered in various homes, and the cousins, Frank and myself, live with Rose, the oldest sister and the first to arrive in America. She was to perform the household chores, such as cooking, laundry, etc. Each boarder was to pay four dollars per week.

For Frank and myself it was a Godsend--back to the warm shelter of relatives and friends. However, the apartment was not furnished. It had only the barest of kitchen furniture. There were no beds. So, each one of the shareholders of this housing project had to buy a blanket, a sheet and a pillow and use the spacious floor as a bed. To say it was not in accord with standards of American comfort may be true, but lying on the floor and without

bedding made us feel like the good old days at home, thus compensating for a painful back or interrupted sleep.

In a couple of weeks, this apartment became the assembly of Oscar's friends--young men and women, musicians, actors and intellectuals.

The people who had sublet one-half of their apartment to the Dubins were also recent arrivals. They were Rumanian Jews who after their marriage emigrated to England, where their children were raised. This was a cultured, well-educated family with two daughters, age sixteen and eighteen and two sons, age fourteen and twenty-two. The father was a struggling, unrecognized artist, earning his living as a woodcraft specialist. The oldest son's name was John. He spoke with an Oxford accent, wore a black cape and English style, coarsely woven clothes. He affected a snobbish English approach to everything American. In his view, art, science and literature, in fact, anything that was genuine was English. Anything American was nothing but an imitation fit for the common ignorant Americans. Invariably, he would have his pockets stuffed with English newspapers in which his letters "To the Editor" appeared. He also carried a stack of essays and poems that he was going to publish. In intimate company he loved to argue to prove his point--he would read aloud, emphasizing every syllable that was supposed to be his writing.

In appearance and attitude towards people he did not enjoy unqualified admiration from his male companions, but he had a way with the fair sex. Rose was one of his admirers. One day I had

an encounter with John. I accused him of plagiarism and proved it to a well-attended assemblage. The assault upon his ego was such that some of the women, instead of reappraising the self-styled, literary hero, came to his defense, with an enormous outpouring of sympathy. Rose could not see her hero deflated and unceremoniously expressed her displeasure with my presence in the apartment. Again we had to move--but where?

In night school I met a young couple, recent arrivals, who were taking courses in advanced English. They were high school graduates from the Old Country and professional teachers there. Our friendship blossomed so rapidly that when the crisis with John struck, I turned to them with my predicament. Without much ado they told me that since we had our own bedding, we could occupy the wide hall in their apartment at five dollars a month with kitchen privileges for breakfast.

This was another Godsend; we moved in the next day. Meantime, I was taking final exams for my entrance to college. By day I worked in a dusty, unsanitary shop--at night I went to school, then tackled my homework. My health was definitely poor. I could not eat and lost weight. My schoolmates had not noticed anything suspicious about my health, but when we moved into their apartment, they realized that I was ailing. After we had been in the apartment one week, this good-hearted couple, who remain my staunchest friends up to this day, began to worry about their five-month-old baby. They did not have the heart to tell me that due to their concern for their baby's well-being, we could not share their apartment. One morning

we woke up to find the apartment vacant. The couple with their baby had moved. They took along their few pieces of furniture, leaving us the apartment to do with as we pleased.

For Frank and myself this was another rude awakening. This shifting and moving had now reached the limit of our endurance. Within ten months we had moved four times, and we faced once again the grim task of moving. We were both discouraged and utterly helpless in the face of this new development.

However intolerable as this ordeal appeared, it was also the last in a freakish run of bad luck. Within a month the Dubiansky family arrived.

Their new home was large enough to house their entire family and also their two homeless nephews.

There we made our home as long as we were single and lived in Philadelphia. The "moving" nightmare, however, still lingers in our minds as a reminder of the eternal truth uttered by our sages, never to despair for, "This, too, will pass."

Other Trials

Dipping once again into my store of memories I recall incidents during my first years in this country that are perhaps worth recounting. Incidents of that period were many and varied. Looking back fifty-six years they appear absurd, even comical, but at the time of their occurrence, they were considered serious enough to jolt one out of his equilibrium.

In my first letters to family and friends, I used to describe the new

land in glowing colors--not only its wealth and beauty, but also the great technical achievements that made it the envy and wonder of the world!

I described the transportation system of Philadelphia as one of the seven wonders of the world. Imagine, every street lined with tracks, carrying trolley cars at intervals of five to ten minutes. For five cents one could travel the length and breadth of one of the largest cities in the United States. Moreover, the trolley provided passengers with almost door-to-door service. It did not take long to change my appraisal of this seventh wonder.

This great technical achievement, this superb transportation convenience turned into a veritable nightmare for me. It shattered my nerves, ruined my sleep and at times brought me to the point of delirium. What caused it?

The Ellises' house was the second from the corner. At that point the Fourth Street car reached the end of the line and turned onto Snyder Avenue. The turn around the corner was made with a deafening, ungodly noise. However, few people objected to the noise during the day. But, in the stillness of the night, when the trolleys made their frequent turns around the corner, the screeching brakes, the noisy clatter and grinding wheels bore down mercilessly on tired sleepers, with no relief or hope for deliverance from this monstrous tormentor. Indeed, the Philadelphia transportation system was anything but wonderful; however, as a monstrous tormenter it could take its place along Dante's Inferno.

Other experiences no less exasperating but in a lighter vein,

involved medical doctors. After several months in the new land I became aware that I owned a stomach. At times it notified me of its displeasure with the *Goldene Medina* of abundance. I began to suffer from constipation. Back at home, in Cherkassi, I never knew what pain or discomfort was except for an occasional toothache. I was hardly aware that I had a stomach that could stop functioning or a nose and throat that could make life miserable.

Here, under the rapid pace of work, study and social activities, my health began to fail. My frail constitution just could not absorb it. I went to see Dr. Gordon for medical advice. His office was on the corner, half a block away from the Ellises' house. His diagnosis was--a severe case of constipation. Dr. Gordon spoke Yiddish and did not charge for the visit. However, he owned the drugstore in front of his office--he would examine the patient, and then prescribe a medicine that had to be ordered in his drug store. He prescribed the famous "Little Liver Pills" for me. They were effective while I took them, but when I stopped, so did the functioning of my bowels. After renewing this medicine several times, I became concerned about the state of my bowels.

One evening, during one of my periodic visits to Dr. Gordon, he again prescribed for the fourth or fifth time, the "Little Liver Pills." Thereupon I asked him, "Doctor, does this mean that my bowels are so diseased that I will have to live with pills all my life?" He looked at me, straight in the eye and in a matter of fact tone answered, "*Noo*, you will want to eat all your

life, so you will have to take the pills all your life." What a future to look forward to!

Meanwhile, I became aware that I was suffering with sinus trouble. My nose and throat revolted against the dusty air in the shop and dirty ash-ridden streets that contaminated the air. The problem of air, pure or contaminated, never occurred to me. In Cherkassi the air was pure and invigorating. I was never aware of its contents, as I was not aware of the very air itself. Finally, I came down with a severe chest cold, and I went to another doctor for help.

At that time, one of the most prominent doctors in downtown Philadelphia was Dr. Max X. His name and fame, both as a medical doctor and social benefactor, was a byword to the entire Jewish community. As I had lost faith in Dr. Gordon, I decided to seek advice from Dr. X. The system of appointments was yet unknown. A patient came to the office and was received in the old reliable manner of "Next in line." Strangely enough doctors' offices in those days were not overcrowded. Within half an hour I was received.

I sat down in front of a tall broad man with a large open face and huge forehead, almost as big as the face itself. His eyes and face looked feverish. He appeared overwrought, agitated and impatient. He asked me in Yiddish, "What ails you?" I answered in Yiddish, *"Dus hartz raist meer."* I simply did not know any other Jewish words to describe my illness, except what I infrequently heard at home, describing a chest cold in Yiddish. Well, upon hearing me say, *"Dus hartz raist*

meer," Dr. X jumped up, and in a furious, uncontrollable voice exclaimed, *"Vher hot deer gesugt as du host a tzerissen hartz?* (Whoever told you that you have a torn heart?) You people make me sick with your *bobski* (old wives) ideas."

He scribbled a prescription while standing up, handed it to me without a word, opened the door and sent me on my way, hardly giving me a chance to leave the fifty cents on his table. I ordered the medicine. I took it and my chest cold disappeared.

I can't, however, recall anything that ever made me as sick and dejected as that unlucky visit with Dr. X.

In retrospect, this and the other episodes described herein, appear both comical and pathetic; but in a certain sense they also offer a rare opportunity to look at ourselves from many angles and measure our experiences in many dimensions, as if we were standing in front of a mirror mimicking and laughing at ourselves and the vanities and absurdities that once spoiled the fun of our young lives!

CAPE MAY--SUNNY SIDE OF AMERICA

In the fall of 1914, I obtained employment in Cape May, New Jersey, as a roofing and sheetmetal worker. I was met at the railroad station by Mr. Swain, my future employer. There were no motor cabs then to take me to a boarding house, so Mr. Swain hailed a horsedrawn cabby which took me to the home of Mrs. Richardson, a widow who made a living taking in summer boarders.

A year-round boarder at five dollars a week was a windfall to a poor widow, and in appreciation she treated me as though I were a close member of the family.

Mrs. Richardson was Scotch and spoke with a brogue. Her husband, a fisherman, lost his life at sea during a stormy night two years earlier, leaving her with a fourteen year old daughter, penniless. She lived in a six room unheated house. When I was introduced to her, Mr. Swain told her that I would remain there either for a few days or if I qualified for his job, permanently.

As I arrived before noon, he asked her to serve me lunch, so I could change clothes and go to work that afternoon. She showed me to my room and asked what I would like to eat--eggs or cold cuts. At that point I felt timid and forlorn. I was in a strange city among strange people--a new experience.

Up until this time, I knew the lonely feeling of being away from home

and family. Yet, I was with relatives, my own people, with whom I could talk in my own tongue. But in facing Mrs. Richardson, I felt as a complete stranger dominated by a strange feeling of inferiority. My English was conspicuously foreign. In the first two minutes I gave myself away as a "greenhorn."

My answer to as simple a question as, "Eggs or cold cuts?" was not uttered directly. I ate neither eggs nor cold cuts. All I could eat at that juncture was corn flakes, milk, oranges or soup and chicken, only of Aunt Chayeh's cooking. I told her an orange and cornflakes with milk was all I could eat. She had neither oranges nor cornflakes. We settled for toast and tea. Right after lunch I came to the shop where a push-cart, loaded with ladders, rolls of tin and various tinsmith tools was awaiting me, the new pusher.

Mr. Swain, a tall middle-aged man, in country overalls, with a captain's cap, chewing tobacco with drips of tobacco juice on his small off-color square beard, said, "Let's go."

Several blocks away, we stopped at a house facing the ocean. We put up the sectional ladders, brought up the tools and materials and Mr. Swain went to work. I was not to do anything, just watch him and act as his helper. The impression I gained was that Mr. Swain was a first-class mechanic and that I would have no difficulty in proving that I also was one.

Suddenly I felt something happen to me--a feeling of gladness seized me, pressing from every part of my being--I was happy to be alive in a fantastic world!

I was sitting on a ladder on a steep roof looking at a quiet ocean on a mid-October sunny afternoon. A strange calm reigned there. There was no city noise, only the rhythmic rumbling of the small breakers in the ocean. The air was mild, fanning a delightful breeze. I could not stop wondering how pure and invigorating the air was, and where were all these big birds coming from? I looked down at the beach. It was strewn with strutting sea gulls. A long, straight boardwalk, fit to receive a king, was empty!

My head became light--I felt I must do something, or say something to express my delight with this paradise. In the meantime, I noticed a strange spectacle on the surface of the ocean about a mile off shore. A long line of creatures were jumping in and out of the water, forming an appearance of large wheels rotating. I turned to Mr. Swain, pointing to the strange phenomenon. "Oh that?" he answered, "You are looking at porpoises--it is their season--they pass here this time of the year."

"But what about those acrobatics?" I asked.

"This is nothing--this kind of fish breathes air, they are just coming up to catch their breath."

As I did not have to work, I had plenty of time to observe and yield to the dominance of an ecstasy, never before felt in all my experience.

Shortly before the roof job was completed, I had a chance to prove to Mr. Swain that I was the man he was looking for. Before I left the push-cart and the shop that afternoon, I was hired, although I made no secret of the

fact that due to my precarious health, I was not sure I could stay there long.

That first afternoon, I went to the boarding house happy and determined to remain there a little while, even if the job would not materialize. Of course, my real problem was my diet. I could not stomach any rough food. How could I get Mrs. Richardson to cook for me what I could really eat--soup and chicken--every day? Well, I thought I would try to talk to her about it.

I went upstairs to wash and change clothes. As I was coming down the stairs, I was suddenly seized with a coughing spasm. I did not think much of it, but as the evening progressed, my coughing did not stop. I sat down to the dinner table. I could eat very little, only the food that I knew I could digest. After dinner, Mrs. Richardson busied herself in the kitchen, her daughter went into the living room to do her homework, and I went out to sit on the porch.

The house was situated on one of the main streets, about three blocks from the center of the city. There were no lights in the streets at night. I made myself comfortable on a rocking chair. The air was mild and invigorating. Only the gentle whispers of trees and chirping of birds were heard. I felt alone, but at peace and happy to have struck this Godblessed paradise!

However, the cough persisted. That evening I went to bed with mixed feelings. If only my Aunt Chayeh lived in Cape May, I would unhesitatingly settle down here for life. With no one to properly prepare my meals, my paradise might well be shortlived.

The next morning I came down to breakfast, still coughing. I ate sparingly. Orange juice, cornflakes and milk. She packed my lunch, enclosing an apple and milk. I only drank the milk. When I returned after work, the coughing still had not let up, but I sat down to the dinner table and again ate sparingly. Mrs. Richardson asked me if I had visited a doctor about my coughing? I told her my problem was not the coughing, but digestion. But, when my coughing did not stop on the third day, Mrs. Richardson asked Mr. Swain to obtain other accommodations for me. She had a young daughter and could not expose her to the danger of contracting tuberculosis. She said, "This young man is definitely a consumptive."

Mr. Swain told me to finish the week there. He had already found another place closer to the shop for me. On the fourth day, my coughing stopped. Suddenly I felt hungry; this was not just a feeling of hunger, I felt a craving for anything edible.

It started with lunch. I ate everything packed in the lunchbox--a meat sandwich, a jelly sandwich, the apple and the milk. But I was still hungry.

That evening, Mrs. Richardson served dinner as usual for three, not expecting me to eat my share. She was completely surprised when she noticed that I was eating with a ravenous appetite! The next morning she asked me if I would have eggs for breakfast. I answered, "Yes, and with all the trimmings." This meant besides an orange and cornflakes, two fried eggs with bacon, potatoes and coffee. To her

complete amazement, I finished my breakfast in grand style. Before the week ended, Mrs. Richardson notified Mr. Swain that the boarder was on the mend, and she would be glad to have me stay permanently.

When I first arrived in Cape May, I weighed one hundred ten pounds. Four weeks later, I visited the Dubins in Philadelphia, weighing one hundred twenty pounds, and very proud of it!

I soon adjusted to my daily routine, with an outdoor job in pure invigorating air. At home, after dinner we would go into the living room. Mrs. Richardson, a middle-aged woman, was well read and could discuss most intelligently current events, particularly religion. Soon another boarder joined me, Mr. Bosser, an Englishman. This was the first time I came in intimate contact with Anglo-Saxons. My boss, Mr. Swain, was an Irishman from North Ireland and a Protestant. My foreman, Mr. McShay, was an Irishman from South Ireland, a Catholic. Mrs. Richardson was Scotch. Mr. Bosser was English. Besides the difference in nationality and religion, the one thing that they all had in common, was their knowledge of the Bible. To me this was quite a revelation, because I had studied the Bible in Hebrew, I thought that only I or Jews really knew the Bible!

My entire conception of the physical, as well as the cultural America was gradually beginning to change.

Philadelphia was a big city with schools, theaters, museums, etc. It was a city where each ethnic group lived in its own world. As a result, I always found myself among Jewish people, wrapped up in their own European culture.

At home, in the theater or lecture forums, not only was the spirit distinctly Jewish, but at times even the language was Yiddish.

Of the physical America we knew only the screeching noise of trolley cars, the narrow dirty streets and the foul, choking air. Of the cultural America we knew little, except what we read in the Jewish press--of money barons and corrupt politicians. As a result the Jewish immigrant by virtue of the Yiddish press and environment emerged with the impression that Americans were mostly Republicans (and the mere word Republican was insulting), that most Americans were ignorant and all they were after was money, exploitation, political power and graft.

In Cape May I had the good fortune of actually living with a segment of Anglo-Saxon Americana not contaminated by the big city.

I lived with a Scotch family, a poor widow trying hard to eke out a living for herself and her young daughter. Yet, she maintained high cultural standards in her way of life. The table settings, the meals, and the table manners suggested the high degree of Anglo-Saxon refinement, but more significant to me was their daily life. When Mrs. Richardson finished her kitchen chores after dinner, she would wash up and come into the living room. There was always a local paper and the Philadelphia Bulletin. There were periodicals and books. Mrs. Richardson read a lot. She could engage one in conversation and take an unbiased view. Her daughter went to high school.

The Minister from the Baptist Church would frequently drop in on his

way to or from church for a chat with the Richardsons, who were members of his congregation.

During the winter, Mr. Bosser, who was a tall man with a large, smooth-shaven sunny face, added considerably to the cultural life and spirit of good fellowship prevailing in this family.

Invariably, the congenial atmosphere was conducive to such widely divergent topics of discussion as religion, literature and history. When Mr. Bosser first learned that I was an atheist, he took it philosophically and expressed the thought that those who discarded religion in their formative years were not altogether lost to God or religion. They usually came back, only more deeply convinced in the truth of religion.

Mr. Bosser would stay several weeks and leave, only to reappear a few weeks later. His temporary departures were felt very keenly. The entire house missed him, and eagerly awaited his return!

After two months in Cape May, Mr. Swain decided that I was fit to become a member of his fraternal lodge and suggested my name. Being a Jew did not impede my application for membership. Of the three Jewish families in Cape May two were already represented in the Lodge. I was accepted and on a certain date, I appeared for the initiation to discover that the annual membership drive had netted one member and I was the star of the show!

I had no idea what this initiation business involved. I knew there were societies, unions, *landsmanshaften* "corporations" where one could gain membership, and I, therefore, thought

this fraternal order was the Gentile version of society life. So it was!

Arriving at the hall of the Lodge I was greeted outside the door by two men formally dressed in stovepipe hats, white gloves, and a red sash running diagonally across their chests. They escorted me into an adjoining chamber a few feet away. Before I had time to see where I was, they slipped a tight blindfold over my eyes, and feverishly began to saddle me with some kind of a harness that slowly weighed me down.

All this time no one uttered a word, a dead silence prevailed. I felt uncomfortable, both from the weight on my shoulders and the ungodly silence. Finally, without the utterance of a word, I was grabbed by the arms and pushed forward to walk. Being blindfolded, with a weight beyond the capacity of my shoulders, marching in a silent void, I was seized with a weird feeling. What was this anyhow? I had read something of such ordeals being committed on captured kings and princes, but here, who was I to go through with this bizarre act? Was this a trick or some real form of torture? There seemed no end to this constant walking--and how much of this punishment could I take?

The entire ordeal was enacted without as much as a whisper from my two tormenters. I steeled myself not to break this torturous silence. Finally we reached what felt like a boarded area. Suddenly a rap like that of a hammer blow on an empty barrel broke the agonizing silence. We stopped.

A heady cultivated voice said, "Brother Charles, do you identify

yourself as Charles Rubin?"

I answered, "Yes."

Again the voice spoke, "Brother Charles Rubin, do you believe in God?"

This question came as a shock to me, even more astonishing than the whole bewildering ritual. Here in America mixing religion with a fraternal society? What was this all about? I was a confirmed atheist, of which I was not ashamed. Well, the weight business, the painful silence, the whole procedure, and now this "none of their business" question, caused me to think a while.

While the first question directed to me was answered promptly, the second was not answered for many agonizing seconds. I know what went through my mind, but what the Grand Master and and Fraternal Brothers were thinking while I stood silent, I will never know!

After a few seconds of unbearable anguished silence, one of the guards pinched me hard and whispered in my ear, "Say, yes." I did say "yes," but at what price?

I felt as though I had betrayed the very God of atheism. After I said the right word, the heavy load and the blindfold were removed. I found myself standing in front of a dais decorated with flags and emblems. A big man in a full dress suit, with a red sash across his chest addressed me and explained the significance of the heavy burdens imposed by the initiation. After his instructions and congratulations, the assemblage of over one hundred fifty members applauded and I became the "umpteenth" member of the great Fraternal Order and the new convert to God,

who profited without even being a member of the Order.

Being free from the many distractions so common to the big city, proved to be very profitable for me in many ways. In this quiet, peaceful surrounding, I could concentrate on my studies, that I had hoped I could use as credits upon entering college. I read a great deal, my health improved, and I took the opportunity to draw a balance of my four years in America. During my sojourn in Cape May, I became aware of a fact that would have escaped me forever had I remained in Philadelphia. From the first day I stepped on American soil, until the day I arrived in Cape May, I lived in a Jewish ghetto, as closed and detached from American life as were the ghettos in Europe.

That spring when I visited the Dubin family to celebrate the Passover holidays, I regarded my cousins and friends who had been in America twice as long as I had, as "greenhorns."

The realization that the real America was not in the big cities, but in small communities, gave me an entirely new perspective on American life.

At the end of fourteen months, I was again faced with an important decision. To remain or not to remain in Cape May? The problem that confronted me was a matter of fairness to a friend.

Long before I appeared, Mr. Swain turned the management of the shop over to Math McShay, who was known to the customers as the foreman. He was a Catholic, while the Swains were Protestants. There was not too much love lost between them. For some reason Math befriended me. He invited me for dinner

from time to time with his young, fine family.

Suddenly I realized that my superior knowledge of drafting and sheet-metal work did not enhance Math's security in his position with Mr. Swain. I, therefore, gracefully removed myself to the great relief of a deserving friend!

In retrospect I can sum up my fourteen months sojourn in Cape May as follows: While my migration from Russia to America constituted a transplantation from the old to the new world, my sojourn in Cape May, after living and working for three years in the ghettos of Philadelphia, marked the beginning of a new orientation, away from the big city.

Besides enjoying the blessed return of robust health, I had the good fortune of living in the real America, breaking bread with Anglo-Saxon families at the "Kingdom by the Sea."

The mere fact that I built my home and raised my family here by the sea, where I still regard myself as being privileged to have lived close to the grandeur of the Atlantic Ocean, testifies to the beneficial influence that Cape May exerted upon my life!

MY RETURN TO PHILADELPHIA

In late fall I left Cape May for Philadelphia!

Again, I was faced with a transition from one way of life to another which I thought I had left behind me and to which I would not return. I remained in Philadelphia long enough to leave my belongings in the Dubin home.

I immediately obtained employment in Bristol, Pennsylvania, a small industrial community. Here my employer found a boarding house for me, as Mr. Swain did in Cape May. After one week I had enough of the city of Bristol. The boarding house here represented a reversion to the cheerless existance I led prior to the exultant experience in Cape May.

A heavy atmosphere hung over the house. There were fifteen boarders. Except for myself and one Hungarian, all were middle-aged immigrants of English, Irish or German descent. The owner of of the boarding house was German, and she was the only one who appeared at ease and had anything to say. All the rest were tense and uncommunicative. This was not my America.

I made one more attempt--this time in Newark, Delaware with even more discouraging results. I came back to Philadelphia.

The Dubins had now moved into a large house in Strawberry Mansion. It was a three story house with rooms for boarders and a large room for an intended *heider* that Uncle Gershon was to

conduct. However, I chose to room elsewhere but took my meals at Uncle Gershon's table. During the fifteen months I was away Uncle Gershon and Aunt Chayeh went through a typical backbreaking period of storm and stress to establish themselves.

Despite adversity, they stoutly maintained, and without much effort, the continuation of their Old Country way of life at home, particularly at the table, when the family and the boarders assembled to dine.

Uncle Gershon sat at the head of the table, Aunt Chayeh at his right, and the five girls sat to her right. On Uncle's left, sat the two sons, his two nephews and the boarders and guests, normally about three, and sometimes more.

While I was away in Cape May, Aunt Chayeh's culinary prowess as well as the cultural discussions conducted by Uncle Gershon at dinner had become the talk of friends and relatives. When Louie, the son of Aunt Chayeh's very affectionate cousin Hershel Manusof became widowed, he decided, since he was childless, to give up his own comfortable home and come to live with the Dubins.

Louie was tall and well-built, with a square chin, beaming large eyes, rough-skinned face and a happy disposition. He was a man of few words, but when he spoke, it was no idle talk. He did not boast of much learning, but he read widely and what he read he digested well and retained in his excellent memory. He added considerable intellectual weight to the table.

Invariably he triggered the topic of discussion. He was a patient

listener and was tolerant of opposing views. It was not so with Uncle Gershon. To participate in a discussion at his table, one had to speak directly to the point. Many times a participant who did not measure up to his high standard would be put in his place. But this did not detract from our appreciation of him. He forced us to study well, and to learn the art of discussion befitting scholars and not merely "blabbers."

Brother Jacob and I had the distinct privilege of basking in the glaring sunshine of what we still call Uncle Gershon's "Academy." With few interruptions, I spent over three years there, forever mindful of the lasting spiritual influence Uncle Gershon exerted upon my life!

Within three or four months, Cape May had almost faded from my mind. While I still retained ambitions to enter college, I became involved with the Self Culture Literary Club. Instead of spending my spare time studying and reading for college credits, I now became completely absorbed with reading and studying to keep abreast of the high cultural and literary standards of this newly organized club. Moreover, I found myself back in the warm atmosphere of old schoolmates, some of whom had made the grade and were already in college. Others, like myself, were still holding on to the glittering hope that the college doors would one day swing open for them.

The S.C.L. Club was organized under the auspices of the College Settlement Society located at Eighth and Christian Street. The underlying purpose of the club was exactly what its name implied. Young men and women who

were ambitious to improve and develop their cultural and literary education found encouragement here for self expression and serious study.

We carried on public debates with clubs similar to ours. Prominent personages were the judges. We held discussions on weighty problems in the spirit of a scholarly quest for truth. Every Sunday night a well-rounded program of book reviews and prepared addresses by members was presented, and was followed by most interesting discussions from the membership and outside visitors.

Gradually, the S.C.L. Club completely absorbed my entire being, thus becoming another milestone in my life. It may well be that my decision to give up for the second time the ever alluring glitter of a profession, had its roots in the S.C.L. Club.

Meantime, the roar and thunder of the approaching war was now clearly heard throughout the land. Preparedness; the draft; the economy; everything was rushing headlong towards our ultimate entry into the war.

I lost all ambition for a permanent job. All I needed was enough work to get by. I would stay on a job three or four weeks at the most. The earnings were enough to sustain me for a couple of months while I basked in the glorious sunshine of the S.C.L.C.'s exciting activities. But, again, the usual activities I sought to escape, while in search of what seemed to me higher cultural and intellectual pursuits, were the very ones that invariably pulled me back; and not only because of the facts of life--that one must earn his livelihood by the sweat of his brow, but even more

compelling, because of the prestige and acknowledgement those activities afforded.

Here is one illustration: During the war there was a great demand for skilled labor, particularly, experienced construction workers.

Since my return from Cape May, I became obsessed with a phobia against working inside a shop. I considered every sheetmetal shop at that period in America as a factory producing two distinct products--sheetmetal fabrication, and tuberculosis. With this in mind, I refused to accept inside work.

During the summer of 1917, the Selective Service draft was already in full swing. There was an urgent need for camp facilities to house the ever growing numbers of recruits. One day I noticed a full page "ad" offering union wages to sheetmetal workers at Camp Dix. The idea of a job in a camp, away from the hustle and bustle of the big city appealed to me greatly. I became excited with the idea of living and working in the open fresh air. The next morning I appeared at the designated place in Camden from whence a train loaded with hundreds of applicants for the various building trades brought us to a stop in an open field, near the Camp. We were then directed to a hiring office, about a mile distant.

It was a hot August day, with a blazing sun and no breeze for relief. The distance might not have been so long but the walk was torturous, affording us a new dimension on how cruel nature can be when city people are exposed to the elements. When we arrived at our destination, we were met by the hiring personnel. We soon heard a voice

saying, "All sheetmetal workers fall in line and follow me!"

There were seven of us. We came to a shanty, about thirty by thirty feet. It was loaded with sheetmetal tools, machinery and metal sheets. The man introduced himself as the Superintendent, Mr. W. He then took our names and addresses. He informed us that we would work under union conditions and union wages, whether we were union members or not. He also assigned us to bunks where we were to sleep and stated that we were to eat rations, the same as recruits at twenty-five cents a meal. He then discharged us until after lunch.

When we came back Mr. W. was waiting for us. We had to start working at once. He appointed John Q., the secretary of Local Number Nineteen, Philadelphia, shop foreman, and Jerry McG. as foreman of Section Number One.

He then told John Q. to fabricate a sheetmetal stack as a model, to acquaint the men with the type of work they were going to do.

The stacks were needed as chimneys in the dormitories for the kitchens and the hot air heaters.

Mr. Q. could not make a stack. He told Mr. W. that he could do other work, but basically he was sent by Local Number 19 to keep the union men in line in case of any grievances. It sounded plausible and Mr. W. turned to Jerry McG., the most outspoken among the seven of us. Jerry McG. did not say a word. Mr. W. gave him a sketch with dimensions and told him to proceed with the job. The rest of us were to place the tools and machines in their designated places until we could start working from the model.

After two hours, Jerry McQ. made five pieces of pipe. Mr. W. became a little impatient. Too much time was consumed in making up five pieces of pipe. Normally an experienced mechanic would start by laying out the base of the chimney first and then let anyone do the simple pipe work. Mr. W. came over, saying politely, "Jerry, rivet the five pieces of pipe together." Jerry sensed that he could not get away with the bluff, so he admitted he did not know how to rivet the five pieces of pipe into one solid length. Mr. W. then called over another man saying, "You, go ahead and rivet the pipes together." The man looked at Mr. W. and the pipes and said he would need a special tool, without which he could not do the work.

By now, Mr. W. was really angry--he called the fourth man; the fifth man; and none could put the pipes together. There were now two men left, Jacob Fox and myself. None of us could deceive anyone as to our nationality.

Mr. Fox was a big, broad man, a little stooped, with bulging eyes and a mouth gleaming with gold teeth. He wore his shapeless hat a little askew. His slovenly appearance and his broken English made him appear the perfect buffoon.

Beside him, I appeared even younger and smaller than I actually was. But, we were regarded as excess baggage from the very start.

Mr. W. was now baffled and outraged. If his appointed foreman and the first group of sheetmetal workers were symbolic of the quality of labor he might expect, how was he going to meet a deadline under contract to the United States Government in time of war?

In his frustration, he turned to Jacob Fox, "Well, what say you?" But Jacob Fox looked at him with cowlike eyes and shrugged his shoulders. That was that! He then turned around and in subdued anger, sarcastically remarked, "To think of it! Among seven sheet-metal workers there is not one that could rivet together a few pieces of pipe."

During all this time, I felt like a midget amidst six far from friendly giants. I was tempted to tell Mr. W. that I could very well fill the bill. But, my experience in shops taught me not to play the "smart aleck" or show any superiority over others, particularly, where bread and butter was at stake. However, his remark that there was not one that could rivet together a few pieces of pipe aroused in me the mechanic's pride and I challenged his statement. In a small voice, I said, "There is one, but you did not ask him!"

Mr. W. still in a cynical vein said, "You know how to rivet together pipes?"

"Yes, I do know," I answered and proceeded to rivet the pipes together. A very simple operation it was. But it made the other six men look rather foolish and none looked or felt it more keenly than Mr. W. himself. However, he was an honorable man and immediately proceeded to revise his unwise behavior toward me.

He asked me if I could lay out sheetmetal work and if I could, to make up a complete stack from the sketch he first gave to Jerry McG. I told him that I was acquainted with many lines of sheetmetal work and that to lay out

a stack and make it up, was only elementary in the trade.

He said, "Go ahead and let me see what you can do." At the end of the day Mr. W. was very happy to see a well-made stack. He then asked me to remain in the shop as assistant foreman to John Q. I respectfully declined the offer as the place was not only terribly hot, but badly ventilated with swarms of flies from the nearby horse stable. I explained to Mr. W. that because of my delicate physical condition I had really come to the camp in order to improve my health, by working outdoors. Furthermore, I told him that I was well-acquainted with the outside work that would be needed, as well as the inside work. My refusal did not please him very much, but he realized the truth of my statement. He really needed outside men with construction experience as well as fabricators inside. Thus, he made a deal with me. He appointed me foreman over Section Two. I would stay in the shop for two days and make up enough metal work for four crews. Each crew was to consist of two men. My job was to first instruct them, then supervise their work. The rate per hour was the same as that for the mechanics, but there would be two shifts. The foreman in charge would supervise both shifts and get paid for sixteen hours per day. He knew that he was offering me something that would topple me over. "And now," he said, "You can buy your best girl friend the diamond ring she has dreamed of. In the meantime, you are going to work tonight, the second shift. Report here after dinner."

The offer was so fantastic that I felt my heart dancing with joy within

me. While the amount of money per day could not be glossed over lightly, the feeling of triumph overwhelmed me. When I reported to the night shift, Mr. W. met me at the entrance, saying rather apologetically, "Sorry, Ruby, we have to change the arranged schedules."

For a moment, I was stumped. A thought ran through my mind, "I should have known that Mr. W.'s offer was a make-believe thing. I should have had better sense and not to have been carried away by flattery and promises."

Mr. W. sensing my disappointment tried to quietly reassure me. He explained that some distance from camp, past Lisabon, a government pump installation could not start operations until some corrugated sheets, left loose, were riveted together.

He simply had no one else to rely upon to do the riveting. Mr. W. assured me again that my foremanship would be safe and that I would be doing him a personal favor by taking care of this matter. He selected one of the so-called sheetmetal workers as my assistant and off we went on a waiting government truck, with instructions to report to the engineer at the pumping station.

Sitting on the floor of the shaking truck, I was overwhelmed with a feeling of gladness. It was a great day for me--a day of triumph and now I was on my way to chalk up another achievement!

We arrived at a farm house, where we were to report to the engineer of the pumping station, under whose direction the riveting work was to be done. He was also the man to quarter us overnight and for the duration of the job.

However, he was at the pumping station. In the stillness of a pitch dark night we groped our way to the pumping station about a mile from the farm. A mild breeze was blowing. It felt delightful to be outdoors. The farm and the pumping station were situated in the heart of the farm belt in central New Jersey. We travelled slowly on a narrow dirt road. As far as the eye could see, on both sides of this road, there were vast areas of vegetable fields and orchards. We could not identify the color or the kinds of fruits and vegetables that covered the fields. The orchards looked like dark walls and the fields like dark rugs, but the sweet-scented breeze of ripened fruits and berries fanned our faces like perfumed velvet waves.

We finally arrived at our destination and met the engineer who gave us a note of introduction to the woman who owned the boarding house. When we arrived back to the farm, it was close to midnight. The house was dark. Every available place on the first floor was taken by sleeping men. It was the same on the second floor. Only the snoring of sleepers was heard. We could not find the landlady or anyone else to talk to. The three of us were all tired, hungry and sleepy. After a while we realized there would be no food. We would either have to sleep outdoors or each man would have to fend for himself and try to find a place indoors.

I soon lost contact with my two companions. There was no place to stretch out on the floor, so I sat down near a corner and immediately fell asleep on my raised knees.

Suddenly, I awoke to a loud noise and chatter. People were walking over and around me. Some carried towels, others were half dressed. The smell of fried food and coffee tingled the nostrils. I rushed outdoors, where I found the driver of the truck and my fellow sheetmetal worker dissheveled and unwashed. There was a water pump near the house where men were washing and using their shirt tails to dry their hands and faces. After washing ourselves we went to the dining room to get breakfast. There we found a large table filled with bread, eggs, hot greasy fried potatoes, milk and coffee--and a vertual free for all!

There were some thirty men crowding, everyone for himself--the devil take the hindmost. I left the breakfast table hungry and disgusted.

The truck now delivered us and our tools to the pumping station where the engineer promptly showed us the work to be done and the location of the materials and scaffolding needed to complete the job.

We donned our overalls and went to work. Naturally, I told my assistant how I intended to proceed with the job and here my trouble began. I had noticed since the time we left camp the evening before, that my fellow sheetmetal worker kept to himself. When we got into the truck we introduced ourselves. His name was Ernie Schwartz. He was not Jewish, he was of German descent. I could not engage him in conversation. When I tried to be sociable, he simply did not answer.

But, when we put up the ladders, one inside and one outside the wall, and I told him he would have to go up

to buck the rivets for me, Ernie became talkative and abusive. He was, he said, a bench sheetmetal worker, not an outdoor riveter. He was not going up the ladder--period!

Without his help I could not do a thing. Fortunately for me the engineer regarded Ernie Swartz as the chief machanic. When the engineer appeared, we were standing about idling. He turned to Ernie, a big, husky six footer, and asked him what was the meaning of our idleness?

Ernie belligerently protested that he would not do any riveting. He said that he was a sheetmetal worker and that someone had made a mistake in sending him here. When we first met the engineer he appeared to be a very congenial sort of gentleman, husky with wavy blond hair and a stylish small beard. He had the appearance of a college professor. But when he heard Ernie make that statement, he exploded with a tirade of curses, the like of which I never heard before.

"This is nothing short of sabotage in time of War," he said. "Get your belongings and get the hell out of here. I don't want you here on the premises!" were his final words.

"How are we going back, we can't walk," Ernie said.

"Get out! Somebody will pick you up at the road. I'll see to it that you don't profane the air around here," he answered.

We walked about a mile to the road, where after waiting about an hour in a blazing hot sun, we were picked up by a government truck.

When we arrived at the camp, we immediately reported to Mr. W. To my

great surprise, Mr. W., in a matter of fact manner said, "Ernie, you report to the shop foreman who will put you to work, and you Ruby, come with me."

Mr. W. drove a horse and buggy, which was the means of transportation at that time. I hopped into the buggy at the side of Mr. Wilson, eager to know how I stood with him after this unpalatable incident. Mr. W. told me how people who try to build their fortunes on lies, only get themselves in trouble and drag along innocent bystanders. He said, "Ernie has never been a sheetmetal worker. He never as much as climbed a ladder. He sneaked in as a sheetmetal worker like many others. When I called for someone with strong muscles, who need not know much about sheetmetal work, Ernie responded, not knowing that bucking rivets would have to be done from a ladder. Maybe it was best for him--a man weighing in excess of two hundred pounds should not risk his life on a ladder."

Listening to Mr. W.'s almost saintly approach to people and their problems, gave me a new insight in evaluating this man. Here was a superintendent, unlike the usual strict hardboiled type, who mixed business with humane understanding--by all standards a rare occurence in a hardboiled world!

In the course of our conversation, he told me that he already had hired over thirty men whom he recognized as first-class mechanics. He showed me the various camp sections that were being readied for the sheetmetal workers over whom I would have charge the next morning.

He would assign two mechanics to me and as the construction program

reached its full capacity, I would have four teams, two men in each, to supervise. He handed me some sketches and dropped me off at the dining hall. Here I found outside showers, where I washed, and then had dinner.

The system was military. After quitting time, all civilian personnel lined up in front of the dining hall where they received soldiers' rations at twenty-five cents per meal. It was a satisfying meal, mostly meat, baked beans, with some prunes or other cooked fruit, all in the one plate. Few complained and some thought it was better than the meals they ate at home. By the time we were through eating, it was almost dark and with no place to go, most of us retired to our bunks.

The first night in camp, I had slept crumpled up in a sitting position on the floor of a farmhouse, but the second night, I occupied a bunk in the bunk house, designed for the sixty sheetmetal workers. In four or five days, it was filled to capacity.

During my absence, over thirty sheetmetal workers arrived, among whom was a considerable number of Jews. The ethnic catalytic had spontaneously placed all the Jews in the rear of the bunk house. The gentiles had the rest of the space to themselves. When the bunk house reached full capacity, there were about twenty Jews.

Most of the Jews were immigrants and first-class mechanics. By eleven o'clock most of the men were in their bunks. The gentile group occupied themselves with games of cards and crap-shooting, which some of the Jewish men joined. In the Jewish section, however,

the air was filled with heated discussions about the correct theory of the coming social revolution.

Was it Krupatkin, with his anarchistic approach? Was it Karl Marx, with his communist manifesto and his appeal to the working class of the world to unite? And what about Bertrand Russell, Scott Nearing, Eugene Debs and all the other prominent names that filled the air in the social revolution movement? It was surprising how much these people knew about the leaders of the socialist movement, although Lenin and Trotsky had not as yet made the front pages of the socialist press.

As the discussions were held in Yiddish it can be surmised that most of of the social revolutionary propaganda and enlightenment originated and was transmitted through the Yiddish press.

The *Forward* was the spokesman for the working class. The famous Karl Marx slogan, "WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE, YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT YOUR CHAINS," was featured on the front page in heavy print.

Most of the men who participated in these discussions had probably never read a book by any of these writers, but they read the daily *Forward* and attended the enlightening lectures to know what each of the eagle heads represented.

This triggered the discussions. Anyone could take a stand and deny the doctrine of the one big name espoused by his fellow participant. Every night for several months the Jewish wing of the bunk house turned into a split house of friends and enemies. In retrospect, it now seems like children's play of the type--"I bet my brother can lick your brothers."

Many of these men, capable and intelligent, came back from these camps with enough savings to attempt business. Some whom I met a year or so later, were the proud owners of hardware stores and sheetmetal manufacturers. They had probably already forgotten about Karl Marx and his contemporaries in the social revolutionary movement, and if they ever thought of them at all, it was only in terms of ridding themselves of the inconvenience of trade unionism.

One striking incident of this period has become deeply imbedded in my memory. The episode appears as fresh and vivid to me as though it happened yesterday!

While the debates over socialist dogma were at their height, a young man by the name of Katzov joined the ranks of the sheetmetal workers in camp. He was of medium height, rather lean, and the possessor of penetrating eyes and a broad forehead that made his face look almost square. He spoke a good, literary Yiddish, as well as English with a marked Lithuanian accent. As soon as he made his appearance, he impressed everyone with his vast knowledge of socialism--he knew it all!

In his presence, few would hazard starting the usual discussions, for Katzov would immediately break in with an abusive tirade. He argued that only a violent social revolution would be the salvation of the working classes all over the world, including America.

One day, Mr. Q., the Union secretary, announced that right after dinner waiting trucks would pick up all non-union workers who had paid their application fees. They would be taken to the Union Hall of Local Number 19,

Philadelphia, for the initiation ceremoney. Most of the Jewish workers applied, including myself and Katzov. Naturally, we went to the meeting.

Upon arrival, we entered a smoke-filled hall, well lit, and hot as blazes. The rear of the hall was stacked with barrels of beer, piles of pretzels and different kinds of cheeses. The "rank and file" were in their places. About eighteen applicants, seven of whom were Jewish, were seated.

As these meetings could not be prolonged into late evening, the chairman announced that this was going to be a mass initiation with the shortest possible ceremony! All new members stood up and repeated the oath of allegiance and the pledge to be faithful union brothers. Before ending the meeting, the chairman asked if there were anyone present among the new brothers who would like to say a few words. Up stood Katsov--and unceremoniously told them that he had not expected to come to a gala affair with beer and pretzels. He thought it more appropriate to immediately appoint a committee to draw up a number of demands such as an hourly increase in wages from fifty-six cents to seventy-five cents, a shorter week from forty-four hours to forty hours and double time for any overtime work, etc. etc. etc.!

Jimmie McG. could not take it. He stood up and yelled, "Point of order--this brash upstart has hardly warmed his feet here, and he is already telling us how to conduct our business." Cries of "Throw him out--throw the whole bunch of them out," roared out, until the

meeting turned into a noisy madhouse. The chairman vainly tried to bring the crowd to order, using the gavel repeatedly, but the noise continued. Finally, Brother McCabe stood up--a tall, stately Irishman of distinguished bearing with wise beaming eyes. He raised his hands over his head. The noise stopped. The old timers aware of the power of this man's oratorical talent quieted down expecting to hear something wise and to the point. He did not disappoint them.

I would be presumptious to transmit literally his short but eloquent remarks. In a heavy Irish brogue he said something on this order: "Fellow Unionists! The behavior of our new brother is deplorable indeed, but I regard the uncontrolled behavior of our distinguished brother, Jerry McG., even less commendable. True, the new brother is out of place. He lacks tact and a sense of propriety, but basically he wants what every true trade unionist wants. He has a lot to learn and he will, if he is as smart as he thinks he is, but Brother Jerry McG. should realize that trade unionism is too big a movement to be dragged down to the low level which we witnessed here tonight." An explosion of applause closed the meeting.

The new Jewish trade unionists were for a moment shamed and embarrassed because of Katzov. But the ensueing innuendo caused by Jerry McG.'s explosion, completely unnerved them. Only Brother McCabe saved the day. We all felt like embracing him as the saviour of our honor at a most trying moment!

Fifty years later this episode, so fresh and vivid in my mind, reminds me of an old Jewish saying--"Our

merciful God watches over the Children of Israel in the *galut* (diaspora), but the good gentiles prolong the *galut"!*

On Saturday afternoons, I used to go home to my relatives, the Dubins in Philadelphia. On the first or second weekend, armed with a fat week's wages, I stepped into a shoe store. I let myself go and bought an expensive pair of shoes--REGALS which were regarded at that time as shoes worn only by *All-rightniks* (well-to-do people). The cost was three dollars and fifty cents.

Uncle Sam paid wages in gold and silver coins. I had in my envelope a twenty dollar gold piece, a five dollar gold piece, and some large silver dollars. To impress the salesman, a young man of about thirty, I handed him, almost jokingly, a twenty dollar gold piece. The man looked at the glittering gold piece, turning it this way and that way, and finally, overcome by curiosity, ask me, "Where did you get it?" I showed him the other gold piece and the large silver dollars. For a moment he thought I had broken into a bank or had robbed a mint. I told him about our great rich Uncle Sam and his boundless generosity. He literally showered one who had the good fortune to work for him with gold and silver. I told him that I was just coming from Camp Dix, where anyone could get a job at construction work. All one needed was a box of carpenter or roofer's tools. I told him there was a train leaving Camden every morning at six-thirty A.M. that stopped directly at the hiring gate.

This salesman, who must have worked for minimum, subsistance wages, regarded me as if I had come from another world! The sight of gold and silver coins, the

directions I gave him to Camp Dix to obtain a job and share in the great opportunity of making real money made me appear in his eyes, as though I were Elijah, the legendary prophet, who appeared to the needy in the guise of an ordinary person. "Of course," he said, "my father left me a box of carpenter tools." He would go the first thing Monday morning. I did meet him in camp the following week wearing carpenter's overalls. He seemed quite happy and on his way to a prosperous future.

I spent about fifteen weeks at Camp Dix. There were times when I worked two shifts and netted over fifty dollars a week. This was a tremendous amount of money at that period.

Meantime, I received an invitation to appear before the Draft Board, where I was decreed fit for the United States Army. I left the Draft Board satisfied that camp life had made me fit for the army, but the instructions to hold myself in readiness for a call from the recruiting office left me completely confused. The thought of military service dulled my enthusiasm for the ideal arrangement at the camp. Why work? I had saved up about three hundred dollars, which was enough to live on for about six or seven months.

The brutal gas and trench warfare, the unprecedented human carnage, such as occurred at Verdun made my future appear hopeless. To spend another day at work was sheer folly.

I came back to Philadelphia with plenty of time at my disposal. I found the S.C.L.C. still going strong, although several of the leading members had already been drafted into the army; others,

like myself, were waiting for the call. One of those waiting was Ladenson, a tall broad-shouldered young man with a full, sunny face, a large forehead and clear blue eyes. There was something aristocratic about him; his bright personality gave him a sort of dignified appearance. In discussions and comments he was always the serious, mature intellectual. Ladenson was one of those members that was held in high esteem by the entire membership of the S.C.L.C.

After he was drafted, a change came over him. The pleasant smile that used to play on his face disappeared. He became serious and lost his eagerness to participate in debates or discussions. We soon noticed the cloud that descended upon one of our favorite comrades. Ladenson did not miss one meeting or any of the gatherings during weekdays. But, he now began to accuse us of cowardice because at heart none of us wanted to go to war, but none had the courage to protest--and that we were all talking from both sides of our mouths, saying one thing and meaning something else.

It reached the point that he began to heckle every speaker at our regular Sunday night meetings. We now realized that Ladenson was really sick. Early in the spring of 1918, on the last day of Passover, the S.C.L.C. staged a gala affair, giving a final send-off to most of its members who were leaving for the army. Ladenson was not there. I never heard from him again. Neither has the Self Culture Literary Club ever again called another meeting! It was one more sacrifice on the "Altar of War."

A week before the Passover holidays, I received a postcard from the recruiting office with instructions to

present myself about two weeks after the Easter holidays for induction into the Army. This left me enough time to dispose of my affairs and make last minute arrangements with the S.C.L.C. for the final and most glamorous affair we ever celebrated!

One of the very active belles of the S.C.L.C. had arranged a farewell party in my honor on the Sunday night before Easter. This was not just a send-off party; it had a purpose. The young lady was popular, intelligent, charming and quite confident that when she decided to select a companion for life, all that would be necessary would be to reach out her beautiful hand and seal her fate with the lucky man. But her first try was not successful; somehow I was not ready for the plunge.

Thoughts had crept into my mind about the necessity of having someone close enough to write to, when I would be in the service, but my heart was not responsive to her.

Since the arrival of the Dubin family in the United States, I had always looked forward to Jewish holidays, particularly Passover. The Passover *Sedurim* at Uncle Gershon's and Aunt Chayeh's table was not only a great annual event, it was also an exultant experience, both joyous and sublime.

The Dubin family, their six daughters, four sons, relatives, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, two nephews, boarders and guests made up a party of some twenty-five people.

Cousin Morris's wife was not there. She was in the hospital giving birth to their first child--a boy! But Morris brought along Clara's niece, who had just arrived that afternoon from

Providence, Rhode Island, to represent her father and his family at the circumcision ceremony that was to take place in a few days. Somehow, the seating order was so arranged that the young lady sat between Morris and myself.

She was introduced to me as Esther, the daughter of Berle, whom I had met upon his arrival in America several years previously. I barely noticed her. Everyone was seated now. The gas lights supplemented by candle lights brightened the large room to a glaring sight. The table was covered with colorful china plates, wine glasses and decanters of wine. Uncle Gershon and Aunt Chayeh were sitting at the head of the table--a veritable King and Queen!

The Passover ceremony at the table had now begun--all males recited the *Kidush* with each one trying to outdo the other. The ritual of the "four questions" and the chanting of the *Haggoda* in the fascinating Passover musical intonation produced a spiritual ecstasy, characteristic of traditional Passover *Seder* celebrations. The climax was reached when the delicious Passover dinner was served. This was followed by more beautiful chanting! The second, third and fourth cups of wine were already consumed and all the participants were rather high and well warmed up.

Suddenly, Esther turned to me, stretched out her white, delicate little hand and straightened my scull cap. When I turned to look at her, I became aware of a strange feeling tugging at my heart--as if something hit me. I looked at the smiling girl--was it a dream? She appeared to me like somebody from heaven--an Angel! I looked at her again--this time I was struck

with an awareness that the girl was familiar to me--as if I had known her all my life--her smile, her beautiful, charming face, her figure--truly enchanting!

She must have been the one my imagination and my heart was searching for all my life, and here she was--sitting right along side of me. I became somewhat disturbed, but overwhelmed with a feeling of bliss that I had never known before!

That night I took stock of myself. There was no doubt in my mind that this was the girl I had waited for all these years, against all others. But why should it come at a juncture of my life when I was about to go into the army and into the very mouth of a bloody war? Perhaps the reason I had become so suddenly enamored of this girl was that I wanted to have someone to write letters to while I was in the service, or someone to shed a tear for me, if I did not return; or if I survived, to have somebody to come back to?

I tried hard to put together the puzzle in my mind. All my thoughts led to the same conclusions--this was the girl I had been looking for all my life. Now that I had found her, I must do something to hold on to her, no matter what the cost--yet, I felt, I should not trust the first impression. I decided to take another look.

The next morning I did not wait until Morris brought Esther to the second *Seder*. Immediately after the noontime meal, I walked five blocks to Morris's house, where I found Clara's father and her sister Dora entertaining Esther.

I took a second look at Esther. She struck me as being even more dazzling than the night before. How old was she? But then, who cared? All speculation stopped--this was it! I decided to tell her, here and now. I asked her if she would like to take a stroll in Fairmount Park. Dora was flabbergasted! What! The idea Charles should take Esther so seriously as to invite her out for a stroll was unthinkable! To her, Esther was still a child. Sixteen and one-half years of age was too early for serious courtship. Dora did not say a word, but her face and her look so transparently reflected her mood that I hesitated for a moment. But Cupid had already completed his mission!

In the meantime, I began to run out of funds. For the past four months I had lived the "life of Riley." I had spent practically all my savings. To express my love for Esther, I decided to buy her a ring before she returned to Providence. In order to make such a purchase I would have to work for at least a week.

Jobs were plentiful. The Camden Shipyard in full page advertisements sought skilled sheetmetal workers, promising high wages and even deferment from induction into the Army, if qualified.

On the morrow after the two *Seders*, I made my way to the gate of the Camden Shipyard and was hired. On the third day, I was deferred from the Army. I made enough money the first week to buy Esther a modest gold ring to take home as a symbol of my love. Our fate and our love was now sealed forever!

Immediately after the Passover holidays, I took Esther to the train. When the whistle blew and the train

began to move, I felt that my second-half had moved away from my grasp and that it would be hard for me to live without her.

My life now took a new turn. All ambition for a profession, for intellectual distinction or cultural self-expression lost its ardor and its importance.

I had now found the real meaning of life--absorbing love that supercedes all values. In about three or four days, I received Esther's first letter and from then until her arrival with the entire Force family in Philadelphia, my life revolved around writing letters to her and waiting impatiently for her answers!

In my letters to her, I sought to persuade her father to move to Philadelphia, since Providence was not sharing in the war prosperity. Within two months after her return to Providence, Esther and the Force family moved to Philadelphia. I could now see Esther every day and the weekends were an endless excursion into all the curiosities the big city offers a romantic couple. Who could measure the bliss, the depth of tenderness and compassion that God and nature bestows on those blessed with true love?

Meantime, the war was coming to a final end and so were the spring and summer seasons that adorned my life with heavenly romance and splendor, to be followed by even a more eventful Fall.

On the eleventh day of November, 1919, Armistice was declared and the War was over.

Esther and I began to plan for a wedding. Two months after the Armistice, on January 12, 1919, Esther and I were

married at the home of the Forces. There was no glamor, no catered event, no music, but a solemn setting of consuming love that graced the union of two lovers!

And as the good Book says, "A man should leave his father and mother and devote himself to his wife"--so did I leave my carefree, bachelor life. I established a home, and began the exciting adventure of bringing forth a new generation, giving and taking from life in accordance with the capacity God and nature blessed us with!

In our fiftieth year of married bliss, in spite of occasional differences, normal to married couples, my adoration for Esther today is as fresh and tender as the first day I laid eyes on her!

We brought into the world three lovely daughters. They are all happily married. At this time, our greatest source of joy and inspiration are the eight grandchildren and the two great-grandchildren.

In Yiddish we would say, *"Aza nachas aff alle unsere liebe"* (We wish such bliss to all our loved ones).

ATLANTIC CITY

Crowded Conditions

My decision to move from Philadelphia to Atlantic City after a year and a half of marriage was prompted by the two compelling considerations that motivate most human behavior and which have a familiar sound in Jewish daily speech--*gesunt* (health) and *parnuse* (livelihood).

After returning from Cape May, New Jersey, my health was tolerably good, but after marriage, the burdens of establishing a home, the arrival of our first baby, the loss of our small savings in the bankrupt North Penn Bank, and, above all, the unsuccessful partnership in a business venture reacted most unfavorably upon my health.

I was definitely not well, yet I could not be as discriminating in selecting jobs as I had been when I was single. Attractive employment was offered to me in shipyards and railroad shops, but because of my poor health, I could not accept. I again began to look to the seashore for salvation.

When I saw an "ad" for a sheet-metal worker in Atlantic City, I rushed to the shore the same day. I was hired at once and remained overnight for a test. The date was June 28th, 1920. On July 3rd, Esther and the baby arrived.

Housing in Atlantic City after the war, as elsewhere in the country, was in such short supply, that anyone lucky

enough to have a spare corner in their dwelling or apartment, reaped a harvest.

My immediate problem was to get temporary quarters for Esther and the baby. With the assistance of friends I finally found a room with kitchen privileges in an apartment consisting of three bedrooms, a dining room and a kitchen. The front room, which was converted into a bedroom, was the only room with two windows. The other two bedrooms had but one small window each, which provided little light or air.

The original tenants, a family with four children, leased the front room and one bedroom with kitchen privileges to two elderly couples. For themselves and the four children they retained only one dark and airless room. When we confronted them with our proposition the impossible overcrowded condition did not trouble them. They merely insisted if their price were met, they would take us in. It was against all reason to move in, but what else could we do? Esther and the baby could not remain alone in Philadelphia.

On the train to Atlantic City, I tried to explain to Esther that until we could find a decent place, we would have to remain in what I jokingly called the "Temporary Palace."

When we entered the room, we found a bed, a dresser, and a crib, the latter having belonged to the landlady's two-year-old child. Esther took one look at the room, the furniture, and particularly the crib, and she nearly fainted. She refused to put the baby into the crib. There were then no restaurants on the northside of Georgia Avenue, nor could

we go out with an eight-month old infant, who had to be fed strict formulas periodically.

This was Esther's first crisis. I doubt whether Esther has ever since been through such a shattering experience as that first day and night in Atlantic City!

Two old women and the landlady, Mrs. Bell, went all-out to comfort Esther. They reasoned with her that it was a temporary arrangement and that as soon as an appropriate apartment could be found, her inconvenience would be over. But Esther was adamant. She would not trust her baby in a stranger's crib, nor would she undress and sleep in a strange bed in the small stifling room. With the baby in her lap she sat on the bed crying. It was past midnight when she finally placed the baby in the crib and went to bed.

The next day I had to go to work. The landlady, a very sympathetic young, native American, assured me that she would do everything in her power to gain Esther's confidence and make her feel that she was not among strangers.

When I returned from work that day, I found Esther smiling and completely reconciled to her new environment. She had found in Mrs. Bell, a mother, a sister--someone she had never before held so close to her heart. Here we remained eight months until we found a five room apartment on Bellevue Avenue, one and a half blocks from the Boardwalk.

However, our experiences before and after moving into the apartment is a saga in itself. The first ten weeks in Atlantic City at the height of the summer season left us with indelible memories that forty-eight years later and from the

vantage point of present day living standards, seem almost unbelievable!

Let me describe just one, more or less typical Sunday during our first summer before we learned from Atlantic City residents how to cope with impossible situations.

It was our second or third Sunday in Atlantic City. We already knew that the two elderly couples in our apartment were expecting a massive invasion of company. That Sunday morning we were all aroused by a daring robbery of two koshered chickens and a large stock of meat that for lack of cold storage inside the apartment, were left outdoors overnight.

After breakfast, Esther and I decided to leave the apartment to the elderly couples and their visitors. We placed the baby in a carriage and went off to the beach. It was not long before one of Mrs. Bell's children, a six or seven-year-old girl, appeared amidst the dense crowds on the beach. She came to summon us home, as a whole family of relatives from Philadelphia had arrived on the excursion train to visit us.

We were more scared than surprised! The thought that immediately presented itself was not that we would have to feed or entertain them, that was out of the question, but even to seat them in the overcrowded dining room was beyond our capabilities. We walked home, perplexed, but still hopeful that we would somehow be able to see our relatives without having to take them up to the apartment.

When we approached the house and saw who the relatives were, we were startled! It was the Lerners!

Now, who were the Lerners? Moishe Lerner, my father's first cousin, was about twenty years younger than my father. When he married, my parents were regarded with pride and admiration by the family. First, my mother, Chana Rochel, Yeedl *der Yusem's* daughter, was known for her *yichas* (nobility) and grand showing towards family; secondly, in responding to the needs of the less fortunate in the *mishpoche* (family), my parents had no equal. The most generous wedding gift was that of Moishe's most admired and respected cousins, Wowa and Chana Rochel.

Dvera, like her husband Moishe, was well regarded by my parents, particularly by my mother, but in Cherkassi, she had no way of showing her gratitude. Now, six years in America, the Lerners were well-established with a comfortable home and a fine family. Moishe was self-employed as a custom tailor, working at home with Dvera helping along.

When I arrived in America and settled with my mother's cousins, the Ellises, Dvera felt somewhat disappointed, but she also realized she could not compete with the Ellises since I was more attached to my mother's side of the family. However, she undertook to compensate for the missed opportunity by "spreading out the red carpet" whenever I chanced to come in to say "hello." The table was immediately set with refreshments, homemade cakes, strudels, all in the old style, but appetizing enough to fascinate the most scrupulous gourmet.

At my wedding, Moishe and Dvera considered themselves among the number one *machitonem* (relatives) and implemented their close relationship with a fine wedding present. After our

marriage, Dvera showed the same warm regard for Esther as she did for me. Both Moishe and Dvera followed with keen interest our adjustment to married life, our home, the birth of our first baby and so forth.

Suddenly, the news was flashed--Charles and Esther had moved to Atlantic City. Somehow, Dvera and Moishe felt dutybound to pay us a visit, to see how we were getting along. They had never been to Atlantic City, a place the whole world was talking about, but never before within reach of the Lerners.

This was their first opportunity to see with their own eyes the celebrated city, the boardwalk, the beaches, and even to bathe in the ocean. Mobilizing their resources, Moishe, Dvera and their three children boarded the excursion train for which the fare was one dollar for adults and fifty cents for children for a one-day, round trip. Furthermore, they borrowed bathing suits from their neighbors for themselves and the children just to make sure they would not miss the great pleasure of bathing in the Atlantic Ocean!

Well, I will leave it to the imagination of my readers to visualize the bewildering situation in which we were placed. The movies, T.V. shows and theaters have presented many such monstrous situations that often overtake innocent, well-meaning people. Usually, such shows are dismissed as gross exaggerations. Actually, no show or portrait can truly reveal the inner shock of helplessness of those caught in the net of fiercely conflicting realities!

Here was Esther, not yet nineteen years of age, with an eight-month-old

baby in her arms, with no place to turn in an overcrowded, overheated, dark room, trying hard to escape for the day and catch a breath of fresh air.

She still had not adjusted to the monstrous living conditions and was in desperate need of motherly care. Suddenly, as if her cup was not yet full, the Lerners appeared.

They were not the kind of relatives whom we could brush aside with excuses or announce there was no place to undress or to dine. To the dismay and chagrin of the landlords, Mr. and Mrs. Bell, the dining table had already been used twice.

How the five Lerners changed clothes for bathing in our small room and how, after the visitors of the two elderly couples and the Bell family were fed, we served a meal to the Lerners with the sympathetic help of Mrs. Bell is a story by itself.

When all the visitors left, the apartment remained crowded. With no relief from the parade of weekend visitors in sight, Mr. and Mrs. Bell reacted to the situation with mounting anger and disgust, while the chief response of their well meaning, helpless tenants was bewilderment.

When the ten-week seasonal lease expired, we mobilized the best efforts of all our friends to obtain another apartment. None was available.

We remained with the Bells unheated large front room all through the winter. It would have been considered a real tragedy to have lived under such trying conditions with an infant in the year 1968!

Somehow, in those days we regarded the worst housing discomforts as being almost bearable as long as the prospects for betterment were in sight.

At last, after eight months with the Bells, we finally moved into a five room apartment. We brought our furniture from Philadelphia. The installment business was as popular then as it is today. There were no difficulties in furnishing the five rooms of which two were bedrooms, and a large front living room, that in the summer season was converted into a bedroom, even as the Bells did. This one room alone paid for our furniture the first season we assumed the role of landlords.

The Building Boom

The image that Atlantic City presented to a newcomer in the year 1920 was far from that of a metropolis! The center of the city had as its hub the railroad stations--a typical country frame structure at Arkansas and Atlantic Avenues and three blocks away at Georgia Avenue, another station where excursion trains stopped right at the Boardwalk.

The city was bounded by Albany Avenue on the west, by the Inlet on the east, Arctic and Baltic Avenues on the north, and by Atlantic and Pacific Avenues and the Boardwalk on the south.

Beyond these limits lay scattered dwellings, dirt roads and marshes with blocks marked out, some with pavements, for future developments. The south side was predominantly studded with frame hotels. A few brick hotels proudly formed the "Atlantic City Skyline!"

The dwellings, both on the north and south sides were of cheap frame construction, nondescript, with few conveniences such as central heating. There were pretentious homes in exclusive neighborhoods for the wealthy residents, but these were few!

Inasmuch as Atlantic City was a summer resort, there were, besides hotel accommodations, dwellings built with an eye to accommodate summer help and vacationers of moderate means. Usually such houses were closed for the winter, as were most of the hotels.

The fame and growth of Atlantic City had its beginnings around the turn of the century when the unprecedented flow of immigrants and natural increase of population caused the big cities surrounding Atlantic City to become overcrowded.

During the summer, for those who could afford it, a cool, airy haven was found at the seashore. Atlantic City was near and caught the fancy of rich and poor alike.

Up until the first World War, Atlantic City grew gradually and normally, people were still cautious about investing in housing on a temporary basis, but somehow kept abreast of the times.

World War One changed all this. While the country flourished in unprecedented prosperity thereby placing enough money in the hands of ordinary hard-working people to permit them a week or a month's vacation at the shore, the construction industry remained at a standstill for four years.

Wide-awake businessmen, recognizing the profit potential of investments in

Atlantic City real estate, launched the great building boom characteristic of that which prevailed throughout the United States in the 1920's. Soon a wave of speculators combed the real estate market for choice lots. There were marsh lands within the designated city limits, which the natives refused to use for building purposes, even if the land were free.

Thanks to the new type of builders that appeared on the Atlantic City scene, the low marshlands, while still dirt cheap when compared with safe, high ground surfaced to a position of dignity. The rush for this cheap land came also from a new breed of land speculators.

During the years 1914-1918, the munitions industry, in order to attract labor for the production of dangerous explosives, offered most attractive wages. Anyone willing to risk his life could earn three and four times the wages paid other higher skilled workers. The industry did not require any skill. Anyone bold enough or desperately in need of money, took the gamble.

There were Jewish people with families who, out of desperation, risked their lives in the ammunition factories.

The entry of the United States into the war brought further demands for labor in the military camps. Anyone who could handle a hatchet and saw got a job at a decent wage. As a result, when the war was over a new kind of investor, speculator and builder appeared on the Jewish-American scene.

Many of this new breed were of the Don Quixote or Menachem-Mendel type. Most of them came to Atlantic City with hardly more than four or five hundred dollars.

They had heard of the land boom in Atlantic City, and so they came and immediately joined the game of buying and selling land. Good land, worthless land --what difference did it make to them? They did a "land office" business.

In the wake of these speculators, a new kind of builder followed. Very few were carpenters by trade. Most of the builders got their building diplomas in the army camps. After a couple of months there, some of the make-believe carpenters, noting how a frame barrack was put together, decided they could do even better, and Atlantic City was the right place, at the right time, and the rest was up to their "lucky stars in heaven"!

It is far beyond my ken to present a clear and complete picture of the characters that starred in the "Gold Rush" drama during the six or seven year period of the Atlantic City building boom.

Because of the surge of memories regarding personalities and events, I will limit myself to only a few personal experiences relating to that period.

After a period of ten months as foreman of a sheetmetal firm, I decided both by conviction and friendly advice to start my own Roofing and Sheetmetal business. Strange as it may seem I never gave a thought to the financial requirements of such an undertaking. More than the previous week's pay I did not possess. However, going into business at a moment's notice was not new to me. I already had several such ventures under my belt (the first when I was about twelve years old).

Furthermore, the day I came to Atlantic City, I left to a partner my half of a foundering business. I immediately obtained a one hundred dollar

loan from a "corporation" and with the whole-hearted assistance of good friends, I began to solicit business among the Jewish builders.

My first prospect was Mr. Levin. He was a man in his fifties, but with his beard and *yarmulke* (skull cap), he appeared seventy.

I entered the kitchen to the rear of his house. The rest of the two story house was rented to summer guests. I introduced myself in Yiddish, and told him that I wished to submit an estimate for roofing on his building project.

Almost without words, he showed me the location and the foundation that was already in place. He then handed me a blueprint. One look told me the story of the project. The print, which was crudely drawn, was an achievement of Mr. Levin himself. He told me to look it over and give him an estimate for the roofing. As there were no specifications, I asked him what kind of roof he wanted, to which he replied, "The best. I already have two estimates. What kind do you suggest?" Being my first prospect and trying to impress him with my competence and experience, I suggested the best roof. *"Eisoch voos!* What better jobs can you recommend?"

"O.K." I said, "I can recommend a better job." In about ten or fifteen minutes I quoted a price, for the better job.

"Well, young man," he replied, "I can't give you the job--I have an estimate for exactly half."

Inexperienced as I might have been in estimating and anxious as I was to obtain my first contract even at a loss, I simply did not have the money to lose in my first venture.

I left Mr. Levin rather shaken and disappointed. In the meantime, I sought out other Jewish contractors. The field was much larger than I had anticipated, with prospects unmistakably bright and promising even though I had not yet clinched one job, no matter how small.

During this time, a Mr. Shtam, who later became prominent among the Jewish subcontractors, appeared and advised me that although Mr. Levin was about ready to award the roofing contract he hesitated to do so when a young Jewish roofer needed the job. He wanted to do a good deed!

I then explained my side of the story and added that Mr. Levin should not hesitate to give the job out for half my price. Next day, the man appeared again.

"Mr. Levin is willing to split the difference and pay you sixty-five dollars more just so you should do the job." I again refused. On the third day Mr. Shtam looked all over town for me. Late that night he found me at home and told me to proceed with the job in accordance with my estimate. I did the job. I relate this episode only because Mr. Levin was not an isolated case.

While there were Jewish builders, also new to the field, who were imaginative, enterprising and quite competent as builders and developers in changing the face of Atlantic City, Mr. Levin was typical of an archaic type of Jewish builder who simply could not cope with a field as strange as building.

Buying and selling fruit, produce, clothing or other articles was something within the experience of the average European Jew, ghetto or no ghetto. I distinctly recall an incident during my

first year in America. Accompanied by a relative who understood clothing, I went to buy a Sunday suit on South Street, then the clothing center of Philadelphia. We did not enter the store, rather we were pulled in. After making my selection, my cousin asked, "How much?" "Thirty dollars" came the reply. My cousin offered five dollars. After a lengthy give and take, we finally settled for nine dollars. The deal was made in a businesslike manner.

But building was an entirely different field. The Levin type of builder had from the very start mistrusted non-Jewish subcontractors, clinging tenaciously to available Jewish contractors, who like himself, were drawn to the "gold rush" at the shore.

There were already two Jewish bricklaying contractors, and also Jewish plumbers, electricians, plasterers, etc. Concrete and paving was the one craft, that no Jew was known to follow at that time. This was a craft completely dominated by gentiles, particularly Italians. The Jewish builders needed a Jewish concrete contractor. Mr. Shtam, the intermediary, who prevailed upon me to do Mr. Levin's roofing job, was also a stranger in the building field. Like most of the new breed of real estate and building speculators, he came to Atlantic City to try his luck. He had been an insurance agent. He acquired a modest sum of money not through any success in selling insurance but from the sale of his home at a highly inflated price.

With several hundred dollars, he began to buy and sell lots, mostly to the arriving so-called "builders." In his contacts with them he took their measure

and found their weak spots. Fear of a gentile subcontractor was one. Like the other newcomers, he was still somewhat unsure of his English, but he was undoubtedly shrewd and intelligent. He soon found an Italian concrete workman who neither spoke nor understood English, but Mr. Shtam apparently knew the secret of communicating with him and a successful partnership of long standing came into being, thus providing the final link of Jewish subcontractors to the new breed of builders!

My first contract before receiving Mr. Levin's order is worth describing as an interesting "first," because it throws a ray of light on eternal truths that govern human behavior. Those who handle wild beasts maintain that the most ferocious beast will not attack man or animal when not hungry or provoked. Human behavior, with few exceptions, is not dissimilar.

My first business venture in Atlantic City brought me in contact with people who were economically hungry, insecure in their position as either speculators or builders, fearful of being overtaken and outsmarted in a new game that they walked into blindfolded.

The friends who advised and assisted me in my new venture pointed out that, if I could obtain the roofing business from a certain newly organized Jewish building firm, my success would be assured. I accepted their advice. For several days I besieged the offices of this firm until I succeeded in establishing contact with Mr. S. the member who handled the subcontracts.

The firm consisted of three partners who, having been involved in a

successful community building project, caught the fever of the building boom. Regardless of the fact that it was a new field to them, they did not hesitate, after only a few tries with three or four small houses, to launch the first large scale building project in Atlantic City.

I was warmly received by all three partners who spoke to me in Yiddish. Mr. S. then advised me of the extent of the roofing work and handed me a set of plans and specifications, promising to favor me if my bid were in line with the other bids.

In a few days I submitted my bid to Mr. S. When I returned the next day for his answer he met me with a handshake telling me that he was glad to award me the contract, and that he felt he was doing a good deed both for me and the Jewish community by helping to establish a Jewish roofing firm in Atlantic City. Furthermore, they would finance the project by paying outright for material and wages as they came due.

While he was explaining the terms I could hardly believe what I heard. It seemed fantastic. I was entrusted with the biggest job in town, consisting of twenty-two units and six stores with no worries about finances. I signed the contract and got set for the job.

While making up the list for material to be ordered I suddenly became aware of serious omissions I made in calculating the amount of material needed for the project. Still, I was not sure of the extent of the error.

The very next day I took the plans and specifications to Philadelphia. My first "boss" in America, Mr. Chernoff, still regarded me warmly. When he saw

me with a set of plans and specifications, I almost heard his inner thoughts--"Why didn't I ever think of settling in the beautiful seashore resort?"

He looked the plans over. I asked him what his quotation would be? His answer struck me with the force of a bombshell. It was almost twice as much as the amount of money I had signed for.

This was not a matter of a few hundred dollars; it involved thousands of dollars. I laid bare my predicament to Mr. Chernoff. He tried hard to retrieve my first venture as a roofing contractor in Atlantic City.

He told me that he had some tile left over from a large roofing project which could save me about seven hundred dollars. He would order all material in his name, and his trade discounts could net me another couple hundred dollars. My labor and management were also worth several hundred dollars. However, he succeeded in convincing me that I should proceed with the job without disclosing to the builders that I knew of the raw deal they dealt me. After they had paid for the material, there would be little money left for labor. They would have to come across to finish the job.

I followed Mr. Chernoff's advice and immediately ordered the material. But, events did not turn out the way he predicted. Before starting on the first job, I became involved in a new project. This one also consisted of twenty-six units. The builder in this instance was an Americanized young man, a fast and convincing talker. He drifted here with most of the speculators.

When he first approached me, he had already been involved in a building

project that boomeranged in his face. He was the kind of man who never succeeded in acquiring financial assets of his own. He was, however, a genius in manipulating other people's money. In any case, no subcontractor would do business with him. Knowing that I was "green" in the business and unaware of the intricate pitfalls along the way, I was his logical quarry. Except for one thing, which he did not know. I was now able to face my new customers without the blindfold of my first unlucky venture.

I submitted an estimate to him, as much out of line upward, as my first venture was downward. Also, instead of being paid a certain percentage for work completed, my contract contained an unusual stipulation: that I was to be paid in full every week for work completed. This project, like the first was sold before the foundations were in place.

Financiers maintained close supervision over the handling of finances and in order to expedite the completion of the project, they paid the subcontractors promptly. Before my first job was half completed, I finished the second project with sufficient profit to swallow a fourteen hundred dollar loss from my first venture, and put fifteen hundred dollars in the bank. All this happened within the first five months of my business career!

These ventures were typical of the business dealings during my first two or three years in Atlantic City. In the meantime, within the ranks of builders, bold Jewish enterprisers appeared. Mostly immigrants, to be sure, but these were men of vision who had the master

builder's approach. High-rise office buildings, apartment houses, banks, hotels, and theaters began to spring up, creating a metropolitan complex that still ornaments the Atlantic City skyline.

For the next six years, the most serious problems that caused me sleepless nights, were the ever increasing need for mechanical and mobile facilities and storage and working space.

I built four shops to accommodate the increasing volume of business. When, in 1926, I finally built the most spacious, all-inclusive building facility to accommodate all of my business requirements under one roof, time and senseless speculation were racing incessantly to topple the entire American economic system into the bottomless abyss of the 1929 financial debacle. With it went the model shop, the thriving business, the substantial investments and all hope for eventual recovery.

But, then, this is a story in itself! After the first three months in business, flushed with success and a volume of business far beyond the capacity of one man to handle, I invited my two cousins from Philadelphia and brother Jacob to come and settle in Atlantic City.

With their arrival, I joined the big league operators and extended my field of operations to the non-Jewish builders. This proved profitable and rather more substantial since they were mostly well-established and operated on solid ground. However, during the first three or four years I dealt chiefly with the "green" crop of builders, who concentrated in the Inlet section where

building lots were cheap. Builders of this type attracted architects and real estate men who neither knew nor required too much "fancy, shmancy know-how" about the building industry. So the real estate men that sold lots to the so-called builders did not know that they were selling lots to their friends that were covered with three feet of water after every northeastern storm.

The chief architect for these inexperienced builders was a half-baked draftsman. Under New Jersey laws, at that time, one capable of drawing a building plan was approved as an architect. So, when one of the so-called builders placed a deposit on a lot, he immediately rushed to the office of Mr. Green and ordered a plan. Within three or four hours, he had a plan and stock specifications. Neither Mr. Green nor the builder were much concerned about the specifications. It was more form than substance and used at its best merely as a guideline. Nor was the building inspector hard on the "green" crop of builders. He was rather sympathetic and instructive. Plainly, there were no obstacles on the road to becoming a builder. It caught the fancy of the typical Menachem-Mendels, who, as in the instance of the old time *klesmer* (musician) seeing the known *shlemiel's* (ne'er-do-well) relatives proudly strutting the streets with sets of plans, felt that if they could do it, he could do it even better--and so he too became a builder!

Another instance: A man, hearing of the building boom in Atlantic City, sold his fruit stand in Philadelphia and came to the shore and immediately established himself as a builder. He was a

tall man, with an attractive personality, but one who probably never saw or understood a blueprint. He became quite a respectable builder and was responsible for many projects.

A memorable character was one whom we shall call Mr. F. He could hardly make himself understood in English, much less read or write. This man was tying up parcel after parcel of lots, taking estimates on the fast-drawn plans and specifications as they came off Mr. Green's drafting board.

The kind of houses these builders erected is not difficult to imagine. Luckily the brick rowhouse was the easiest to build, and so, the Inlet, up until this day, bears the stamp of this muddled type of construction. And, WONDER OF WONDERS! The houses after forty-five years are still there withstanding the periodic floods, some of them patched and sagging under the load of premature aging--but still carrying the imprint of a highly spirited group who contributed much to the growth of the Inlet section of Atlantic City!

Of no less interest than their "Don Quixote" approach to business, was the social and cultural atmosphere that dominated the newly emerging group.

Housing was the scarcest commodity at that time. Therefore as soon as their first housing projects were sold, the builders would confidently plan a house for themselves in the next building project. And so, within two or three years, almost one hundred Jewish families settled in the Inlet, among them the builders, subcontractors, and workers in the various crafts.

Most of these people were scarcely eight or nine years removed from their *shtetel* in eastern Europe. They still lived in much the same manner as they had in the Old Country, although they had discarded the old religious traditions--observance of the Sabbath, holidays and *Kashroth*. It was easier and cheaper to live without them. Otherwise, the American scene impressed them merely with the opportunity to work the longest hours, taking on the hardest tasks, using the smartest *shtetel* dealing methods, aiming for one goal--to make a dollar, and rise to the top!

However, while the Inlet was in the process of developing its own image, Atlantic City came under the benevolent influence of able and responsible Jewish leadership. This was the time when several Synagogues and a Reformed Temple were built.

Jewish societies were organized, a thriving "corporation" was doing a land office business and a Jewish political club was active and in contact with political bosses. Atlantic City could already boast of a Jewish Mayor, and the first Congressman from Atlantic City was a Jew!

These were the years when the hotels and the pleasure potential of Atlantic City spread their fame throughout the metropolitan areas to the compact Jewish and gentile masses.

Rich and poor alike were attracted to the beautiful beaches and boardwalk of Atlantic City!

But the Jewish people of the Inlet were as far removed from the big city *yarid* (tumult) as their construction was from the real thing. It took several

years before the Inlet melting pot finally crystallized into a coherent whole.

With few exceptions, the community consisted mostly of young families or couples in the process of bringing forth a new generation.

As new houses came off the assembly line, there soon appeared Jewish delicatessen stores, groceries, tailor shops, shoemaker and barber shops. The barber shop was the popular meeting place for disseminating Inlet gossip.

The building boom in the Inlet created unprecedented prosperity, and the barbers themselves were now land speculators and builders. It would be no exaggeration to say that the present day beauty salons for women have nothing on the Inlet barber shops of the 1920's.

A decent builder or subcontractor worth his salt would feel degraded not to spend five dollars for a haircut and all the trimmings. The *shtetel* atmosphere of the Inlet asserted itself in many ways, but none as lasting and picturesque as the nicknames that most popular individuals were branded with--like *"Chazerel," "Laizele,"* and *"Pleaderen."* Nevertheless they were borne with grace by those so named.

The most popular sport was card playing--and POKER was the dominant game. I did not play cards, but not always could I excuse myself from being a "regular guy." The one time I participated in a poker game, it cost me fifty dollars, only because that was all I had on my person. Had I had one hundred and fifty dollars it would have gone the same way. The other sports were wrestling and boxing.

Few people in the Inlet had a need for any religious or cultural outlets. Not until the year 1926 did anything of a religious nature make its appearance there--and then not because the predominant segment of the Inlet community expressed a need for it. It just happened that a retired man bought a home in the Inlet.

He arrived in America before the turn of the century and prospered here as a saloon keeper. Somehow he seemed the personification of a "saloon keeper" --tall, broad, with a bald head, a round shaven face and a square chin. Within several months after his arrival, he began to invest large sums of money in new houses before they were completed, thus gaining the favor of most builders.

When this man, Mr. Felt, proposed to establish a prayer house for the High Holidays, the builders responded enthusiastically. Most of the builders soon enlisted the support of the subcontractors and their own working forces and in little time fifty tickets at five dollars each were sold. This was sufficient to cover the expenses of renting a hall, obtaining scrolls, prayer shawls and other clerical vestments. That year the Inlet Jewish community, although lacking the deep spiritual commitment that motivates the truly religious Jew, had a House of Prayer. It, nevertheless, evoked a nostalgic feeling that here was something too precious to discard. The fly in the ointment was Mr. Felt insisted that he alone would perform as Cantor.

Many suspected that the man had been too busy during his active years to have ever attended a religious service.

Yet, Mr. Felt was not challenged, and he had his way.

From the moment he opened the services, it became apparent that Mr. Felt, as a Cantor, was a dismal failure. He had neither the voice, nor an elementary understanding of holiday chanting. Throughout the eight days of *Succoth* Mr. Felt failed in his strenuous efforts to assemble the minimum requirement of ten men to conduct services. He was plainly a disappointed man, but would not accept defeat. He sought a way out to turn what might have been considered a failure into a glorious triumph. During the *Succoth* week, he announced that on the last day of the holidays, on *Simchas Tora*, the day when drinking in the prayer house to the point of intoxication is permissable, he would offer a *Simchas Tora* party, and not with bootleg liquor either, but with the real "McCoy," bottled in bond! It was during prohibition years. Who, except a one-time saloon keeper, would be in possession of this precious liquid?

Needless to say, the announcement electrified the Inlet ticket holders. They all came for the daytime services, as though it was *Kolnidre* night. A large table was set with refreshments and drinks. Indeed, it was the real "McCoy"!

The services were on and, of course, Mr. Felt with the Scroll in his arms, was leading the procession around the improvised pulpit.

The worshippers were more interested in the drinks and refreshments than the monotonous chanting of Mr. Felt. Suddenly, Benny Minovitz, wrapped in a long prayer shawl, yellow with age, darted from the crowded congregation, seized the Scrolls from Mr. Felt's arms and began to

dance and sing in the traditional manner with a gusto and flexibility that startled the congregants.

Apparently, the drinks were not lost on Benny Minovitz. For some two hours the Inlet men, who thought the holiday chantings were a gross disappointment, now felt well compensated. As the saying goes, "ALL IS WELL, THAT ENDS WELL"!

The extraordinary party with bonded whiskies in time of prohibition was an exciting event by itself, but the revelation that Benny Minovitz, an unassuming little man, a hard-working carpenter, could at the right time and proper place, turn an otherwise drab situation into a hilarious affair, was the most pleasant finale to the first religious undertaking by the Inlet Community.

My residence in the Inlet was not by choice, but rather one of grim necessity.

After having spent eighteen months in the hard begotten apartment, Esther, now with two infants, got up one morning with the firm resolve to leave the apartment. Bedbugs and cockroaches were nothing new to us on both sides of the Atlantic but the size, the numbers and onslaught of them in our apartment were such that our beds, our furniture, the babies' cribs were all so infested with them, that we had to leave everything except our clothes and run away to a furnished apartment at the height of the season, at a fabulous cost, and to of all places--that sparsely settled, unattractive section of Atlantic City--the Inlet.

Meantime, the second shop I built within the first year of my business venture proved inadequate to the demands

of my ever growing business. Inasmuch as the bulk of my business was now in the Inlet section and building lots were still available, I bought two parcels of land within a block of each other and on one I built an up-to-date shop of brick construction with a warehouse and plenty of ground for outdoor storage facilities.

On the second lot I built two brick houses, one for myself and one for my brother Jacob. Within two years, I found myself again cramped for shop and storage space. For the fourth time in five years I was compelled to build a new shop. This one was close to the Inlet area and was considered the last word in modern industrial construction--with a railroad siding for economic car loading and unloading. This, however, was also my last building venture.

While the building was going up, the spectre of the coming economic deluge was hardly discernable.

With the momentum of the building boom emerged a community of Jewish settlers with families totally unattached to any religious or cultural institutions. Their children were reaching school age. Public schools were close by and for many it was enough. But this also was the time when the Workmen's Circle and the *Farband*--Jewish National Workers Alliance began to spread out beyond their metropolitan confines.

Here in the Inlet, they found fertile ground for their organizing drives. The Workmen's Circle, a purely worker's organization based on a socialistic, atheistic ideology, was soon a going concern.

The Farband, based on a socialistic, Jewish national and Zionist ideology

brought to the surface the dormant need for Jewish life, not only for workers, but also for small businessmen.

Both organizations were Yiddish speaking and provided its members with sick benefits, cemetery and life insurance. But whereas the Workmen's Circle stressed the theme of social revolution, the Farband stressed the need for Jewish secular and national education for children and Jewish culture for adults.

The organization was formed with no difficulty, and at the third meeting, one of the builders suggested a large property, upon which was erected a pretentious building named the Folk's Institute, containing classrooms, meeting rooms and an assembly hall. The building was financed with a thirty thousand dollar mortgage and five thousand dollars cash.

A Yiddish speaking teacher soon organized the school and prominent lecturers began to visit the Folk's Institute. With all this went a newly organized "corporation." The meetings soon brought to the surface the typical *Schreyers* (big talkers) as well as sincere idealists who later contributed much to every worthwhile Jewish community undertaking.

The most salutary result of the appearance of the Farband was the new sense of identity that stimulated the Inlet Jewish community. Weekly programs of meetings, lectures and Jewish concerts captured the interest of the Jewish community of Atlantic City, but particularly of the Inlet residents. Holiday celebrations by the school children with the accent on "national" (not, God forbid, religion) contributed much to the

awakening of the cultural and national consciousness of the parents. The school, the lecture, the concert forum reawakened the Jewish identity that in the stress and strife period of planting their roots on the American soil, had previously eluded them.

As time went on, their children grew up and followed the general Jewish pattern of unprecedented growth and development in every field of endeavor.

The Inlet Jewish community can boast of contributing to the entertainment world such men as Zeki, the Lamplighter, Arthur Tracy, the Street Singer, and many others. However, it should be noted, that here in the melting pot, Jewish talent and genius asserted itself mostly in the professional, educational and economic areas. It is, therefore, unusual that from the Inlet Jewish community two brothers emerged who chose permanent military careers, served with distinction, and achieved high rank. A peculiar irony of their tale lies in the fact that the father of the two men--one an Admiral and the other a Colonel--was a prominent leader of the Workmen's Circle; a dedicated idealist who preached the gospel of a world free from capitalist exploitation and liberated from communist enslavement, and who believed, above all, in the abolition of military and naval power. "Only in America!"

A Briss in the Inlet

A Bar Mitzvah in the Old Country was not a big affair. It was so self-evident that a thirteen year old boy had learned all the requirements and assumed

the responsibilities symbolized by the Bar Mitzvah that to make a big show was superfluous.

However, an engagement party, a wedding and a *Briss* (circumcision) were matters of great moment in the life of a Jew. In this country, long before the multi-million dollar Bar Mitzvah fad captured the fancy of the younger Jewish generation, the *Briss* was one of the first traditional celebrations to be considered excess baggage and as a momentous celebration it lost its meaning.

Perhaps among the strictly Orthodox gentry, a *Briss* still held sway, but in the Inlet, a *Briss* with all the trimmings was really a rarity. Neither the spiritual climate nor the cultural awareness here were conducive for such an event. Besides, the diversities which marked those from different geographic backgrounds were still unresolved in the melting pot.

Here lived Russian, Ukranian, Polish, Hungarian, Galician and Lithuanian Jews! The distinctness of each ethnic group was perhaps most pronounced in their Yiddish dialects. In the Inlet all these diversified Jewish groups had one common denominator. They all agreed that Jewish religious and traditional life was passé in America and gave it up without much effort.

And so, in this tiny Inlet melting pot lived a Rumanian subcontractor, Mr. Lutman, whose daughter gave birth to a son. The Rumanians were never satisfied with any other cuisine, be it American or Jewish, except their own. Consequently, they always congregated privately where they could feast on food and drink, Rumanian style, to their heart's content.

Moreover, they were very particular and boastful of the wines and steaks that only Rumanians knew the secret of preparing and consuming in the manner of genuine gourmets!

Now the moment arrived for Mr. Lutman to prove publicly the superiority of Rumanian cuisine and the joy the Rumanian epicure derived from it.

The event took place on a Saturday in Mr. Lutman's new home. The guests assembled in time. The *Moyel* (one who actually performs the circumcision rite) was already there. The topic of conversation was "a *Briss* in America." In the Old Country people saw or knew what it was, but in America, most people regarded it as a curiosity. Even more provoking of curiosity was the delicious aroma of steaks being barbecued in the kitchen.

Cooking on the Sabbath may not have been fitting for the celebration of a religious rite--but who cared?

The Reverend asked no questions, nor was he confronted with a request to prove his competence and validity as a religious performer. Well, the circumcision was performed American style. That is, the Sundick and Quartershaft was given to anyone who happened to be closest, with no emphasis on the honor of being Godfather, etc. The baby was immediately removed and the *L'chaims* took over. Soon the furniture was moved to the side and long tables and benches were brought in. The tables were loaded with pitchers of wine and such a variety of food that the senses were overwhelmed.

After a few drinks and sampling some of the most tempting delicacies, the guests became high. This was before Jewish life in the Inlet organized around

the Farband and Workman's Circle, where Jewish folk songs enlivened every gathering.

When the guests became "heavy of foot" and "light in the head," they began to express their joys and sorrows in loud conversation. Suddenly, the homespun waiters put a board about nine by nine inches square and one inch thick in front of each guest, upon which was placed a red-hot sizzling one inch thick steak, sprinkled with tiny red peppers and garlic. I knew Americans ate steak. I had eaten steak in Cape May. But I had never seen or eaten a one inch thick steak on a board. Whether it was the board, the steak or my imagination, I have never since eaten meat so exotic in taste and appearance.

After the food and drinks were enthusiastically consumed, the long tables and benches were removed. Small card tables were set up and several groups of men and women sat down to play cards. As one of the "boys," I found myself in a group of five or six men. The game we played was POKER. After several games, I was forced to retire. I lost the fifty dollars I had on my person. Fifty dollars to a big "tycoon" like myself did not matter much, although somewhere from the depths of my "inner" self, a chastising voice kept repeating, "Gambler, you hideous gambler."

I left the house, still a little shakey, both from the rich food and drink and the gambling experience. To add another unusual event to an unusually eventful day, that Saturday was the coldest day of the year. When I tried to start my two year old Dodge, it was frozen stiff. The engine was ruined.

I had to walk home, blowing as the saying goes, "hot and cold." Yet, in the deep fastness of memory, the first *Briss* in the Inlet still registers as a great day!

Of course, the *Briss* itself was a memorable event, but what is so great about losing fifty dollars gambling in cards, or letting one's car freeze?

The answer, believe it or not, is that I never, but never, since that Saturday, played cards or gambled again. Also, a few days after my car froze, I was thrilled sitting behind the wheel of a brand new REO!

The End of an Era

Seven years is only a fleeting moment in world history or in the course of human events. Yet, significant changes for good or evil are known to have taken place in much shorter periods. However, in the life of an individual or community, seven years may constitute a long era of growth and development and yet end up in complete disintegration.

Such was the fate of many individuals in the Inlet and Atlantic City Jewish community when like most Americans, they were caught in the 1929 economic debacle. What comes to mind of that period, begging to be chronicled, are the newly successful businessmen and the evolving social structure so promising at that time. Also of no small interest is the manner in which human nature asserts itself when faced with problems of self-preservation.

Compared with Atlantic City's high swinging builders, the Inlet tycoons were nothing but small fry. They did not rise

on wings as was the case with the spirited builders in Atlantic City.

The Inlet "big-shots" rose by force of a mighty wind. When it blew itself out, they crashed to the ground, from whence they came, each to his place of origin. The grocery man, the fruit peddler, the teamster, the musician, all tried to re-establish themselves in their previous callings either in Atlantic City or elsewhere. It was a bitter pill for them to swallow. Yet, they were considered fortunate compared with the unattached, hopeless and desperate fallen "greats." However, there was also the Menachem-Mendel types and they, too, ended up from whence they came.

Mr. F., whom we have described previously, advanced so rapidly as a result of his manipulations, that he and his partner, the money man, achieved as builders a reputation inflated beyond all proportions. The competition for a place in the sun, was chiefly carried on among the wives of the newly rich. Many offered conspicuous expression of the success of their husbands with the display of fine furs and diamonds.

However, neither Mr. F. nor his wife, though young and beautiful, had any taste for such things. As a result when the crash came, and some of the other Inlet builders fell back upon selling or pawning a piece of fur or jewelry, Mr. F.'s family did not possess a single item that could be converted into bread and butter.

They soon left Atlantic City, to re-establish their ties with *mishpocha* in Philadelphia.

In the early 1930's, the Farband organization was a going concern. Once

a week there were well attended business and cultural meetings. The Farband "Corporation" also met once a week. One evening, during the "corporation" meeting Mr. F. showed up. He had lost weight and looked bad, as if all the worries of the world had descended upon him.

He was most warmly received. After the grand welcome Mr. F. was then asked the reason for his visit to Atlantic City. "Well, I have some business to promote here. Gentlemen, *ich been aff Gehacktene Tzures* (I am in desperate trouble). I need financial aid. Here is a model of a famous boat. I would like to raffle it off, right here and now. Whatever you can do for me gentlemen, will be greatly appreciated."

There were thirty people at the meeting. We sent Mr. F. home with thirty dollars and the cost of his fare to and from Atlantic City.

Thus far I have portrayed the rise and fall of various types of builders who surfaced during the roaring twenties in and around Atlantic City. I singled out individuals who in the main represented the majority, who sought their fortune here during the building boom.

However, I can't exclude myself as an innocent bystander or observer, as one who merely watched the parade pass by.

I, too, represented a certain, not altogether unique type, whose emergence from the convulsive booming era into a new start was no less dramatic and bewildering than mine.

As stated before, the gathering clouds of the impending economic collapse were recognized sooner in Atlantic City than in many other places. Luxury businesses were first to suffer throughout

most of the country. Atlantic City had only one commodity to sell--LUXURY! Our entire economic structure suddenly ground to a screeching halt with the building industry in the forefront.

My position as a successful businessman, the proud owner of a modern, well-equipped shop, stocked with material and the employer of an organized labor force, was not as immediately affected as was the case with other businessmen. There were large construction projects still going on within an accessible distance from the shore. I tried my luck there, and surprisingly, succeeded in signing up large contracts, thus keeping my equipment and labor at work.

On the surface it looked good. I continued ordering material in volume for monthly delivery. Shortly after starting several large projects, things began to happen.

The local builders, who, because of notes or open accounts, were indebted to me, could not meet their payments. Out-of-town builders, who under contract were supposed to meet designated payments during progress of work, either absconded with the construction money or abandoned the project unfinished, because of lack of funds to meet their obligations to the subcontractors. It hit me like an avalanche. I invested large sums of material and labor into projects that went sour.

Early in 1929 I was deeply mired in financial trouble. I sought legal advice, hoping against hope for a miracle. My lawyer advised me that wherever I was heavily involved, to try and finish the job, no matter what the gamble implied.

The lesser projects were to be abandoned altogether as a complete loss.

I was now faced with a hard decision--to gamble good money that I did not have on bad money that was not there or take a loss outright and forget about it. I decided to take the gamble.

Actually, the pinch of making ends meet had made itself felt as early as 1928. My assets were still solid. Thanks to my policy of always keeping a step ahead of builders who overstepped their credit allowance, I came out with small losses from the Inlet builders. My secret weapon was, instead of being their creditor, I became their customer. So, for instance, when Mr. F. overextended his credit with his deals and projects, regardless of his ability to meet the accrued financial obligations imposed by his reckless manipulations, I had him build three homes, one for my father, one for my brother Jacob and one for me. With other builders I did the same thing. When 1928 arrived I had enough property and other business assets to seriously consider giving up my business, and retire on a comfortable income so that I could realize my long cherished ambition of obtaining a college education.

And here is where the irony of fate stepped in. While I was entertaining these beautiful dreams, the gathering clouds were already darkening the bright skies and the economic breakdown in Atlantic City descended with galloping speed.

During the year, seeing what was happening and finding money progressively scarce, I began to refinance my properties from token to solid mortgages. All the while I kept pouring money into projects

I was committed by contract to deliver before I could apply for payment. As these payments were not made I began to see the handwriting on the wall. At the end of 1928 I was worried, but not yet desperate.

It was at the beginning of 1929 that the full force of my financial troubles descended upon me. Tenants of the various properties stopped paying rent. Payments for interest, taxes, insurance, etc. came due. I could not meet the payments. I soon realized I could neither keep the properties nor sell them. In desperation, I began to accept anything above the mortgage. By mid 1929 I retained four pieces of property that carried only token mortgages.

When the picture gradually began to change, I still entertained hopes that I could salvage some of my valuable properties--my home, my shop and other choice parcels.

It was a sad day for me when I decided to give them up. I could not meet my weekly payroll. Material under contract of monthly delivery kept on arriving. Payments on notes had stopped since early 1928. I had to make monthly token payments on them, open book accounts receivable were frozen. At times I found myself completely insolvent.

I recall an incident when a carload of steel arrived. To release it I had to pay forty dollars in freight charges. For thirty days the car stood on the tracks opposite my shop, subject to a fine of two dollars per day. Instead of forty dollars I had to pay one hundred dollars to release it, with the money obtained at abnormally high interest. It was then that I placed first and second

mortgages on my choice properties at crazy bonuses. These also were lost to the mortgageers.

1930 was ushered in, more to the tune of a funeral march than the usual hilarious abandon of the immediate past. Many of our banks were already closed. Loans could only be obtained by way of tremendous bonuses, but even this source began to dry up. One example of the fantastic conniving and throat slashing of the times will illustrate the immoral depth into which otherwise good people could sink.

My despair over my inability to obtain cash drove me to an office notorious as the last resort for the desperate. The office procedure seemed normal enough. First order of business was the purchase of a lot for two hundred dollars. The lot was to be found on a sub-division map as a number situated somewhere in the New Jersey marshlands. The purchasers knew it was a "gimmick," but they signed on the dotted line anyway. The next step was to sign ten weekly checks undated at one hundred dollars per week.

The borrower would then get a check for seven hundred dollars to be deposited three days after the date of issuance. I signed all the papers and received the seven hundred dollar check. Three days later, I deposited the check and proceeded to issue checks of my own. Hardly six weeks had past when I received a batch of my checks marked "insufficient funds." I was stupefied. Was it possible that I had overdrawn? No, I did not! My lenders had unceremoniously deposited all ten checks four weeks before they were due. I stormed into their office demanding an explanation.

The operators--four or five of them--were sitting around a large desk, pale and downcast, in an atmosphere more of a morgue than an office. One of them, the cashier, produced a box with bounced checks and notes, saying, "You say you are outraged? You are in trouble? We believe you, but at least you can call us bastards, swindlers and threaten us. We are facing ruin at the hands of people as trustworthy as you, who are now total financial wrecks, and we have nobody even to talk to." He did not hesitate to show me the signatories of the checks, and makers and endorsers of the notes, glancing over the names, I could hardly believe my eyes. But it was true.

I left the office with a kinder evaluation of the so-called heartless usurers, but not a bit relieved of my financial worries. During that time a bankrupt metal distributor who for years enjoyed my confidence paid me a visit. Inasmuch as he was aware of my financial difficulties, he had a plan that would, in one grand slam, rid me of all my financial burdens. His proposition was simple enough. Since my credit rating was still good, there was a golden opportunity for me to get rich quick. All I had to do was to order carloads of material from my suppliers. He would dispose of it, sharing the receipts fifty-fifty after which I would declare myself bankrupt and my troubles would be over. For a day and a night I nearly went out of my mind. I owed to "corporations," to banks on notes and loans, interest and payments due on mortgages and signed checks--the most pressing and immediate obligations. No doubt, I had reached the end of the line. Income a

trickle--outgo a flood. No more property on which to place mortgages. A blank, black wall faced me on every turn. Whether it was the remote hope of a miracle that contracts, which on the advice of lawyers I had completed on defaulted building projects, might yet materialize, or just a sense of moral outrage, I felt much relieved when I rejected the offer. However, search for loans and financial relief occupied my entire being by day and night.

One cheerless November morning in 1930 when the skies were low, laden with heavy clouds, and a dry, cold, bone-chilling wind raged mercilessly, anyone in my circumstances would have been struck with the feeling that even the elements of nature joined in a conspiracy to more deeply emphasize the hopeless misery of those trapped like wild animals in a cage.

That morning I received a telephone call from my lawyer, the fifth or sixth periodic call, reporting on one of those hopeless cases he was handling for me. This was a two year old litigation of a $12,000.00 loss in one of the shipwrecked building projects.

This time, however, he indicated that he would like to see me at his office before five o'clock. When I came in, he greeted me at the door, saying, "Well, Mr. Rubinstein, the sad news is, that your case is closed. It was a total loss. Sit down so I can explain."

I was not too much upset by one more disaster. I almost smiled at him. He sat down, opened his drawer and pulled out a check, saying "Here, Mr. Rubinstein is one loss that carries with it some

good cheer." He handed me a check for forty-five hundred dollars!

For a moment, I was stunned. I did not know whether to cry or dance for joy. Until he handed me the check my heart was heavy, my mood tense and agitated. I had the feeling of being hopelessly crushed and enveloped in darkness.

Suddenly, a ray of light blinded me. My heart jumped out of its bonds, the depressed feeling left me. I was free--delivered from the deepest depths of despair. What a glorious feeling!

But the release from the pent-up troubled feelings produced a negative climax. The shock and sudden release was too much for me. Within a week, I contracted scarlet fever. I spent six weeks in a hospital and six months recuperating. When I returned to active life I left behind not only a life-threatening disease, but also the eventful period in which the drama of my rise and fall as a successful businessman was played out.

I was now ripe for a new start--an experience not altogether strange to me. To start from the ground up always struck me as a romantic adventure.

What will it be--success or disappointment? If success--I would thank my lucky star. Should it result in a failure, so what? It could only lead to a new start.

However, the transition this time was not fraught with difficulties. All burdens and worries that heretofore made life miserable, and intolerable, were shoved aside into the past.

Once more, the challenge of the unknown, the lure of the future came to the fore. In this mood, I emerged after

my recuperation. With no properties to my name, with most debts paid out of the forty-five hundred dollars, I picked up one truck, my 1927 Reo, and whatever material and sheetmetal machinery there was; I rented a shop and apartment on Atlantic Avenue and made a new start.

Business here was at a standstill and life was hard. But I found a cherished outlet in social and cultural activities in an area I had long neglected. With no pressure of business and much improved health, I had started a new chapter, hardly spectacular materially, but richly rewarding socially and culturally.

The Jewish Community Center was already functioning on a broad cultural base. Concerts and lectures were now offered weekly. I joined a chess club. The Farband had now developed into a unique Yiddish speaking cultural center with deep emphasis upon socialist and Zionist ideologies.

The membership was divided on two cultural levels. On one level, the Farband created an outlet for the highly intellectual men and women--professionals, doctors, scientists, singers, etc. Also represented were those on a different cultural and intellectual plane. But it was a living pulsating organization with enough activities to satisfy all shades and types of the membership.

The weekly meetings educated a generation of parents to the necessity of Yiddish speaking schools, the ideals of socialism and Zionism. Besides, the Farband developed a system of celebrating Jewish holidays in a secular orientation.

So effective were these celebrations that the parents themselves,

irreligious as they were, shared the enthusiasm and joy of their children. The cultural effectiveness of the Farband was most striking in the singing of Jewish folk songs. It became so popular that at the "wink of an eye" we would start singing.

However, the one outstanding feature of the Farband's cultural and educational endeavors were the weekly *Mlava Malka* (the good-by send-off to the Sabbath).

Little by little, the *Mlava Malkas* turned into a cultural institution of learning and folksinging. Here we sang most all popular Yiddish and Hebrew - Israeli songs, from the ultra-Chasidic to the current theatrical hits. But invariably we began and closed with the theme song: *"Vider is Avek der Shabbos* (Once Again the Sabbath is Gone)."

Here at the *Mlava Malkas* we created a public platform for discussions, speeches and recitations by the membership or invited guests. To the spiritually starved Jewish group, still in the process of finding itself, the Farband served it well as the crossway between the old discarded and the newly acquired world.

Up until the end of the second World War, I enjoyed life in abundance in a field close to my heart. Material success, important and demanding as it was at that juncture in my life, when my growing family needed it most, occupied only second place in my scheme of values. Between 1931 and 1945, a period of fourteen years, the world had been through the greatest global convulsions, and we Jews had suffered from the disastrous Hitler holocaust. As critical times and

historic events always bring to the surface men and women of leadership and capabilities suited to the historic needs, I found myself absorbed in a modest role as one of the lesser cogs on the Jewish scene.

No event before or after this period had a more salutary effect upon my private or social life. But fourteen years is a long stretch of time and I was now once more ripe for a change, which came sooner than expected and in which period I find myself up to this writing.

GRAVES

In my vocabulary the word "grave" is suggestive of something morbid, a word associated with events best not to think about. Yet there are people who sell graves; undertakers use graves. To them it is "the more, the merrier," and the word "grave" is as normal as business itself.

However, in our story "graves" are both the subject matter and the pretext around which several incidents revolved.

Grandfather's Funeral

I was eight years old when, during one cold winter night, my mother picked up the night lamp and for the second or third time entered Grandfather's room to see if he was in need of anything.

On Saturday, the day previous, he sent for all his sons and daughters who lived in town. He told them that he felt his time had come and before he departed from this world, he wanted to bless them and to prevail upon them forever to remember to be good God-fearing Jews.

The entire day and evening he hardly partook of any drink or food. He went to bed, pale and feeble. Mother was worried and restless all night. When she again entered the room, he was utterly still and, failing to awaken him, she alarmed the household.

Grandfather was dead. She ran out of the house in below zero weather,

awakened the neighbors and set things in motion to notify the members of the widely dispersed family.

As dawn broke, our courtyard was already swarming with people; the deep frozen snow was being ploughed up into chunks of white stones and people were still coming.

Grandfather's family name was Rabinovitz, but he was also known as *Reb Yeedl der Usem*. He was a prominent scholar and teacher, whose students graduated into the Rabbinate.

Upon learning of his demise, his former students and the learned gentry turned out in force to pay their last respects to *Reb Yeedl der Usem*.

Soon, the *Hevro Kadisha* (Burial Society) arrived with their equipment and began to prepare the body in accordance with the Jewish rites. Most people, in and out of the house, were heavily dressed in furs and high boots, prepared to withstand the onslaught of the below zero weather.

Inside the house, grown people, my aunts and uncles, were wailing like children. The doors were open and the cold inside was as penetrating as outdoors.

Suddenly the wailing stopped. Something had happened. *"A shaila, a shaila* (a rabbinical ruling was required)!" What happened? A red splotch appeared on the face of the deceased. By the time the Rabbi's ruling had been obtained the splotch disappeared and preparation of the body continued.

About eleven o'clock the burial society completed the sacred rite of preparing the body and placed it into a wooden box, called the *mito*. The box was placed upon a stretcher with four

legs and four handles. Four husky, bearded men, with high fur *chapeos* (hats), heavy coats and fur-lined high boots, each took in his heavy fur-lined gloves one of the handles of the *mito*. The procession started with the four carriers in front and some fifty or sixty men following.

There were no women among the marchers. The cold was too intense for them. I was bundled up in everything that could be slipped over my head until Father was satisfied that I could follow in the procession.

By the time we reached the main thoroughfare, half of the marchers who started out with the best of intentions to go all the way to the cemetery, could not withstand the bitter cold. One by one they gave up the struggle, retiring to their homes. The procession started from our house on Suvoroskaya, a wide street but now covered with snow. Only a narrow path, created by sleigh traffic, was available for the funeral procession.

Traffic was sparse, but when two teams met head-on, there was trouble. The procession had to form in single file and wait till the road was cleared. The day was sunny. The entire countryside was blanketed with glistening fresh white snow. There was no wind when we started--just biting cold, which made it hard to breathe.

Most faces were grim, with tears streaming from their eyes and steam issuing from their nostrils, as though from steam engines. After walking three blocks we reached the main street, Dachnovskaya, the only thoroughfare leading to the "holy place." We made a turn to the left. The narrow path in

the center of the snow covered street was similar to that on Suvorovskaya, but here we met a stiff breeze. Soon dry snow particles began to bombard our faces. Our eyes began to smart. Icicles appeared on beards and walking was difficult.

As we turned on to Dachnovskaya, we passed two long blocks solidly lined with buildings. A variety of establishments were located here: stores, barber shops, the City Theater, Rabbi Schneyerson's large house and quite a few other houses tenanted by Jews. After the two blocks, houses facing the street became rather sparse. Open spaces with isolated peasant *isbus* (houses) and barns peeping out from their white snow wrappings stretched out as far as the eye could see. Occasionally, tree clusters dotted the area. Here and there a lone tree, forlorn and naked with outstretched snow covered branches, seemed like skeletons accompanying our funeral procession.

From the time the procession reached Dachnovskaya, the cemetery appeared not too far distant. What appeared as a dark mountain in front of us was really the beginning of the vast pine forest that nestled in its interior, Sosnovka and Dachnovka, two world famous *dachas* (country estates). This was our destination. The illusion of close proximity, somehow relieved the hard and painful trudging.

Midway between the city outskirts and the cemetery we passed an isolated complex of one large house and a number of scattered barns. The roofs were heavily covered with snow but there were well cleared approaches to both the front house and the barns. Here

the snow was not altogether white. In places there were darkened spots. Drums and barrels, some stiffly frozen and only partially sticking out from the snow, others freshly scattered, straw and hay, signs and boxes, soon indicated even to me, that this must be a store.

As we passed it, practically all of the adults repeated with some relief, "Meyer Isaac's." For everyone knew they were nearing the cemetery, and that refreshments would await them at Meyer Isaac's on their way back.

The Jewish cemetery almost touched the entrance into the forest. As cemeteries go, the Cherkassi burial ground met the highest specifications. It was high and dry. To the front, it faced the *dachas*, Sosnovka and Dachnovka. On its right, several hundred feet below, flowed the broad, majestic Dneiper. When we finally reached the cemetery the grave was already dug and an open wooden box was in place at the bottom of the grave.

The usual procedure of interment was for a strong man, a member of the Burial Society, to go down into the grave. He would receive the body, place it properly into the prepared box and after performing the proper rites, he would cover the box and come up, leaving the mourners to fill the grave with the freshly dug earth. However, in the case of an important deceased person, the honor of going down into the grave to receive the body and perform the rites was accorded to the most prominent person at the grave side. And who was more prominent among the assembled mourners than *Reb* Mordechai Kuton?

Not only was he the president of the Burial Society, which alone was a great honor, but he was also the *gabai*

(manager) of the *Litvishe Shul* (synagogue). He was a well known scholar and respected by all for his open-handed charity.

In stature, he was short and round. His face, his head and beard corresponded closely to his general stature. Only his thick lips, large nose and bulging eyes were visible. Otherwise his face was wrapped in a bearded forest of grayish hair and cloth wrappings.

Reb Yeedl der Usem had been his personal friend. How could he refuse such an honor? I did not see how he descended into the grave, but a call came for a member of the Burial Society to go down into the grave to perform the manual rites, as *Reb* Mordechai Kuton, due to his weight and overdressing, could not as much as even raise his arms. Finally, the body was placed in the wooden box, the shells placed over the eyes and *Reb* Mordechai, breathing heavily, delivered the last parting request that *Reb* Yeedl should intercede up above with the proper authorities in behalf of his family, his friends and all the Congregations of Israel.

As he finished his pleadings, he remained momentarily motionless. Suddenly, he fell heavily on the narrow side of the grave. He had suffered a severe fainting spell. The man in the grave and those above panicked. For a moment, there was noise and confusion. Everybody wanted to help, but there was simply no room in the grave for more men as *Reb* Mordechai himself took up the largest part of the grave. It took a while before some logs and boards were rigged up and *Reb* Mordechai was brought to the surface, still unconscious.

Fortunately Mordechai Kuton and several other well-to-do people had arrived at the cemetery in sleighs. The availability of immediate transportation probably saved *Reb* Mordechai Kuton serious consequences. The mourners and members of the Burial Society, now tired, frozen, and hungry, walked to Meyer Isaac's store, about a mile from the cemetery.

We entered the front of the store, but were immediately ushered into the rear. I saw little of the store. It was a Sunday afternoon when business dealings were forbidden. I do remember distinctly the smells that at once suggested food but were drowned out by the offensive odors of kerosene, tar, dry fish and raw pelts that were protected from damage by ill smelling chemicals. I found myself squeezed into a narrow passage between rows of sacks of feed, barrels of herring and various oils. Meyer Isaac was serving refreshments. Everyone received a generous drink of vodka, a bagel made with eggs and a big chunk of marinated herring. I was given a large bagel and the marinated herring. Not only do I remember my grandfather's funeral and the incident in the grave, but even the place and the people where we received the refreshments. I still recall vividly the tantalizing pleasant scent of the marinating spices and the delicious taste of the herring and bagel.

Even more than the pleasant smell of the marinated herring and the offensive odors of the store, grandfather's funeral remains associated with another train of thought. Scents and odors have a memory of their own, potent enough to stimulate thinking and a whole chain of

memories with startling clarity. The offensive odors and sweet scents in Meyer Isaac's store, both bring to mind with equal strength the rabid Russian anti-Semitism and the cruel fate of the Jewish people amidst the peoples of the world, since the beginning of their wanderings, and their miraculous survival.

I was eight years old when the funeral took place. It was in January, 1901. Russian hatred and persecution of Jews was of long standing and was pursued relentlessly. It was no secret that this hate emanated from the clergy and the ruling Junta. I remember one winter day shortly before grandfather's death when the streets and sidewalks were covered high with freshly fallen snow. Walking was difficult during the day.

My grandfather was partially blind and I used to lead him to and from the prayer house. As the pathway in the high snow was narrow, we walked single file, I in the front and he holding onto my shoulder. A young Russian officer in his haughty uniform came from the opposite direction. I turned sideways, but Grandfather, unable to follow my instructions in time, went sprawling into the snow, as a result of a forceful push from the officer. I could not help him to his feet until I was assisted by a passerby. Such incidents were neither new nor shocking. They were usually brushed aside with a wave of the hand as if to say, "What can you expect from a hooligan?" But even more intriguing is Meyer Isaac's existance in the lion's den.

In a country consumed by hate and prejudice, particularly towards Jews,

Meyer Issac lived and prospered. Here he raised his family and carried on a fruitful Jewish life including the important sacred charity--membership in the Burial Society. Meyer Isaac, a symbol of our Jewish fate, prompts stimulating thoughts, hopes and speculations, and above all, a mystic sense of *betuchen* (divine confidence) in our continuity and survival.

Shloime Yashner

Around the turn of the century, some sixty-five years ago the role of the Jewish Burial Society was considered a sacred service in behalf of the Jewish community, poor and rich alike. As the majority of the Jewish inhabitants at that time were poor, the Burial Society made certain that every Jew would have a proper grave in the Jewish cemetery and would receive the same ritual and handling.

Members of the Burial Society were devoted men unafraid of hard work and all the implications incidental to handling and ritually preparing the bodies. This type of work was and still is considered the most sacred form of charity, since one cannot expect the dead to return a favor.

But while their services were regarded as the highest form of charity, the Burial Society also wielded great power, particularly when applied to recalcitrant, well-to-do Jews, who because of their wealth, became arrogant and deaf to the needs of the Jewish community. I will relate one such episode that will illustrate the power of the Burial Society. The episode provides

further substance to the accepted philosophy of our sages that every Jew is responsible for the well-being of all other Jews!

Shloime Yashner was one of the few rich Jews in Cherkassi. He owned a hardware store. From a humble beginning, he developed his hardware business into the largest store in and around Cherkassi. In his store, one could buy anything from a samovar to a nail, retail or wholesale. His business was located in the best marketplace. The complex consisted of a large brick building in front and a vast area in the rear for warehouses, dwellings, etc.

Shloime Yashner was a tall, broad man, with a long, gray beard. As cashier, he would sit in his store, near the door, in his *capote* and round hat. The Jewish community had long dismissed him as a miser and a "no-goodnik" with regard to charity. Yet, during critical periods, when help had to be sought from any quarter, the rabbi would send a delegation of the most prominent men with a solemn appeal and admonition that he not remain deaf to Jewish *zures* (misery). When confronted by such a delegation, Shloime Yashner would not look at them. He would turn his cold eyes away, and without a word would pull out five silver *rubles* from the cash drawer and with eyes still averted, hand over is donation. This was the largest amount he ever gave and he gave this infrequently.

Years passed and his two sons went their separate ways. They built large hardware stores and prospered, but when it came to charity, they acted in exactly the same manner as their father. They did not give.

Shloime Yashner was now old and paralyzed. Confined to bed, he was without speech as his last days approached. He had never thought of making a will while he was well and so he died without a will to apportion his wealth!

The Jewish custom of interment was, and still persists among the orthodox, that when death occurs, the body is laid to rest on the same day except for Saturdays and holidays.

Shloime Yashner died on a Thursday in mid-July, when the heat was unbearable. The family immediately notified the Burial Society. A representative of the Society notified them that the body would not be moved until the family settled Shloime Yashner's debt to the Jewish community. For the years that he had neglected to pay his just share to charity, they asked ten thousand *rubles!*

Thunderstruck, the two Yashner sons declared "It's a hold-up," and would not be swayed by hold-up men. One hundred *rubles* is all they offered. "Take it or let the body lie there."

The next day, with no break in the heat, the body began calling unwanted attention to its presence. Here it was Friday, and if the body was not moved before sunset, it would have to remain unburied until after the Sabbath. It was unthinkable to permit the body to remain in the house another day because of the scandal it would create not only among family and friends, but also among the gentile neighbors.

The bargaining parties made no progress. After hours of negotiating, the Yashners made an insulting offer of two hundred *rubles*. The body remained

to roast in the heat on Saturday. Meanwhile, the whole sordid story became known to the gentiles. The great *Sobor* (church) was in the middle of the marketplace. Shloime Yashner's store and home were near the church. The *Espravnick* (governor of the area), a very tolerant gentleman, realizing the explosive nature of the situation, became alarmed when he learned that the body was still in the house on Saturday.

He called in the Yashners and told them that although he couldn't force the Burial Society to move the body, he would order the outhouse cleaners to dispose of the body as they dispose of the outhouse refuse if it was not removed. That did it! The Yashners, through the good offices of some prominent businessmen, paid three thousand *rubles* thereby squaring the debt and infamy that Shloime Yashner left for the family to inherit.

An American Funeral

We shall now return to the subject of graves in a different setting on American soil. The incident took place in the Spring of 1919 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Uncle Gershon's niece, Rachel, who was orphaned at a very tender age and was brought up by the Dubiansky family as their own, died in childbirth. She was married before the Dubianskys came to America.

Rachel was a very attractive woman and her kindness knew no bounds. It was natural that after her marriage, all of of the Dubianskys gravitated to her home even long after the elder Dubianskys had arrived in this country.

Here relatives, Oscar's old friends, her husband's friends and many other acquaintances assembled to create the cheerful, cultural atmosphere that formerly prevailed in the Dubiansky home in Cherkassi.

Rachel was the darling of the family and her six-year-old daughter was similarly beloved by all those who knew her. When the news of her sudden and untimely death became known, the neighborhood, her friends and the entire Dubiansky family were stunned. Uncle Gershon, particularly, was grief stricken. When we arrived at the cemetery, the grave was already dug. While we were waiting for the funeral men to take down the casket, I noticed that the pile of earth on the side of the grave was not dry earth. It looked like mud. I was tempted to look down into the grave, and lo and behold, the grave was half-filled with water.

I was horrified at the sight. Somewhere from within me came an uncontrollable outcry of protest. I yelled that it was a *hillul hames* (an insult to the deceased) to bury a human body in a grave half-filled with water. In a most authorative manner I declared that I would not allow this burial to take place until a dry grave was prepared for the deceased.

The funeral man stood there, looking as though they had been caught red-handed in an illegal act. I turned to Uncle Gershon, but he, too, was completely overcome by this shocking development. He turned his face away, but soon regained his composure and said, "Let them call a rabbi to issue a ruling in the matter." The undertakers complied. In

about ten minutes, a man appeared and introduced himself as the rabbi.

His ruling was, that according to Jewish rites, no grave can be closed unless it is filled with the body for which it was intended. Upon the advice of Uncle Gershon I accepted the ruling without further protestation.

To many of us, this was a funeral where the crude commercialism of the final interment made death itself appear respectable.

As our Uncle Gershon, blessed be his memory, then remarked, "It is the lust and greed for money by crude, cynical individuals that perverted a meaningful prohibition, originated with the loftiest motives by our sages, into an abomination that cries out to high heavens."

PORTRAITS

In the course of a lifetime, one is apt to become entangled with many types of characters. Memories of some linger despite all efforts to forget. Others are like cherished treasures, securely hidden, and are only occasionally brought to the surface.

Thus, in my limited capacity as a recorder, I shall attempt to describe some of the more impressive personalities I met on the highway of life!

Harry McWayn and Solomon Greenberg

During my first three years in America I spent most of my time going to school by night and working in a shop during the day.

School was never a problem. I felt at home there from the very first minute I took a seat in a classroom. With few exceptions my fellow students and teachers were like one happy family. The students and I were striving for the same ultimate goal--college and a successful professional career.

The shop, however, was always a problem. With the exception of a few isolated cases, I could never keep a job more than a few weeks, or at the most, a few months. Even after I had given up hope of a professional career, I could not remain in one place very long. Indeed, I had to work to earn a living but only if the job held some

interest or challenge. Manual labor, even specialized craftsmanship, held no lure for me. I sought greener pastures.

Thus during my early years in America, I regarded employment not merely as a means of livelihood but more importantly as the vehicle leading to speedier Americanization. This approach prompted me to give up job after job until I finally found employment in the John Bird Company, a shop with an English speaking personnel that fully met my requirements.

However, in the melting pot we call America, the strangest things can and do happen. The very thing I schemed and planned to escape, embraced me with the strongest hold. Almost from the very start I became engulfed in a friendship with a Yiddish-speaking man whose company I preferred more than that of the English speaking friend who so eagerly sought me out at the Bird Company.

His name was Solomon Greenberg. But before I proceed with the story of this remarkable man, I bid my reader's indulgence to digress for a while, so that I may introduce one of my first English speaking friends, who also left many pleasant memories.

During my two years with the Bird Company there were constantly new faces as new men were hired and others fired. There were also those, working outside on construction jobs, who were occasionally transferred to the shop and vice-versa. Among those newcomers there appeared a man named Harry McWayn. He was tall, with an oblong boney face, serious looking eyes, and sandy long hair parted in the middle.

He was put to work on the first floor under my foreman, John McGerry. After a week, it became apparent that Harry was too good for the foreman and he was sent away. When John McGerry sent someone away, the management knew the reason and placed that man on the approved list.

During the week that he worked on the first floor, we had little occasion to talk or to become intimately acquainted. The atmosphere that John McGerry created in the shop was so hostile and foreboding, that no one felt like talking or relaxing.

After Harry McWayn was placed on the second floor, I met him on his way home after work and we began to talk. He lived in my neighborhood, some twenty blocks away from the shop and about thirty minutes walking distance.

In the course of our walking, we learned all about one another. He knew of my problems and tried to help me any way he could. But my deep elation was that I occasionally spent some thirty minutes with an English speaking man. Moreover, Harry McWayn was an intellectual--a first generation American of Irish descent with a large family of brothers and sisters. He knew of poverty and wished that his wife, who was deeply religious, would have better sense and stop bearing children before they shared the fate of his brothers and sisters.

Harry was not a religious man. He had read most of the agnostic literature of that time. Church and clergy were to him the opium of the masses even as it is taught today in the Communist countries. Eugene Debs was his idol and leader. He saw no chance for the

ordinary working man to advance himself under the capitalistic system. As far as he was concerned, he would get himself a government job in the Philadelphia navy yard, thereby assuring a yearly income sufficient to provide the leisure to pursue his revolutionary socialistic activities. I was a fellow traveler, who shared his ideals and admired his courage and his ability to think clearly and constructively.

Harry's friendship meant much more to me than the gratification of personal favors. We shared the same ideals, and as a by-product of our conversations, he assisted me in learning the English language.

For about two years, with occasional interruptions, we had one or two weekly walking sessions. Eugene Debs, Scott Nearing and Bertrand Russell, the English socialist and philosopher, were our idols.

Harry had a lot to say and he said it in good literary English, and, indeed, it was not wasted on me.

After the summer of 1914 when I left my job at the Bird Company I lost track of Harry McWayn, only to meet him again four decades later.

We shall now return to the story of Solomon Greenberg.

After several weeks in my new job, I noticed two new men leaving the shop, walking in the same direction that Harry and I were walking. Not only did they look Jewish, but they spoke Jewish loudly enough so that I could not miss hearing every word. Well, I reasoned, whether we were looking for the same objective or not, I would not take the initiative to make their acquaintance. By that time, I was already sufficiently

friendly with Harry McWayn, that our walk home had become a welcome ending to the day's monotonous work. The only thing that marred this ideal situation was that Harry would occasionally be sent to do outside work.

At such times I would walk home alone. When Mr. Greenberg's walking companion was laid off, it was only natural that he would engage me in conversation when he saw that I was walking alone. He knew that when I first started working I had had trouble with a youngster who had been taught a lesson by Leo the boxer. He, therefore, approached me and unceremoniously said to me, *"Mah shmecho?"* (Hebrew for what is your name?) I answered him in kind. "So I see I measured you up right," he said in Yiddish and this was the only vernacular we ever used.

He was a Rumanian. But his Yiddish sounded like that used by Yeshiva scholars. It was mingled with so many Hebrew quotes, that I was overwhelmed by his scholarship. But that was only the beginning. He was not out to impress me with his Talmudic knowledge.

This was only the frame that ornamented every joke, every story or anecdote he ever heard or read. Thereafter, he would meet me at the door of the shop and start talking, telling joke after joke, humorous stories of rabbis, anecdotes about the clergy. Old or new stories were climaxed with outbursts of laughter from his appreciative listeners.

His phenomenal memory and talent to communicate whatever he saw or heard never ceased to surprise me! This was an extraordinary man! Or should I say, outstanding? Yes, and something more. He had no aspiration for the limelight.

He was content with his material estate and did not seek to commercialize his gifts of memory and talent.

He was an exceptional craftsman, but he would work only in those shops where management could afford the luxury of truly artful work. Mr. Greenberg was not satisfied to be just a sheetmetal worker. At the end of a day's work he would look at his finished product and say, "This is another Greenberg creation," oblivious to the fact that the time involved could be ruinous to his employer. He loved to work and derived from it a pleasure and satisfaction that is the reward of the true artist.

When I first met him, Mr. Greenberg was a man about forty years of age, of medium height, slim and dark complexioned. He had a square dimpled jaw, a full grown cultivated black mustache and beaming brown eyes. He felt very superior, not only because of his scholarship, but also because of his general attitude to the vital problems of life.

His philosophy of life was based upon the Hebrew saying, *"Buruch Hashem Yom-Yom,"* which he interpreted to mean: "Every day is the day to live, to act, and to extract from life every last drop of joy of which one is capable." As long as I knew him he practiced that philosophy.

He was a gourmet. He regarded eating as an occasion. A number of his Rumanian *landsmen* shared the same interest. They would gather in a Rumanian restaurant or private home where Rumanian dishes and wine were consumed, at a leisurely pace. They sang and joked as they did in the Old

Country when they were young, and wine was cheap and all the worries were left for the future. In his conversations with me he would make fun of the Polish or even the Russian Jews, who he said were living corpses; they were dead and did not know it. "What do they know of life--except to slave in shops, denying themselves the very things that make life worth living? It is a fool's life to live in constant fear and worry of what might happen tomorrow. You call that life? No, it is not so with me and a good many of my Rumanian *landsleit*. The art of living requires the greatest wisdom. To extract from every object the greatest amount of joy and usefulness is what gives sense and meaning to life; be it the sightof God's beautiful creation, the work one is doing or even the herring one is eating!"

When I jokingly asked him how a herring fitted into his joyous scheme of life, he replied: "All right, take a herring, the *ooriman* (poor man) among the edible fishes. One does not make *gelfilte* fish from herring, nor does herring grace the table of nobility. It is the poor man's dish, but look at the potentials of a herring when I get through with it. Did you ever see how the average person eats herring? He either eats it in its raw salty state or in a make-believe marinated concoction. Not so with *Reb* Shloima Greenberg. In the first place, the herring that has the honor to reach my table must have a *miltz* and not a roe. And while my wife, may she live long and be well, is a master cook, when it comes to a herring, I take over. I skin it and soak it overnight. I then extract the *miltz* and grind it into a thick paste,

after which I mix it with a fine wine and delicate spices. Into this sauce I place the cut-up herring and leave it to age a couple of days. When this herring reaches my plate, the aroma and the taste supercedes anything served at a king's table!"

"And this is the answer to your question, Charles--not only make the best of what you have, but extract from it a usefulness and joy that rivals the best available!"

One time while walking home from work, Mr. Greenberg invited me to his home. While I was struck by the neat and tasteful arrangement of the furniture and the bric-a-brac, I was even more impressed with his wife. Before me stood a young, beautiful woman. She was not tall, but well-proportioned. She had upswept, light reddish hair, a fair complexion, sprinkled with freckles and her blue eyes radiated warmth and goodness.

At the time of our encounter the Greenbergs had already been in this country about five years. Neither Mr. Greenberg nor his wife made a strong effort to learn English. I was, however, somewhat puzzled by Mrs. Greenberg's Yiddish which sounded a little off the beaten path. In the course of time, I learned that Mrs. Greenberg was the daughter of a Sephardic family, who traced their geneology back to the Spanish expulsion. The family settled in Rumania as citizens of Holland, which government they represented.

Their version of Yiddish differed from that of the Rumanian or Russian Jews. The family enjoyed special rights denied native Jews in Rumania. They were, therefore, privileged.

Mrs. Greenberg was the belle of the town, not only because of her nobility, but also because of her beauty and charming personality. Of all the eligible suitors, Solomon Greenberg was the least likely. But they chanced to meet and this charming belle fell in love with Mr. Greenberg!

Her compelling motivation was the well-known saying that, "It is better to lose with a wise man than to gain with a fool!" And because she made the choice, their life was a classic model of all-consuming love. They had no children, but they truly followed Mr. Greenberg's philosophy--"Everyday was the day to live the full life!"

When I left the Bird Company, we heard from each other occasionally. In 1918, we met again at the New York shipyard. Here, Mr. Greenberg was encouraged to pursue his artistry and inventiveness. There was a great demand for new methods and skills that required more than mere workmanship. Mr. Greenberg was credited with quite a few innovations that earned him the thanks and appreciation of the management. And so, life rolled merrily on for the Greenbergs until the 1930's, when the bottom fell out of the American economy.

Up until this time Mr. Greenberg had always earned a good living. They had a nicely furnished home free of mortgages and a car. She had beautiful jewelry. In addition to living the good life they had substantial savings in banks and shares in several "corporations" that yielded large dividends. With the savings lost in the bank debacle, the large dividends no longer coming in, and with no employment, the Greenbergs began to feel the pinch of

the depression as did most people of that period. Yet, their mode of life did not change. They could still borrow from the "corporation." They pawned some of their jewelry but never looked or acted "shipwrecked" as many others did. The only thing that really disturbed Mr. Greenberg's peace and tranquillity was lack of employment. Without working and creating, life became empty.

There were no jobs, even if one offered to work at specialized crafts as a common laborer. Mr. Greenberg perhaps for the first time in his life, became frustrated. He was not himself. He needed a job to restore his self esteem and that eluded him. Fate itself came to his rescue. Somehow, the very loss of the props that gave sense and meaning to Mr. Greenberg's life had brought him a new rebirth. When things were at their worst, Mr. Greenberg entered the artistic world where he rightfully belonged.

He found a job as a repairman in an antique shop. For Mr. Solomon Greenberg, the job was not only humiliating because of the shamefully low pay, but to come down as low as a repair man was also tantamount to suicide. However, instead of tinkering and patching the centuries old antiques, he was able to reproduce exact duplicates that had a market value as an art object only slightly less than the original.

Mr. Greenberg was now an artist recognized for his skill and talent. He spent the rest of his life in that shop. If he was not acclaimed as one of the recognized world artists, it mattered little to him. He had more than one talent to exploit if he were

bent on public recognition. He lived by a wise philosophy of life and that was enough for him. Solomon Greenberg proved to himself and his fellowmen that it could be done!

Every summer, with few intervals, the Greenbergs visited us in Atlantic City. As ever, he dominated the scene with his jokes and amusing stories that were as fresh and vigorous as ever. Mrs. Greenberg had the same haughty and regal appearance as she had twenty years earlier.

We treasured their friendship and looked forward to their visits. During the second World War, the Army occupied most of the hotels. Gas was rationed and vacation travel to Atlantic City almost ceased. When the Greenbergs did not appear for about two years, we were not too upset about it. After the war, we became curious about their whereabouts. A friend informed us of their tragic end. Mrs. Greenberg had suffered a fatal stroke. In a matter of a few weeks she passed away and Mr. Greenberg was griefstricken. He could not endure it and died within a month.

They had no children and most of their worldly possessions went to a niece. But, Mr. Greenberg also left a precious legacy to his friend--the wisdom of living the full life while one is alive--a legacy treasured and remembered by all his friends.

And now we shall conclude the story of Harry McWayn. Time passed and it was now 1950. The first World War, the great depression, the second World War were now history.

On a business matter, I chanced upon a customer by the name of McWayn. I remarked to him that I once had a

very dear friend by the name of Harry McWayn. "Harry McWayn!" said my customer, "I have a brother in Philadelphia named Harry McWayn!" He mentioned his occupation and that he used to work at the Philadelphia Navy Yard before his retirement.

I recalled that Harry's ambition was to obtain a permanent job at the Navy Yard. "This must be him," I said. Nevertheless, I hesitated. A fortnight later when I answered the telephone a strangely familiar voice said, "Hello, is this Charles?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Who do you think is calling?"

"It is Harry, of course," I replied. I had recognized his voice. Moreover not only his voice, but when we met face to face, Harry looked much as I knew him forty years before. I told him so, and to my pleasant surprise, he insisted that I, too, sounded and looked almost as he remembered me in the far off past.

"So, Harry, how did you fare all these years?" I asked. "Have you realized your life's ambition?"

"I did," he answered. "And you?"

"I did not," I replied.

"How come?" he asked. "I see you are a prominent businessman, well-established, have a fine family. What other ambition did you miss? Oh yes, I remember, you were out for a professional career--what happened?"

In a few words I told him what prevented me from pursuing my ultimate ambition.

But, I was anxious to learn how he had realized his dream in a capitalistic world. He looked well and prosperous, and his wife beside him, visibly shared his peace and prosperity.

Looking at him and hearing him talk, there remained no doubt in my mind that Harry did, in substantial measure, realize whatever he sought from life!

"Well, to begin with," said Harry, "You remember--I was a Socialist as convinced as you were in the ultimate triumph of the coming social revolution. But there was a difference in our approach. You, as well as the great majority in the movement, settled down to wait for the 'pie in the sky' of a socialist society. I decided to live my life under conditions most closely approximating the dreamed of future socialist state. To that end, I obtained a government job in the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Any enterprise run by the government is socialistic. The post office is a sample of socialism. So is the mint and so are the several Navy Yards throughout the country. It is a non-profit organization."

"The workers are taken care of for life. They have had social security long before it became the law of the land. I had paid vacations, paid sick leave, pension and almost steady employment, with a chance of constant advancement. But this was not all. It gave me an opportunity to live my life as I wanted to live it. True, I could not afford the many pleasures the well-to-do can buy for money, but I drank from the cup of the most precious things in life that are within reach of almost everyone who reaches out for them."

"I enjoyed leisure with no strings attached to it. It was worry free, in contrast to the average working man or the prosperous businessman, whose leisure is contaminated by worries due to our competitive system. I reveled in

the pleasures of hunting, fishing and boating--even as the big tycoons do. I had time to read and enjoy my circle of friends, my home and my family. And here I am; I did not have to wait to reach the age of sixty-five to retire."

"I retired after twenty-five years with the government. I have a part time job now just to keep in condition. That, my friend, does not mean that I did not experience the bumps and hurts common to all with families and children, but to sum up my philosophy of life and the wisdom of living it, I think I did not do so badly!"

While Harry was talking we sat around a table, drinking beer and eating cheese. Harry always liked to talk, but now after a couple of beers, he seemed not only interesting, but sound and mature. Yet I wondered whether in recounting all the joys and happiness he extracted from life, he also meant to cover up a life of ease, devoid of the thrill and excitement, the reward of those whose lives are predicated on strife and struggle.

A man who never tasted defeat or disappointment in his venture--what can he know of the ecstasy and heavenly joy of having finally made it?

Harry McWayn, after forty-five years of living the life he fashioned for himself, was still as interesting and stimulating as ever, but if I had to choose between Harry McWayn's model of life and the one I lived, not altogether by choice, I doubt if Harry McWayn's model would have suited me!

The Master Builder

Jacob Shenker was among the first of those who arrived in Atlantic City during the early twenties and who was recognized by his contemporaries as a master builder.

His business activities were concentrated in Atlantic City rather than in the Inlet, which was then the center of feverish building promotions. He was neither a speculator nor a chance builder. Building was his line in the Old County and so it was in the new world. He could read plans, interpret specifications and even make his own recommendations to an architect.

Jacob Shenker did not grow rich overnight as did some of the Inlet crop of builders, but in a few years he was comfortably settled financially.

Aside from his business activites, Jacob Shenker was the typical old world revolutionary, imbued with the socialist philosophy. There was no Tzar to overthrow here, but he dreamt of a world-wide social revolution which would include America.

As an intellectual, he was well read and he invariably sought out others to discuss literature or timely problems. Most of these discussions bore a socialist coloring.

Somehow, in line with my business, I gravitated to his circle and I found his company most congenial. He had a fine family--a lovely wife and four teenage children. His home did not feature the latest trends in fashionable furniture or rugs. Instead, it was a home where children were brought up in an atmosphere of high culture and ethical values.

I did extensive business with him, and enjoyed both his business and his close friendship. When, at times, he overreached his credit allotment, I applied the same rule to him as I did to most other builders--I became his customer instead of his creditor. He had land for sale. I took several parcels, thus straightening out all due and overdue accounts. The amount in excess was covered by a long term mortgage. No doubt, it was a satisfactory transaction for both.

In the middle twenties, a vast building program got underway for the Sesquicentennial Fair in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Builders were in great demand, particularly reputable, responsible contracting firms who could guarantee completion on or before a certain date. This was Jacob Shenker's chance. He had the experience and a reputable subcontractor organization, which was the greatest asset needed to enter into this rich field. All he needed was to organize them into a company and pull their financial resources together.

Jacob Shenker's reputation as a builder and his integrity as a responsible businessman soon produced the desired results and the company was on its way. He at once procured plans and specifications. The subcontractors, including Jacob Shenker, submitted fat quotations and because they guaranteed completion before the deadline they were awarded contracts on all their bids, with most favorable financial arrangements during the progress of construction.

Work was started at once. A large warehouse and office was erected on

location and men and material began to stream onto the grounds.

Jacob Shenker, the master builder, was now in his element, and at the height of his career. He marshalled his labor forces like a general, and watched his buildings grow at the planned speed and tempo.

The first payment came due and was promptly met. It was received with an unusual sense of joy both by Jacob Shenker and his subcontractors. They had all dared to venture into an unknown, strange field, and succeeded beyond all expectations. The original risk was the vast investment of material and labor until the agreed payment would become due. Now, they could confidently face the bankers, the suppliers and their friends, who helped them overcome the first critical financial hurdle.

Days and weeks rolled by. Work on the several buildings progressed satisfactorily. Another payment became due and was promptly paid. The deadline was fast approaching. Overwork at double-time had to be paid, but it was all foreseen and allowances had been made.

Suddenly, the financial backers of the vast building project became too deeply involved in a multitude of other undertakings and could not meet the agreed payments.

Somehow, Jacob Shenker and his subcontractors were led to believe they would be paid upon delivery of the keys to the owners. On that ground, they proceeded to finish the buildings at a frightful cost. They borrowed money from friends and banks and attempted to turn every resource into cash.

When the buildings were completed, the original promoters were ousted. The

bank mortgagers took over. Jacob Shenker and his company were left in the cold and financially broke.

While the Sesquicentennial project was in progress I almost lost track of Jacob Shenker. I knew that he had a large building project in Philadelphia, that carried a bonded completion guarantee and knowing the time and strain it involved, I did not wonder much at his absence from view.

After dinner one summer evening in 1927, Jacob Shenker rang our bell. I answered it. In front of me stood the tall, massive Jacob Shenker. He was dark of face, his eyes foreboding and his entire countenance was distorted beyond recognition.

We usually met on a "hale buddy well met" basis. But this time I realized that something had gone wrong with one of my closest and cherished friends.

"Charlie," he said, "I have a busy evening in front of me. I came to ask a favor of you. I need five hundred dollars at once. Now, here is a receipt for the five hundred dollars which is applicable to the mortgage on the last parcel. Please, no questions."

He took out his watch and said again, "Please." I, at once, made out a check for five hundred dollars and handed it to him. With a barely audible thank you, he rushed out of the house.

As we had already learned from the subcontractors that the Sesquicentennial gold mine had turned into a financial graveyard for all participants, his appearance and behavior worried me considerably.

The next morning around eleven o'clock, I stopped at the bank to make

a deposit. As I came to the window, the teller met me with an exclamation of surprise and wonder.

"Mr. Rubinstein, why he was just here an hour ago and cashed your check for five hundred dollars."

"Why the wonder?" I asked.

"Don't you know? Jacob Shenker just shot himself off the Steel Pier. He committed suicide."

Luckily, he was a poor shot. He was seriously wounded, but eventually recovered.

He finished his days in Philadelphia, a resigned man, more broken in spirit than in body.

The Saga of Dr. Tolberg

After the Farband moved into its new quarters--The Folk's Institute--a well organized folk *shulle* (school) began functioning, and a thriving "corporation" spread its benefits to the ever growing membership. But there still remained areas in which the needs of the average member were not met.

Besides the social and cultural benefits, every Farband member was provided with a life insurance policy, sick benefits and a cemetery lot, which at that time was considered as a sort of security.

However, other fraternal Jewish organizations also provided their membership with medical benefits in the form of an organization doctor, whose services were contracted on a wholesale basis. The individual member usually paid half the prevailing fees. A resolution was introduced and passed to

provide the membership with the services of a physician.

It was not easy to find a doctor in Atlantic City who would become involved with a Yiddish speaking organization and accept half the prevailing fees. After concentrated efforts, a well-known doctor agreed on the Farband terms. Doctor S. Tolberg was his name.

He not only spoke Yiddish well, but was glad to join the Farband primarily because of the cultural services it rendered to adults and its educational program for Jewish children. He also respected the basic nationalistic philosphy followed by the Farband.

Dr. Tolberg soon emerged as one of the very active members, frequently attending meetings and thereby adding a touch of dignity to the young and lively Yiddish speaking organization. He, nevertheless, stood out as a strange phenomenon. He was married to a Catholic woman with whom he had two sons. Both were brought up in a non-religious home atmosphere, but since they knew only the mother's family, they grew up oriented toward Catholicism, much to the chagrin of the father.

It was known, however, that the couple had enjoyed a happy life and that the difference in nationalities and religions did not interfere with the love and respect they entertained for each other. About three years after Dr. Tolberg joined the Farband, his wife passed away. Her loss fell hard upon him.

The disorganization of his home and personal life made him thoroughly uncomfortable and unhappy. All this happened during the depression times of the mid-thirties.

His two sons were now of college age. He neither had the financial means nor did the boys evince any ambition for a college education. Their needs, however, and their demands upon him were now beyond his meager income. He sought relief in marriage.

His second wife, a middle-aged Jewish woman came from a fine family. She had all the attributes generally associated with a doctor's wife. She was refined, intelligent, and above all, she knew his problems and willingly undertook to share his burdens until his sons outgrew their dependence upon their father.

Meanwhile, after a year's neglect, their home had to be remodeled and new furniture added.

Using all their own money and borrowing the rest, the house was turned into a home.

That is what they thought, but it was fated to be otherwise. From the very first day the second wife entered the house, the two sons disliked her, and expressed their feelings in no uncertain terms. His wife, at first, took it philosophically. After all, she knew what she was getting into, and if it were a battle of wits, it was also a battle of time and endurance.

She held out against all provocations and misdeeds of the two youngsters, knowing full well that her husband had no communication with his sons in the normal sense of father and sons, and the struggle was all her own.

In the meantime, the depression deepened. Patients did not hesitate to call for his service, but when it came to pay, they could only promise to make good when times improved.

Dr. Tolberg was not the hard-boiled kind who would demand his fee or else. Days and weeks passed with so little cash coming in that he could hardly keep up with the food bill. It came to a point where the ice-box would be emptied by the two boys and Mrs. Tolberg did not have the cash to replace the food for her husband's dinner. As wise and considerate as she was, she could not keep from him the unbearable mess that was taking place in their home, which was further aggravated to the breaking point by his financial failure.

In line with the fund raising activities sponsored by the Farband, I often visited Dr. Tolberg to discuss organizational affairs. Except some small talk, it was strictly business.

He was a man of few words, and carried himself with the pride and dignity becoming a doctor. Throughout the years of our association, during which he experienced the personal tragedy of losing his wife, then remarriage, etc., he never once alluded to his personal affairs.

One day discussing Farband problems in his office, he suddenly opened his heart and revealed to me the depth of his tragedy. Here he was a "Doctor," he said. His parents had sacrificed themselves to send their two sons to college. Both sons sacrificed the best years of their lives in becoming doctors, and what had they accomplished?

His brother was a sick man. As for himself, he was a busy doctor, who was wracked from pillar to post to get a few measly dollars to keep body and soul together. Sometimes, he said, he felt as though he were groping in a nightmarish thick darkness. "For what?

To think of it! Besides the 'pain and calumny human flesh is heir to,' here I am desperately entangled in a struggle for mere subsistance!"

He drew out a thick book from his drawer and turned page after page filled with figures and names of patients who owed him fees for months and years. "Here," he said, "Here lies buried over ten thousand dollars." He just did not know how to cope with the collection of fees nor with his desperate financial circumstances.

I recognized the feeling of hopelessness that I myself had lived through in the recent past. I left that evening with a heavy heart and a prayer on my lips that the good Lord might help this sorely stricken good man.

About a week after this visit, Esther and I were taking a leisurely evening stroll on a crowded business block on Atlantic Avenue. Coming towards us, we saw Dr. Tolberg, without a hat and with his necktie loose. He dashed past without recognition, although we, thinking he was looking at us, were ready to greet him in the familiar, intimate fashion.

He appeared distraught and his fixed stare into the distance disturbed us. Where was he rushing? We turned back, but he disappeared in the milling crowd.

The next afternoon, the Philadelphia evening papers featured in big letters the following bulletin:

"Prominent Atlantic City Doctor, Samuel Tolberg, found dead by gas in Philadelphia rooming house."

A Daylight Robbery

This story relates an incident in which I was personally involved, during a trip from Chicago, Illinois, to Benton Harbor, Michigan.

The whole matter could have been glossed over in a lighter vein, except that it left in its wake a pointed question unanswered. We were on our third and last day in Chicago, ending a pleasant sight-seeing tour in the big city!

This was a treat that Yonnie, my son-in-law, had promised me since he returned from Chicago, after his discharge from military service at the end of World War II.

We were up early that morning. Our feet were still sore, and the weariness from pounding the concrete floors of museums, libraries, and sidewalks the day before was painfully felt in our bones.

After breakfast, Yonnie, who claimed to know Chicago and most of its show places, as well as he knew his own hometown of Philadelphia, laid out the itinerary for the final day. We first made a tour of department stores--not that we were bent on bargain hunting--just to take a "look-see."

After roaming around in some famous shops, we finally landed in Marshal Fields department store. Here we let our eyes feast on the finest jewelry and art works. The longest time, however, we devoted to the book department--a veritable sea of books.

We felt very good in this atmosphere and eagerly purchased two small paperback books. We left the store satisfied that the two books were a fine

selection befitting men of good taste in the exalted world of letters.

As we had no room in our suitcase, I placed the books in my coat pocket.

By this time we were quite hungry. Any restaurant would have been good enough for lunch, but Yonnie insisted that we top off our tour in grand style--that is, to take our lunch in a quaint beer garden where they served the largest ten cent mug of beer and the longest frankfurters. When we entered the place, I was overcome more with the size of the interior than with the size of the frankfurters and beer steins. We found ourselves in an open barn with rough tables and benches--the kind used in public parks.

It was a self-service eating and drinking place where they dispensed beer in oversized steins, oversized frankfurters and huge sandwiches. I attacked one such giant cheese sandwich--barely going half way, but the stein of beer made me feel as if I had swallowed a gallon of the liquid.

However, Yonnie with an appetite becoming the occasion, did justice to everything his hands touched. Every time I saw him mingling in the crowd I saw the personification of the classic gourmet who delights at the altar of good food. Little by little, the beer took effect and we both became quite happy. Our tongues loosened and like two happy kids, walked away to the Bus Station. The bus was on time. We boarded it, placed the suitcase on the overhead shelf, and settled down for the two and a half hour trip to Benton Harbor, Michigan, where we were to be met by our relatives, farmers with whom we and our families were visiting.

About five or ten minutes before the bus arrived in Benton Harbor, the passengers began to take down their luggage. I reached up for our satchel and placed it on my seat.

Yonnie, now sitting on the opposite side, yelled to me, "Take down your books." "Right," I said. "Good you reminded me." I stood up again, reached out my hand and brought down a box.

The satchel and the box were now in plain view of all passengers. As we stepped down from the bus, a woman passed me--almost touching me. She turned around and looked straight into my eyes. It was unusual but I paid no attention. Most of the passengers went into the lounge room, to wait for their next connecting buses. We, too, went in to wait for the farmers.

I put down the satchel and the box and made myself comfortable on a bench. By the time we arrived in Benton Harbor, Yonnie and I were very thirsty. Since we could not leave the luggage, Yonnie went for a drink first. As I was sitting in the waiting room, the same woman that had given me that penetrating look when I came off the bus, sat down opposite me and looked straight into my eyes. For a moment I must have blushed. What does this woman want with me? I stole a sideways look at her. She was so much younger than I--really good looking, well-dressed and shapely. Since I could not stand her gaze, I decided to leave my baggage and go outdoors to meet Yonnie. But Yonnie was not there.

After a while I went back to my seat in the station. The woman was not in the place opposite my seat where I left her, but about ten feet away from

there. She was still facing me and gazing at me without a let-up. Finally, I could not stand it any longer. I picked up the satchel and the box and left the station. After a while Yonnie appeared, happy, talkative and in the best of spirits. Before I had time to take my turn for a drink the farmers appeared and took us to the farm.

As we entered the house and laid down our bundles, the first order of things was to report our purchases. "What is in that box?" several voices asked.

"In this box are two most wonderful books," we announced with as much pride as when we bought them. Several hands pounced on the box.

When the wrappings were removed and the box opened, we were all hit with the surprise of our lives. There were no books. It was a box of candy! A box of candy? But where are the books? The books were found in my coat pocket. Thus, the box of candy solved the riddle of that woman's penetrating gazes.

But why this woman, who knew all along that we had robbed her of her box of candy, did not claim it, remains unanswered.

Der Tzenter

What I am about to narrate involves me as an eye witness to an unusual story. It occurred during the summer when I was saying *Kadish* (mourner's daily prayer) for my mother. For many years, Esther and I used to spend our summer vacations in the Bear Mountains at *Unser* Camp.

This was a resort owned and operated by the Farband Labor Zionist

Order exclusively for its members. Its original name was *Yiddish Nazionalner Arbeiter Farband* (Jewish National Workers Alliance). Not only was the organization secular, ignoring all Jewish rules and regulations concerning dietary laws, the Sabbath and holidays, but its constitution and by-laws expressly forbade the acceptance into membership of policemen and Republicans. The vernacular, oral and written, was purely Yiddish.

This resort in addition to featuring fresh mountain air in open country, also dispensed Jewish culture, such as lectures, concerts and the theater. It, however, snubbed anything of a religious nature.

In the 1950's when the name was changed to Farband L.Z.O. new winds began to blow in the ranks of the membership. The first indication that the rank and file were no longer the fanatical atheists of three decades ago, came during a teachers' and educators' convention in camp. As non-religious Jews, they staged this assembly on Rosh Hashona--the High Holidays. I was a delegate to this convention. During the dinner hour, on the eve of Rosh Hashona, an announcement was made that if anyone cared to attend Holiday services that evening, there was a *minyan* (a ten-man congregation) in a nearby settlement, about half a mile away, run by Orthodox Jews.

There were a few members sufficiently reactionary to say *Kadish* who had need for a house of prayer. As we were about to leave for the *minyan*, it started raining and the roads quickly became unpassable.

Another announcement was made. This time there was a request for ten

volunteers to organize a *minyan* in camp. Services were to be held in the Casino, a large hall seating some four or five hundred.

Enough *Chaverim* (comrades) responded. They immediately started on the way toward the Casino. But it was not only the few who raised their hands that went, but practically the entire assemblage braved the rain and made their way into the Casino almost filling the hall.

Upon the stage a half dozen men were arguing loudly. Each proclaimed himself a *chazen* (cantor) and would not yield his position at the improvised prayer table. While this squabble was going on, a short and insignificant looking man stepped up to the stage saying, "*Chaverim*, none of you may *daven* (pray as a Cantor) because not one of you has a *Talis* (prayer shawl). I have brought with me from my farm a *Torah*, a *Talis* and holiday prayer books."

He pulled out his *Talis*, prayer book and a fine *yarmulke* ready to start services, but the would-be contenders did not yield. The manager of the camp had to be summoned. Inasmuch as the loudest pretender as a *chazen* was one of the important figures in the close councils of the Order, the farmer was persuaded for the sake of peace and harmony to permit the persistent so-called cantor to chant during the first evening service.

The services began and the cantor was a complete flop. However, since the congregation had no alternative, they remained.

The next morning when convention committees were to meet at designated places instead of attending their

assigned committees, most of the delegates appeared for the services. The manager of the camp was again called in to appoint a cantor.

This time he did not yield to the loudest pretender. He now knew better and gave the honor to a young refugee who performed in oustanding fashion.

There were few prayer books, but the congregation silently followed the cantor with undiminished devotion, as though they were participants in an ultra-orthodox synagogue. The reading of the Torah presented an opportunity to follow the age old tradition of auctioning off the honors! The scramble that ensued among the bidders for the honors was unbelievable.

A man I knew well, one who was not easily swayed by tradition or anything pertaining to religion, outbid all others so he could walk up to the Torah and recite the blessing! He admitted to me, that for the forty years he had been in America, he had not set foot into a synagogue. The atheistic delegates who came to the convention to hear Chayim Greenberg and participate in convention business, found the show stolen by an inspiring religious service, led by a heart-stirring cantor.

Encouraged by this spectacle, one of the "Generals" (a regional director of the Order), a man known for his tireless efforts in behalf of the Farband and Israel, began a campaign to reorganize the camp kitchen from a *treife* one to a Kosher one. After a few years, he succeeded and another of the Farband bastions tumbled.

When I decided to spend our summer vacation at the camp, I knew full well that there were no facilities to say

Kadish. But I was also aware of the changing times and therefore certain that there would be enough *chaverim* to organize a *minyan*.

We arrived on Friday afternoon. Immediately after registration, I went to the office of the manager of the camp and informed him that I was a "mourner" and intended to organize a *minyan*. For this purpose, I asked him to send a man to town to bring prayer books, prayer shawls, two or three pairs of philactories, *yarmulkes* and, if possible, a Scroll. He did not refuse but said the time was too short to assemble all these items. I argued that in New York, only forty-five miles away, there were dozens of bookstores that could outfit, not only a *minyan*, but an outright congregation.

The manager promised to do what he could and he did.

Around five o'clock we had every item I specified except the Scrolls, which arrived a few days later.

A section of the library was allotted for the *minyan*. That Friday afternoon I stood at the dining room door after dinner and organized the first *minyan* at the camp. During the first weekend I had no difficulty in recruiting the necessary ten men. In fact, news of a *minyan* had spread around camp, and we acquired steady customers who would in turn round up *chaverim* to be *der tzenter* (the tenth man), to complete the *minyan*.

However, on weekdays during our two weeks stay in camp we sometimes encountered difficulty in finding the ten men.

We also noticed a man from a nearby Jewish settlement who, hearing that

there was a *minyan* conducted in our camp, came every morning, donned his philactories, wrapped a large, woolen prayer shawl over his head and shoulders and followed the services.

In this attire, he appeared to be either a rabbi or one of the "rock-ribbed" old time orthodox Jews who would not part with the old world and its way of life! Every morning he would appear with his philactories on arm and forehead and prayer shawl over head and shoulders.

One morning we found it difficult to assemble ten men. Eight men, besides myself, were sitting around and waiting impatiently for a tenth man to turn up.

In desperation I decided to go into the kitchen and ask the chef whether he could spare a Jewish man for half an hour to serve as the tenth man. As I was walking to the kitchen I saw a man heading toward *Kinderwelt* (a children's summer camp) which was an adjunct of the Farband. I ran after him. When I reached him, I was breathless and he turned to me questioningly?

As I approached him I noticed that his pockets were stuffed with Jewish papers. I knew then that I was on solid ground, that I had my quarry. I told him my story.

He looked at me apologetically and in Yiddish said, "*Chaver*, I have been in this country for thirty-seven years and believe me, not that I am a bad Jew, but I was never once in a synagogue or to a *minyan*."

Well, this is going to be your first time," I said.

Reluctantly he walked along with me, but what would not one *chaver* do for another?

When we reached our destination and entered into the prayer room, the man with the prayer shawl over his head jumped up and yelled in an emotion-filled voice, *"Du, Du ocher Isruel* (you accursed of Israel), your presence here defiles a house of prayer. You wicked man! Your hands are soiled with the misery and brutality you brought upon the Jewish people of our *shtetel* (town)."

The two men who had known of each other's existence in New York, but had not heretofore met in almost thirty-eight years, at once recognized each other. The exchange of accusations and name-calling mounted in fury and became very embarassing to the other worshippers.

Finally, cooler heads interceded and order was restored. As the only mourner, I conducted the services. At the conclusion, while I was putting away my prayer shawl and philactories, the "tenth" man came over to me and apologized for the unseemly disturbance. He said, "Believe me, *Chaver* Rubinstein, in my heart I am just as good a Jew as this man in *talis* and *tfillin*."

"You heard only the abuse he showered upon me, that my hands are soiled with the misery and pain that I brought upon the Jews, but he did not tell the whole story. The truth is, that during the Bolshevik take-over of our *shtetel*, eight Yeshiva-*Bocharim* (Jewish Academy students), were rounded up, because of their education, to serve as agents of the new government. We had no choice. We either complied or faced the worst."

"After a few weeks of training, we were entrusted with the highest responsibilities in conducting the economic and political affairs of our city that

was more Jewish than gentile. We were to give orders. If they were not followed, the culprit paid with either complete confiscation or physical torture in jail, and sometimes with his head."

"To have been lenient under such a regime meant our own heads. After only three or four days all eight of us met secretly and decided we would not become the murderers of our own brethen; we would take the life and death gamble, and break out of this bloody trap. Some of us disappeared at once, others several days later. Not all of us made it. What happened to the unlucky ones we do not know. However, this much I do know--this man sitting here in *talis* and *tfillen* is a big *chochom* (wise man)--a *tzadick* (holy man) because he succeeded in being one of the first to escape to the United States where he landed right flush into the lap of ultra-pious relatives and could display his learning. Here he is the self righteous Jew."

"Well, I was not that lucky. For over two years after my escape from the Reds, I wallowed in the ghettos of Poland and France, but not among pious Jews. I came to this country through the efforts of a distant relative who is a prominent labor leader. He at once introduced me to the tenets of the labor movement where I rose to my present position." He handed me his card on which was nicely engraved his name and that of a well-known Jewish union. He continued, "You know how far I could go within the labor movement with a nationalist or religious orientation. In time, I became absorbed in the work and I found a spiritual outlet within the ranks of the labor movement. Here

I speak and write to people who are interested in following my leadership."

"But," he added, "this man who accosted me so flagrantly has on his conscience the very evil he charges me with, except that he thinks he can cover it up with *talis* and *tfillin* and I don't!"

"Now, that I have told you my story, I feel much relieved, but please do not expect me to be a *tzenter* tomorrow!"