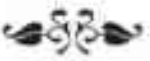
MY LIFE IN THREE WORLDS

Boris Wolsky



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MY LIFE
IN THREE WORLDS

On the occasion of our 50th anniversary
this book is dedicated to my wife Luba
who is as much a part of these pages as myself
and to my sons Albert and Gilbert
who published this book.

17392

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MY LIFE
IN THREE WORLDS

Book I

MY LIFE

1

Brest-Litovsk—My Birthplace

late 1800s

Brest-Litovsk was the largest and most important of the early Jewish settlements in Lithuania, dating from the second half of the 14th century. On July 2, 1388, Grand Duke Vitold granted a charter to the Jews of the city, which gave them a higher juridical and moral right. Brest-Litovsk soon became a center of trade and commerce as well as of rabbinical learning and the seat of the administration of the other Jewish communities in Lithuania, to which the charter was later extended.

The Jewish community of Brest-Litovsk enjoyed prosperity for the next four centuries under the reign of the Polish kings, but in 1764 when Stanislav Poniatowski became King of Poland he gave in to the pressure of the Russian Empress Catherine II (Catherine the Great) and restrictions for Jews in different fields such as business and trade were established.

At the end of the last century, the city of Brest-Litovsk had a population of 60,000. It was renowned because of its geographic position, between Moscow (Russia) and Warsaw (Poland), and had rail connections with Lithuania and other Baltic countries. Sitting on the Muchavets River and the Bug River—which, via canal to the Vistula River, and via the Vistula to the Dnieper flows into the Black Sea, Brest was an important commercial port. At the center of two important rivers, it was also a strategic site, and an important fortress had been built there between 1836 and 1842.

Fifty percent of Brest's population was Jewish. The Jewish community was very well-known throughout Russia because of the city's famous scholars, among whom were Rabbi Diskin, Rabbi Boreisho and the Soloveichiks, Rabbi Joseph Baer (Luba's great-grandfather), his son Chaim (considered Chief Rabbi of all Russia), and his son, Rabbi Zev.

Brest had a wonderful main synagogue and thirty-six smaller ones, also a Yeshiva which was famous. Students from many Jewish communities in Europe came to Brest to study and to train to be rabbis. There were no cafeteria or kitchen facilities in the Yeshiva, so each day the students took their meals in different private homes. Some families accepted one, three, five or more boys for the same day. My parents accepted five boys on Wednesdays. The Yeshiva preferred to place five boys on the same day rather than one boy for five consecutive days to take their nourishing meals for various reasons. One was to avoid the host having a stranger at his table every day. Also, the boys felt better in their own company than alone with strangers.

Also in Brest were Hebrew and Yiddish schools as well as Jewish vocational schools, libraries, and institutions: a Jewish hospital; an old-age home; an institute for medical aid and medicine; an orphanage; a home for pregnant women (including a milk dispensary); a shelter for strangers and beggars who were generally housed several days on a temporary basis; and an organization for loans without interest. There were also two Jewish banks.

At the time of my birth—August 17, 1898,—and my youth, there were no high buildings in Brest. Most of the buildings were of wood construction and one or two stories high. Streets were paved with cobblestones. Water was obtained from the wells and the river by carriers who brought it to the homes.

In the center of the town there was a huge market, an impressive one-story building, erected on a high plateau. The building was rectangular, three blocks long, had four main gates and was like a fort. Stores and stalls lined the front of the building and the inside around a huge square court.

Peasants from the surrounding villages brought their produce to the market to be sold: wheat; potatoes; vegetables; wood; charcoal; as well as animals (horses, pigs, calves, sheep, goats, and dogs). The peasants bought kerosene, sugar, salt, herring, and other items.

Two scenes remain vividly in my mind. One was the "barber shop." This was a long and narrow "store," without any mirrors, which contained eight to ten small wooden benches, a large pail of lather, a painter's brush, and a few razors. As soon as a peasant walked into the store, the barber instructed him to sit down. The barber would then immediately put lather over the customer's face. The idea was that with the

lather on his face the peasant would not be able to walk out. Then the barber would go from one customer to another with his razor, doing half a dozen beards in succession.

Most of the store keepers were Jewish women since the men were in synagogue all day, studying the Talmud. The stores had no heat in winter. For warmth the women kept pots of lit charcoal under their long dresses. Occasionally, a dress would catch fire. When the "burning" woman started to scream for help, women from all the other stores came immediately to put out the fire. No men were allowed to help! Sometimes a woman whose dress caught fire ended up in the hospital.

A description of some other *Brisker* (people who come from Brest) will give a more complete picture of the city.

The Rabbi was not only a spiritual leader, but saw to it that no orphan remained without a foster home, no sick person without medical care, no poor person without bread. Even an unwed mother would leave her unwanted child at the rabbi's door, sure that her child would have a nurse and later a foster home. The *gaboim* (trustees), most of them wealthy people, respected their rabbi, executed his wishes with honor, and provided the necessary funds.

There were in Brest two doctors and two *felshers* (male nurses). Dr. Steinberg, a military doctor who always wore his officer's uniform, on arrival at a patient's home would immediately open the windows advising "fresh air" as his first prescription for the sick. His orders on how to treat the invalid were strict and given in a military tone, but should he see that his patient was poor, he would refuse to take money for his visit. He was therefore known as "the doctor of the poor."

Dr. Shereshevsky, "the society doctor," dressed fashionably and rode in his own horse-drawn coach with a uniformed driver. He was too expensive for middle-class people.

Zorach, the *felsher,* was used for colds and other common sicknesses. He arrived in a *drozke,* a hired horse-drawn carriage, for which he charged 20 kopeks. Considering himself an expert in medicine, his price for a visit was one ruble.

Noske, the *felsher,* had served in the army in a military hospital, and when he was discharged decided to put his experience to use professionally. His patients were the poor and he couldn't afford to travel so he walked from one patient to the other. When he arrived at a patient's

home, he first took the pulse, then inquired whether the patient felt warm when covered with a blanket and chilly if the cover were removed. At that point he told the patient his diagnosis. He was particularly busy in cold weather when people used him to put suction cups on their backs, or apply leeches for bleeding.

There were special professionals such as *Der Wasserfurer*, who obtained water from the river or special wells, the only place it was available. They then sold it by the pail from the large barrels on their horse-drawn platforms.

For heating and cooking, one needed wood of different sizes. A woodcutter would come to the home and cut the wood to the necessary sizes for the ovens or stoves.

The *Ombudsman,* a conciliator for thieves, was usually a quiet and pleasant storekeeper and fine family man conducting a side business. When someone was burglarized, he would go to the conciliator to buy back his objects. Bargaining was permitted, and when the agreed amount was paid, the objects were delivered to the plaintiff's home intact.

Letter Writers came in two categories. Yiddish letter writers took care of persons who did not know how to read and write. (I cannot call them illiterate because all men and most women knew how to read their prayer books.) Letter writers in Russian were used by small manufacturers, storekeepers, and businessmen to file different forms, applications, and reports.

Porters carried heavy packages, sacks of grain, flowers, and sugar from the wholesalers to the stores. They did not use carriages, but carried the heavy loads on their backs attached with a string or strap.

The history of Brest-Litovsk had been, and would continue to be, as stormy as its location was strategic.

In 1905, after the revolution against the Czarist regime, a pogrom broke out in which Jews were beaten, their stores and homes looted and plundered. (This same thing happened in 1937 under the Polish regime.)

With her first class fortress, Brest played a great defensive role in World War I and as heavy fighting was expected, all the inhabitants were forced to leave the city and were not able to return until the signing of the Peace Treaty of March 3, 1918. This Treaty, signed in the

Fortress of Brest, has since been referred to as "The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk." Leon Trotsky, who signed the Treaty for the Russians, wrote on one of the walls of the fortress: "No War, No Peace."

Brest had been destroyed during the War and when the Germans were defeated, the region was occupied by the Ukrainians, later by the White Russians, then by the Poles, and in August 1920, by the Red Army. In March 1921 a Peace Treaty was signed between the Poles and the Russians under which Brest became a part of Poland.

Because the Fortress of Brest stopped the invasion of the Germans and retarded their advance for one month during World War II, it was named "The Hero Fort." As soon as the Germans occupied Brest on June 22, 1940, they rounded up all the Jews in the streets. Within 48 hours they had selected 4,000 of the youngest, both men and women, and shot them all. The strategy of catching and torturing continued and within the first two weeks 9,000 Jews perished. Then the Germans created a ghetto and all the Jews of Brest and surrounding areas were placed there. The ghetto was like a Hell. The Nazis starved the Jews, denying them both food and water. The Jews were flogged on their bare bodies; people went crazy, panic was great.

On October 14, 1942, the entire ghetto was surrounded by the Gestapo with the help of Polish murderers. The Gestapo then forced the Jews to undress completely and dig their own graves. All the Jews were shot and when the graves were full and covered, one could still hear the groans and moans of those whom the bullets had not finished. A great Jewish community of 30,000 persons disappeared, under the most tragic and barbaric circumstances.

Blessed be their memory.

2

My Childhood

1898-1911

I was born on August 17, 1898, in Brest-Litovsk, the third in a family of nine children, four boys and five girls: Moise Leizer (Lucien), Meir (Miron), Berl (Boris), Alexander, Gitel, Feigel (Fanny), Sara, Paula, and Beila.

I was not an "easy child." I was told that in 1901, on a Saturday during the summer, a fire broke out in the town. The day was extremely hot but windy and the fire spread rapidly over the entire town, much of which was of wood construction, virtually destroying entire areas. Water could be obtained only from the river or from special wells which were a great distance from each other, and there were not enough firemen to fight the fire. The panic was indescribable. The screams of terror could be heard miles away.

Afraid and crying, I had dragged my older brother Lucien to follow the crowd running away from the fire. In the confusion, fear, and panic, my parents discovered that two of their children were missing. The whole family ran all over town to try to find us. They ran through the streets among the blazing houses and through the dense smoke. Their fears that perhaps the children had perished in the fire grew greater from moment to moment.

It was not until evening that they learned that we were safe. Someone told them that their children had been seen in the village of Kotelne, three miles from Brest. We were found safe and sound.

However, because my parents were looking for us, their attention was taken up by this search and they were unable to protect their homes and businesses. I felt guilty because it was due to my running away with my brother that our family living quarters with all the household goods, all the furniture, clothing, and possessions had gone up in the flames. Also, my father's flour and cereal warehouse, with its equipment and supplies, as well as a salami factory operated in partnership

with his brother-in-law Hersh Priluk, had been wiped out. Out of all these worldly possessions only ashes remained.

When I was five years old I was sent to a *cheder,* a private religious school, with two or three teachers, for small children. There were such schools with one teacher only, for children up to 13 or 14 years. Classes were held from nine o'clock in the morning until six o'clock in the evening, with a half hour for lunch, which the children brought from home, and a half hour for a tea or milk break in the afternoon.

The year was divided into two semesters: one semester was from the first day after Passover until Succoth, and one semester began after Succoth and lasted until Passover. Classes were held six days a week. Even on Saturday, when the school was closed, there was not much time left for playing. On Saturday mornings I had to go with my father to the synagogue and in the afternoon to the home of the *cheder* teacher to read *Pirkey Avot* (ethics taught by the sages) for one or two hours. Vacation was ten days during Passover and twelve days during the High Holy Days (Jewish New Year and Yom Kippur), and Succoth.

Usually, a *cheder* teacher accepted from four to fifteen boys. His meager existence for the six-month term was paid for by the boys' parents. Wealthy parents placed their children in classes of six, sometimes only four, pupils. Most of the classes were held in the teachers' homes. However, there were free classes in the synagogue for poor children or for those whose parents could only pay a nominal fee.

Actually, I disliked going to the *cheder,* so my parents hired one of the porters from my father's warehouse to carry me daily to the school. In the neighborhood the story had circulated that when you heard yelling and screaming in the morning, you knew that Wolsky's son was being carried to the *cheder.*

At the age of nine years I was placed in a *cheder* of eight boys. The classes were held in the teacher's apartment which consisted of two rooms with a kitchen. In the first room was a long table with two benches, one on each side. Four boys sat on each. The teacher sat at the head of the table.

In the second room, which was used as a bedroom, the teacher's wife conducted her own business, a miniature factory of *kvass,* a drink made of fermented rye bread and apples. The teacher's wife bottled this drink and then peddled it to the people of the neighborhood. From

time to time in the *cheder* we would hear a noise which sounded like an explosion, but this was only the pop of a cork of the fermenting *kvass,* which had shot up to the ceiling.

My teacher was a tall, thin man of light complexion, with grey eyes and a long beard. He would return to the *cheder* after his morning prayers at the synagogue just at the time we children arrived. He would ask us to repeat what we had learned the day before. During this recitation he would eat his breakfast, which consisted of black bread, a piece of herring, tea, and a small amount of butter which he seldom actually ate. When he finished his meager breakfast, he would put the butter in his mouth and keep it there until it melted completely. Then he would tell us that this small piece of butter was the best medicine for his voice and lungs which he used all day to teach us.

His system of teaching was to read a sentence of the Hebrew text in the *Chumish* (part of The Five Books of Moses called *Torah)* and translate the same into Yiddish. We normally followed him word by word. Sometimes, in order to check whether we really understood what we were learning, the teacher would stop in the middle of the Yiddish translation to find out if we were following him with our brains or only with our voices. Many times he realized that we did not really know what we were saying. Then he would always repeat the phrase, "I was blowing the balloon, blowing hard, and when I succeeded in filling it up completely it burst."

I describe this particular *cheder* because something happened which I cannot forget. It was winter. My mother had asked me to wear long woolen underwear. I refused to do it. One afternoon my mother came to class, bringing the long underwear with her. In front of all the other boys she asked me to put it on. This I did—not in front of the other boys, but in the *kvass* factory, the bedroom. I don't know if my face was red or purple but I do remember that I felt like I had a temperature of 110 degreees. Since that day long underwear was part of my daily apparel.

From a *cheder* for eight boys I went to one for six boys, then later to one with only four boys, where I learned the Talmud. After my bar mitzvah my *cheder* classes were for only four hours daily. In the afternoons I had a private teacher for the Russian language and other subjects.

3

My Youth

1911-1915

When I reached the age of 15, a family conference was held consisting of my father, my mother, and an uncle, Isaac Forer, the husband of my father's sister Sheine-Reisel. He was substantially built and looked like a patriarch. He was always neatly dressed and very intelligent. The whole family always turned to him for advice.

At this conference, two important decisions about my future were made. One, I was to be sent to Odessa where there was a college specializing in engineering for flour mills, since my father was in the flour mill business. A special tutor was hired to prepare me for subjects which would make me eligible for the school. The second decision concerned military service in Russia, which was compulsory for four years, and a particular hardship on the Jewish boys who were badly treated in the Army and often humiliated. That is the reason that Jewish boys did everything possible to avoid military service, going as far as having all their teeth extracted, producing a hernia, cutting off a finger of the right hand or a toe on either foot, or inflicting some other type of physical defect.

My two older brothers, Lucien and Miron, wore glasses and with the help of a paid lobbyist, it was no problem to exempt them from military service. But I was in good physical health and had no disabilities. The only solution was to present me to the physical examiner for military service when I reached 17 years of age. But as I was small and thin, I would not be of the required weight and size.

Our entire family was registered in Domachevo, 100 miles from Brest, where my father was born. My father went to Domachevo and two days later came back with my birth certificate making me three years older than I actually was.

In 1914 the First World War broke out and because of the War, 19-year-old boys were being inducted into the army. My father was a

brave man of strong character, but as soon as he learned that 19-year-old boys were being called up, he became depressed and very nervous and blamed himself, saying, "I did it—I advanced my son's age and because of my act my son will be sent to the War."

The family tried to convince him that there was nothing to worry about because I was not yet fully 16 years old and looked even younger, and because I was underweight and was small for my age, I would not be accepted for military service.

My father insisted that I would have to lose even more weight. There were many young men trying to do the same, and small groups were formed to lose weight together. My father, afraid that before I would be called into the Army I would grow taller and heavier, used all of his influence to see to it that I would be called to the next physical examination. He succeeded and I was to present myself to the physical examiner on May 19, 1915.

Two months before I was to present myself for the physical examination I joined a group of four other boys and we devised a program which consisted of walking eight to ten miles a day, sleeping only two hours daily, drinking only water and tea (without sugar), eating only a piece of boiled meat, cooked so that it would lose all its fat, salad without dressing, no bread, and no soup, taking a laxative every day. In addition, I wore a specially made corset to keep my chest very tight so when my chest size, which was a criterion for fitness of service, was measured at the physical examination it would be as small as possible.

Our weight loss group met in the afternoon for a three-hour walk to the suburbs of the town. Then we met again at 10:00 P.M. for a two-hour walk in town and at midnight we went to one of our apartments to spend the night playing cards and other games, drinking tea and watching that none of us would fall asleep. Early in the morning we again went for a walk and then went home for the most desirable "activity," a two-hour sleep.

At the beginning of the program I was always hungry. Two portions of tough tasteless meat per day did not satisfy me, and this "meal" was certainly not sufficient. Later I became so revolted with the meat that I was ready to fast completely. Walking was tiring but I liked it. The hardest part of this regimen was the lack of sleep.

When I was at home my father kept me company and watched me so that I would not fall asleep. When I was alone, I was afraid to sit down,

but even standing up sometimes I would fall asleep and then fall to the floor.

Early morning was the best time of the day because at 8:00 I was allowed to sleep for two hours; the worst time was when I had to get up. No one in the family wanted to wake me because I yelled and resisted. When my mother made the attempt, I begged for five or ten minutes more. She would give in and then I would beg for another five minutes and again she would give in. The unpleasant job of waking me up was then assigned to my father. He did not give in and because of my great respect for him I did not resist. I realized how painful this was to my father, and a couple of times when I woke up and opened my eyes I saw him standing over me with tears streaming down his face. This man, who had such a strong character, was crying!

During all this time I was under the care of a doctor, and twice a week he checked my physical condition, my weight and size, particularly the chest measurements. The doctor advised my father that I was cooperating very well and that there was nothing to worry about. My father, however, was still concerned, and as soon as he learned who the principal military doctor for the physical examination would be, he tried through business contacts to locate a friend of the military doctor who would be willing to talk to this doctor about my case. The military doctor advised that if my weight and size were as he had been informed, I would receive a deferment for one year.

Finally, the date of my physical examination was set. A couple of days before it, my grandmother arrived from Zbraz, a village about 100 miles from Brest. In the afternoon of the day she arrived, she went to the cemetery where her husband was buried to tell him that his grandson would be called up the next day for a physical examination in order to enter military service. She asked her dead husband to "use his influence to intercede with the good angels to see to it that his grandson would receive a "white certificate" which meant "No good for military service."

That night, May 18, 1915, I received (for the first time) six hours sleep to make certain that I would not fall asleep when I was called, and in the morning I shaved, so as to weigh even less. My parents accompanied me. I went inside and my parents waited outside in the yard. Two hours passed before I was called. I was nervous but glad that the torture was finally over. During these hours my parents were most

certainly praying in silence to God and to their dead parents for help and intervention. The examination lasted about ten minutes. Then the Chief Doctor kept his promise—he pronounced the word *otstrochka,* which meant "deferred for one year."

When I came home my grandmother told me that she had been sure my dead grandfather "would do his best." I asked Grandma, "If you were so certain, why did I have to go through this terrible ordeal for two months?" She answered me wisely. "My child, you have to remember this all your life. You can ask for help *only* if you try hard to do it by yourself."

Our telephone rang constantly as friends and relatives called. Neighbors came in to congratulate me. Everyone knew how I felt. I was looking forward to the minute I would be able to go to bed and sleep as long as possible.

4

World War I

1914-1918

In July 1915, the whole civilian population of Brest was given three days to leave town. All the supplies of flour in the store, the living quarters with all the furnishings were left behind. We were only able to take with us some clothes and linens and we left by train for Pinsk, some two hundred miles from Brest.

By this time Pinsk was full of refugees from various surrounding areas evacuated as the Germans advanced. Within a few days we were lucky enough to find two small rooms and here the whole family of nine persons settled. (My oldest brother, Lucien, was studying in France and the second one, Miron, in Russia.)

Two months later the Germans occupied Brest and Pinsk and my father decided to go back to Brest. Transportation facilities for civilians were prohibited. With two other families, we bought three horses and wagons and piled the wagons with the remains of the family possessions and children and started on our trek back to Brest.

The journey was a hazardous one. The main roads were filled with soldiers and the families had to travel through small side roads which were full of sand and mud. On these roads we met German soldiers who took away the good horses and replaced them with one blind horse, a lame horse, and a pony. My father and the other family heads would get out of the wagon from time to time on the journey and pull the wagons to assist the horses. Covering two hundred miles took two weeks.

During the journey we got word that no civilians were allowed to go back to Brest. We decided to stop over in Kobryn, the nearest town to Brest. It was fall, it drizzled constantly during the day, and the nights were cold. Drenched to the skin, with sniffles and colds, the families at last arrived in Kobryn.

There we found an apartment which had a barn in the yard. We decided to keep the small horse because it would not require much food and we would be able to use it to travel to the farms around the city to obtain food, such as vegetables, fruits, eggs, and butter.

In Kobryn we learned that my mother's sister Sheine, a widow, and her two small children were in Biten, about one hundred miles from Kobryn. Neither mail nor transportation had been re-established so I volunteered to hitchhike or walk to Biten and find out if my aunt and cousins were really there. I walked more than I hitchhiked because there were no cars or trucks on the roads, only horse-drawn wagons which passed from time to time and would not take me if they were loaded. I spent the first night in Zabinka, the second in Tevli, the third in Beroza Kartushka, and on the fourth day I arrived in Biten.

I knew that a family by the name of Machles, our relatives, had been evacuated from Brest to Biten. I managed to find the Machles family

and from them I learned that my Aunt Sheine and her two children were living with them. It is hard to describe what happened when I walked into the home of the Machles family, or when my aunt and her daughters arrived one hour later to join us. With the War still on, there had been no way to learn what had happened to any of us. Now we found each other alive; tears and laughter were intermingled over our reunion.

Dinner was a festive meal of herring and potato salad, and a potato *hulnik* (a sort of long, rectangular potato cake) as the main dish and as a dessert, delicious potato *latkes* (pancakes). After dinner, each of us narrated the stories of life under the German occupation and how miraculously we had survived. Many of the farmers had fled before the German invasion, leaving their crops unreaped. The Germans forced the civilian population to harvest the wheat, corn, and oats, and took the vegetables and potatoes for themselves. But the Machles family took me to their cellar and showed me with pride their stock of potatoes, which they said was to last the entire winter.

On the way back to Kobryn the hitchhiking was more successful and in two days I was home.

Some weeks later my Aunt Sheine and her two children came to Kobryn to live with us. Our family then consisted of twelve persons.

Living without any means of subsistence greatly disturbed and worried my father. Many restrictions had been imposed by the Germans and my father felt that the only way he could support his family was to travel by horse-drawn wagon to the town of Vlodova, which was under Austrian occupation, two hundred miles from Kobryn, where food and other necessities could be obtained and at cheaper prices than in the areas occupied by the Germans. These commodities could then be resold, at a profit.

However, the arduous trip by wagon from Kobryn to Vlodova was too difficult for my father and I volunteered to do it. I became, at 17 years of age, the mainstay and breadwinner of a family of twelve.

Many other people in Kobryn besides myself took up the Vlodova trip as a means of earning a living. For security reasons, groups of five persons (including myself) would leave Kobryn for Vlodova at the same time, making up a caravan of horse-drawn wagons, and following a definite routine. We would depart from Kobryn with our wagons on a Sunday morning and arrive in Vlodova on Monday evening. Tues-

day was spent at the markets picking up quantities of supplies of all sorts and loading the merchandise onto the wagons. Wednesday morning we would leave Vlodova and arrive back in Kobryn on Thursday evening. This routine was repeated week after week.

The other four persons in our group were all much older than I and they looked upon me as their own child. They instructed me as to what to do and what not to do, how to take care of my horse, and where to buy goods. They kept me company from the time of our departure from Kobryn until our return home.

However, after a time I became too much of a burden and responsibility to them because my horse was too small to follow the wagons, and after three weeks I was on my own. Because my horse was small and slow I was obliged to leave my home on Saturday night instead of Sunday morning, and return on Friday morning instead of Thursday evening.

The first Saturday night that I began the journey alone was a night with a full moon, clear sky, and cold, dry weather. I told my parents that there was nothing to worry about. However, when my horse reached the forest and the wind started howling and the trees made strange noises which sounded like people quarreling or fighting or running, when the barking of a dog sounded to me like a wolf, I started to shake and rushed to reach the nearest German checking post. There were many such control points along the road where we had to show our identification papers and the soldiers searched for arms in our wagons. In general they were friendly and we could warm up there and even get a free cup of coffee.

After a couple of trips my fear abated and I rode alone in all sorts of weather, rain or shine, warm or freezing, calm or stormy. I had to make my own decisions now as to what to buy and what prices to pay.

The trips to and from Vlodova were extremely exhausting, particularly the return, because I loaded the wagon down with as much merchandise as the horse could haul. Instead of riding in the wagon, I walked alongside the horse most of the time. On Fridays and Saturdays, after my return from the trips, I relaxed completely in order to catch up on my sleep.

One evening, on a Thursday, when I left the Inn after dinner for the return trip to Kobryn, it started to rain and continued throughout the night. There was no shelter. The horse had to slow down. I walked all

the way, the water penetrating my boots and coat. To this day I cannot understand how I managed to get back to Kobryn. When I arrived, many hours later than usual, my parents were standing outside the house very worried, waiting for me. I fell to the ground, almost in a faint. My mother cried out, "I don't care what happens, there will be no more trips." That was my last one.

There were thousands of Jewish refugees in Kobryn, many of them without any means of making a living. The Jewish community, with the help of the German occupational authorities, organized a free kitchen where twice a day the refugees each obtained one slice of bread and one bowl of soup. Twice a week they were given a small piece of meat. The head of a family had to register and he received a card with coupons for each meal, showing the number of persons in each family. They were valid for one month and then renewed.

The kitchen was under the management of a German sergeant and a Mr. Boruchin, a civilian representative of the Jewish community. There were also a few paid employees, but the clerical work and distribution of meals were carried out by volunteers. I became a volunteer and enjoyed doing this work, despite the fact that it was depressing. Once a month I had to do a very unpleasant job.

The meal cards were issued on an oral declaration of the number of persons in the family. The Germans insisted on visiting the homes of the cardholders during curfew hours (11:00 P.M. to 6:00 A.M.) when everyone was certain to be at home for the purpose of checking the living conditions of the cardholders and to ascertain the number of persons in each family.

Two armed German soldiers would pick up two volunteers at their respective homes at 11:00 P.M., and we would go from one home to the next, to "count heads." Before we accepted this task we made an agreement with the authorities: only we two civilian volunteers were to enter the houses; the soldiers were to remain outside.

It is impossible to describe what we found in the middle of the night. In some homes the floors were completely covered with sleeping bodies. In one, two persons were sitting on chairs, their heads resting on the backs of them. When we asked these people why they were sleeping like that, they replied, "Because there is not enough space on the floor." Their strategy was to change places in the middle of the night with some of the people who had floor space.

Since there were no refugee camps or dormitories, people lived two and three families to an apartment. Because the soldiers remained outside we were able to close our eyes when the real number of persons in each family was less than the number on the cards and we allowed them to receive an additional slice or two of bread, and an additional cup of meager soup.

Because Jewish people were seldom accepted as students in Russian universities, my brother Lucien, who had graduated from high school with a golden medal, did not win a place. Therefore, in 1913 he had left for France, where he was accepted at the Institute de Technologie in Nancy. We did not receive any letters during the war period but we assumed that he was safe.

My brother Miron had gone to Zitomir in the Ukraine to attend to our father's business there at the time of our evacuation from Brest. Since we were occupied by the Germans we did not have any information about him, which worried us greatly.

My mother had a brother living in Moscow. Under the Czar, Jews were not allowed to live in Moscow or other large cities, but exceptions were made for very important businessmen classified under category "A" (*pervy gildy kupetz*). Since my uncle was a renowned furrier, he was authorized to live in Moscow. Mother's sister and her father had left Warsaw for Moscow when the First World War broke out and we hoped that my brother Miron had joined them there. But with no mail or transportation, we didn't know how to find out where Miron was.

By then the actual fighting was over, but all borders were closed. We were told that in a small town near the border between the Austrian occupied zone and the Russian zone there was a man by the name of Moishe, who at night transferred people from the Austrian zone to the Russian zone. We also learned, after talking with various people, that some fighting was still going on in parts of Russia between the White and Red Armies.

A friend of our family, Mr. Leizer Miller, who had relatives in Moscow, agreed to join me on a trip into Russia. We planned to leave for the Austrian occupied zone. There we would contact the famous Moishe and have him transfer us over the border into Russia. In Russia we would first go to Novosibkov. Why Novosibkov? Here I have to reveal a "love story."

Our apartment in Kobryn was on the ground floor. Above us, on the first floor, lived two brothers, Fishel and Joseph Lev from Bialystock. During the War their parents and other members of their family had left for Novosibkov, and the two brothers came to Kobryn to be in a town which was occupied by the Germans so as to avoid being taken into the Russian Army. My sister Gittel fell in love with Fishel, the elder of the two brothers. As soon as the War ceased, both brothers left for Novosibkov to join their family there.

Our going to Novosibkov had three purposes: first, to obtain from the Lev family their advice as to how to reach Moscow in a way that would avoid the towns where civil war was in progress; second, to turn over a letter written by my sister to her sweetheart Fishel; and third, to carry a message from my parents to Fishel's parents, asking their approval for the marriage between Gittel and Fishel.

On a Sunday morning in September 1918, Leizer Miller and I left for the Austrian occupied zone. Crossing the border from the German zone to the Austrian zone was no problem. We went up to Stuezin and found Moishe. With him we discussed our plan and settled the amount of his fee. Telling us the crossing would be done the next night, he got us a room in a private home, instructed us not to walk on the streets and to avoid showing ourselves in any way. Also he told us to carry very little baggage.

The next morning we awoke and looked through the window of our room. Across the way were military barracks. We were amazed to see that the two Austrian soldiers standing there were wrapped in *talisim* (prayer shawls) and were wearing their *tfilin* (phylacteries) for their morning prayers.

At about 10:00 P.M. we joined Moishe and with two other men and two women started to walk. We left the town through a small crooked street. After two hours of walking through farmland we lay down for a half hour's rest. After that we continued all night, with a routine of one hour's walking and fifteen minute's rest. In the middle of the night the two women became tired and the four men were obliged to carry their luggage.

Our walking seemed endless and all of us complained to Moishe. In order to encourage us he answered, "It's only one or two more kilometers." An hour later he told us again, "It's only one or two more kilo-

meters." One of us told him that when the real Moishe (Moses) led the Jews from Egypt, they had also become tired and complained. He said to them, "A couple of days more." This "couple of days" took forty years until they finally reached Eretz Yisrael. "So," he asked our guide, "why don't you tell us the truth about how many more kilometers we have to walk?" Moishe answered, "Be quiet. There is a village near here and you could be caught. Better follow me without asking questions."

Finally at dawn we saw some lights in a village at a distance and Moishe told us, "There is your destination." He brought us to a house in the village where we got hot tea and bread. After this breakfast he put us in a barn where we rested on the hay for several hours.

At 10:00 he woke us and told us that only two could leave at one time to walk to the town, which was about two miles away. Then a half hour later, two more could do the same thing, and an hour later the last two could go, in order to avoid the attention of the Russian authorities. Once we arrived in the town we easily boarded a train and proceeded to Novosibkov, where we arrived the next day.

The letter to Fishel which I was carrying had not been sealed and I was curious to see what a girl in love would write to her sweetheart. But each time I took the letter out of the envelope, I felt guilty about breaking the confidence my sister had placed in me, and replaced the letter without reading it.

Upon our arrival in Novosibkov we went to call upon the Levs. The family of my future brother-in-law received us warmly and we spent the day with them. When I turned over the letter to Fishel, I felt like a hero, having resisted the temptation of reading it.

Upon the advice of our host, Mr. Lev, we went to Kharkov where our relatives, the Rabinowicz family, were living. We asked their suggestion on continuing the trip to Moscow, since the army of General Wrangel was still fighting against the Red Army along the route. The Rabinowicz family, who received us warmly, informed us that the Wrangel Army had been completely defeated, that a parade was to take place the next day to celebrate the occasion, and that it would be safer to wait a few days until direct trains to Moscow would definitely be running.

We attended the Parade the next day and saw that officers, colonels, and generals of the Wrangel Army were brought to the main square

where an officer of the Red Army cut off their gold and silver epaulets, decorations, and medals and put them into a box prepared for this ceremony.

Two days later we took a train to Moscow and arrived the next day. In Moscow I separated from my friend Leizer Miller, and I took a *droshke* to my uncle's apartment. In the yard of the house I recognized my maternal grandfather walking around. When I told him my name and mentioned that I was the son of his daughter Libe, he did not react, and I realized that he had apparently lost his memory. He did tell me the apartment number where his other daughter was living.

When I walked into the apartment of my aunt (my mother's sister Pearl Gilevich), she immediately recognized me and was so overcome she could only murmur, *"A mensch fun yener velt"*—a person from the other world.

I was told that my brother Miron was a student at the medical school in Samara, but that he was temporarily in Moscow and would be back after dinner. I hid myself in the other room and when Miron returned, my aunt started to tell him a story—that she had received news from his family and that they were all alive, and that the person who saw them not long ago was actually in Moscow and that he would be in later. She told Miron that "this person" was a relative. After keeping him in suspense for 15 minutes, she opened the door and when Miron saw me, he could not believe his eyes!

After dinner I went to bed in my brother's room and we recounted to each other all that had happened during the four years of the war. We talked all night. At one point Miron said, "There must be a full moon tonight," but actually it was already dawn and the rays of light were coming in through the window. I learned that my Uncle Priluk (my mother's brother), his wife, and her brother had been killed in their home by robbers.

Life in Moscow was still not stabilized. The Soviet government had started to nationalize the large industries, warehouses, and department stores and loaded trucks with goods from these various places to transfer them to the established selling points. Small stores were still being operated privately; my Uncle Gilevich still owned his store.

Miron had to leave for the university and I was anxious to bring the news to my parents that their son was still alive and that he would soon

be a doctor. After five days in Moscow, my friend Miller rejoined me and we started our return journey together.

We traveled by train to a small town near the Austrian border and there a man helped us to cross. In the evening he brought us in his horse-drawn wagon to a peasant's home, which was isolated and far from other houses. The peasant, like all Russian *muzhiks* then was very poor. In spite of this he was very hospitable. He and his wife had only one room, with an oven for cooking and baking, one bed, a table, and a bench. There was no electricity, no kerosene lamp, and not even a candle. The room was lit by a *luchina* (a long taper) protruding from a piece of pine wood stuck in a hole in the wall. The room was full of smoke. The peasant insisted that Miller and I sleep in the bed, he and his wife in the barn. At first we refused to deprive this peasant couple of their comfort, but when we saw that they were offended, we were obliged to accept the offer.

We spent the night there. At dawn the peasant walked with us across the border, which took about two hours. We reached the Austrian occupied zone and from there it was easy to get to Kobryn.

Once home, I brought the good news to my family about Miron and their relatives.

5

The Return to Brest

1918

Following the signing of the Armistice, we moved back to Brest. As after a cataclysm, we walked from one clump of debris to another. Here was our flour mill, in the suburb of Brest, with its machinery reduced to molten metal. Here were the two houses which we had owned and rented, completely destroyed and practically unrecognizable. Here was our apartment, in the center of town, of which only the shell was standing. Here was our warehouse—only broken bricks and stones were left. That was all that was left of 27 years of hard work, hope and disappointment, success and failure.

However, we were lucky enough to locate a nice apartment which had escaped the destruction and was for rent. As soon as we were installed in it, my father started dreaming about building a power mill. It was impossible to obtain construction material or machinery and we did not have enough money to pay for it. But willpower and determination, as it often can, overcame the difficult obstacles. I helped my father plan and build the mill and in the spring of 1919, from old bricks and secondhand material, a new building began taking shape. By the end of the summer smoke was rising from the metal chimney and the millstones started to grind out the first bushels of wheat.

I soon learned how to work the steam engine and operated it for the second shift. Also, from time to time I would inspect the workings of the millstones next door.

As I ran the steam engine for the night shift, I put a bench in the machine room and was able to take a nap from time to time.

Once, in the middle of the night, I was asleep on the bench when I felt some movement near me. I opened my eyes and saw my father standing next to me, crying. He had returned from a trip to Warsaw and on his way from the station he had stopped at the mill. Seeing me in my working clothes, covered with white powder from the mill, my face black

from the dust of the coal with which I stoked the steam engine, and worn out with fatigue, he shed tears. I felt sorry for my father but it didn't bother me. I was in good health and took it easy and found it a normal occupation.

A distant relative of ours named Aaron, an orphan boy 19 years old, without any profession or vocational training, was in need of a job. His uncle has asked my father to employ the boy and teach him a trade. My father agreed to do this.

Early in the morning the day after the Red Army occupied Brest, in August of 1920, Aaron arrived at the mill accompanied by an officer of the Red Army and a soldier. They presented my father with a paper stating that the mill machinery, grain, and flour had been requisitioned and that nothing could be taken out, even for our own personal use, without special authorization of the Commandant of the city. A soldier was put at the door for 24 hours to see that nothing was taken out. Due to a shortage of bread, the Army decided to run the mill around the clock without interruption. My father told them that he had no personnel for three shifts and because of the War he did not know where his former employees resided. Through Aaron they found out that I could run the steam engine and other machinery. They forced me to run the mill for 36 hours without interruption until they found a mechanic and this mechanic and I divided our duties into two shifts. Despite the shortage of manpower, Aaron did not show up for work. He was already a commissar.

The soldiers on guard at our mill were dressed in old, filthy uniforms. They had no boots but wore old shoes that had seen better days. Over their shoulders they carried guns with bayonets which were higher than their own heights. When the soldier was brought his meals for the day he was also brought at the same time, a one-page newspaper. When I asked him, "What's the news in the paper?" he answered, "I don't know because I don't know how to read." I said to him, "Give me the newspaper," but he answered, *"A kurit ne nado,"* which means "I need the paper for my cigarettes." He then took out a pouch of *machorka* (dry, chopped leaves) which served him as tobacco. He placed these dried leaves into a small piece of paper rolled up like a cigarette which he smoked.

The Polish Army retook Brest after heavy fighting, and in March 1921 a peace treaty was signed, and Brest remained under the Poles.

The first couple of weeks the Polish soldiers celebrated their triumph by harassing the Jewish population. They helped themselves to merchandise from Jewish stores without paying for it. They beat up young Jews in the street and used knives to cut off the beards of Orthodox Jews, sometimes taking pieces of their skin. My father was one of them. But after a couple weeks of such occurrences, life in Brest returned to normal.

My father bought a diesel motor to replace his steam engine, and he also bought new machinery to make barley and corn flakes. By August 1921 the mill was completely reorganized, with good machines and efficient personnel. Then I told my father, "Now that you can manage without me, I will go to Paris to study engineering." My father was not happy about this piece of news but he accepted it. However, he asked that I return to Brest when I finished my education. (A similar situation was to arise forty years later, between myself and my son Albert.)

6

My First Years in Paris

1921-1925

My brother Lucien had been in France since 1913. By this time mail service with foreign countries had been re-established, and from letters we received from him, we learned that he was working as an engineer in a motor factory located near Paris. He encouraged my coming, and

sent me an affidavit to enable me to do so. In October 1921, I left Brest for Paris.

My decision to leave for Paris was not an easy one. I knew that I had been a great help to my father and notwithstanding his acceptance of my departure, it pained him greatly to lose me. My mother cried often and I was very depressed, but I steeled myself not to give in. She was busy baking butter and raisin pastry and canning jars with jam. With two heavy suitcases I left for Warsaw where I received my French visa, and then proceeded to Berlin, and from there to Paris.

Sitting opposite me on the train from Warsaw to Berlin was an officer of the Poznan Brigade in full uniform. One of my suitcases was on the shelf over his head. All of a sudden I noticed that a drop of jam from my suitcase fell on his splendid uniform. My blood ran cold and I hoped that no more jam from my valise would spill on the officer, as the men in the Poznan Brigade were known to be rough fighters and malicious people. Unfortunately, the jam continued to drip on the officer and each drop shortened my life by a year. Luckily for me, when the train stopped at the next station the officer got off and I breathed a sigh of relief. But from that day on, nevermore did I carry jam in my suitcases.

In Paris, I lived with my brother in a one-room studio in a private home in Vincennes, a *faubourg* (suburb) of Paris. Every day I went to the home of Lucien's fiancée, Sonia Kroupitzki, for French lessons. Lucien helped me with mathematics and other subjects, to enable me to pass the exams for the school of engineering. Alone in the room, I worked very hard, going over my material again and again. Sometimes sleep overcame me, but out of principle I did not go to bed before midnight.

We lived in a private two-story brick house with a small garden. The landlord lived with his family, a wife and two children, on the first floor. Our room was on the second floor; there were two more rooms on this floor, one occupied by a young lady who worked as a secretary, and the other room taken by a young girl, Emma, the landlord's niece, who had a heart condition and did not work.

Emma and I met frequently in the yard and on the stairs and would exchange greetings. *"Bonjour, Mademoiselle." "Bonjour, Monsieur." "Comment allez-vous, Mademoiselle?" "Merci, ça va bien, et vous, Monsieur?" "Merci, ça va."* These were the only words I knew

in French. After a couple of weeks, Emma let me know through her uncle, who spoke some German, that I would never learn French from books alone, that I must practice it conversationally. In view of the fact that she did not work, she was ready to practice with me an hour a day. The one hour a day was extended to two hours a day and my French improved rapidly. My homesickness disappeared and even mathematics and other subjects improved. But because of Emma's heart condition I tried very hard not to get emotionally involved.

In 1922 I was accepted at the Ecole du Génie Civil. My French was not yet good enough to pursue successfully all subjects, but one of the students helped me with his notes. I worked very hard (I had stopped my lessons with Emma) and spent all my free time on homework, until I overcame my inferiority to the other students. In 1923 I took additional courses at the Conservatoire Nationale des Arts et Métiers, and in 1924 passed the exams and obtained a diploma as a graduate of the course in Industrial Electricity.

Despite the hard work, I consider my student years very pleasant. The enjoyable student atmosphere in Paris was a change from the monotonous life in Brest. Even though I was considered a very serious student, the "take it easy" group nevertheless invited me to join their activities, such as Sunday out-of-town excursions and the "Monom," a parade of students marching and singing through the streets of the Latin Quarter, all wearing their berets decorated with many buttons, insignia, medals, ribbons, etc., and their arms around their girl friends.

Three times a week after lunch we went by commuter train to Asniere, another *faubourg* of Paris, for practical exercises in the workshops of the Institute. As soon as the station master appeared, we started to sing, *"Le Chef de Gare, il est coca, il est coca"* (his wife cheats on him). All the passengers craned their necks to look at the station master, who was very embarrassed, but what could he do to a group of students? As soon as he saw us he hid and came out only to give the departure signal.

Every year I spent summer vacation in Brest with my parents. This gave me an opportunity to keep in contact with my friends and also to help my father with his heavy duties. Each year on my way from Paris to Brest I stopped in a different country and in this way I visited many European nations.

I passed the last exams prior to my graduation with high marks, but

risked losing my diploma. The dean of the college, Mr. Astruck, was the author of a book entitled *Le Système Tailor.* This was the system of conveyor belts in the large car and machinery factories. In his book he praised this system, showing that it could actually double or even triple production. This was not an official subject for the exams but he asked me to read the book and to be ready to discuss it.

When my opinion was asked, I answered that I was against it because it made the worker do the same tedious job all day—using a screwdriver to screw in the same little screw or adding the same part in exactly the same place for hours. It made the job too monotonous, so the worker would lose interest and turn into a robot. The dean became extremely excited and told me, "You are reasoning like a worker and not an engineer. Why do you need a diploma?"

My colleagues told me that the dean was very offended and that I had made a mistake, but since his book was not an official subject for the exams, he could not do me out of my diploma, and on the spot they elected a committee of three of the best students to have an interview with the president of the college, to run interference for me. This was, however, not necessary, since I received my diploma of Electrical Engineer in July 1925.

As usual, I went to visit my parents in Brest during my vacation. This time, as my studies were over, we started to plan my future. Naturally, my father's desire was to keep me with him, but when I insisted on remaining in France, he suggested that Lucien leave his job and that the two of us start our own business. My father offered to help us with money and I wrote to Lucien outlining the plan for us. We accepted our father's offer.

Before I left for Paris again my father told me, "You are now taking an important step in your life. Remember, life is complicated. There are good days and bad ones. Always be honest, build up a good name, and try to keep it all your life. If you owe money to anyone, try to pay as soon as possible. If a friend asks you to help him, do it if you can afford it, but never endorse a note for anyone because you might not be able to pay it when it becomes due. Remember, money can be stolen or you can lose it, but a good name no one can take from you, and it will follow you everywhere you go."

When I returned to Paris, Lucien left his job at Electro-Mechanic and we opened a shop under the name Construction Electrique de Par-

is (C.E.P.). We bought used electrical motors, reconditioned them, and sold them as second-hand. We also repaired motors for factories and industries. We made a living but didn't have enough capital to expand our activities. It was hard work and a lot of responsibility but we carried on.

Lucien was the outside man, buying and selling motors and looking after plants and factories which entrusted us with taking care of their motors, guaranteeing their functioning without interruption, and whenever necessary, replacing a bad motor with a working one.

I was the inside man, working with another electrician and a secretary. More complicated reparations were made through other shops. I liked the work, but it was too monotonous. The shop was without windows. Some light and air came in from the small office in front of the shop, but I found the surroundings rather stifling and so I decided to seek my satisfaction in community social work.

7

My Bachelor Status Becomes Shaky

1927

Although I was president of a large Jewish community organization (La Colonie Scolaire), an engineer, partner in an electrical motor company, and had a good reputation in the community, I was still a bache-

lor. In Paris there were many rich parents with daughters to be married off. Also, many of my friends and acquaintances attempted to arrange meetings with marriage possibilities. When I told them "I am not ready yet," they thought I wanted a larger dowry than they had mentioned, and would return with offers of substantial increases. I became disgusted with all this and felt like I was on an auction block. I managed to stop accepting meetings with any of the girls proposed to me.

The situation was different when I went to Brest for a vacation. There I had to fight with my parents and my sister Gittel, who was living in Bialystock. I did not have as much trouble with my mother because she felt there were not many girls in all of Poland who would be suitable for "her son." However, when I went, as I usually did, to Bialystock to see my sister and her family, I had to compromise. From a prepared list with comments and documentation as to age, beauty, education, family background, and amount of the *naden* (dowry), I selected two girls and spent two pleasant evenings with them, but I managed to return to Paris a bachelor.

At the beginning of 1927 the contents of letters from home changed. Mother asked me to advance my vacation and to make arrangements to stay home longer than I usually did. At the same time my sister Gittel stopped bothering me about the two girls, and I understood that an agreement had been made between my mother and my sister; upon my arrival home, a proposition was to be made to me.

As usual, I arrived in Brest in July. One evening after dinner, my parents went to another room and started to converse with each other in hushed tones. I surmised that they were working on some sort of strategy in presenting a "proposition" to me. Half an hour later they called me to join them. My father started to explain how impractical, illogical, and unhealthy it was to be a bachelor in a foreign country, far from home, and he told me that when he had been my age he had already become the father of three children.

Then my mother took over and said to me, "We know people by the name of Soloveichik who originally were from Brest but who now reside in Vilno. Mr. Soloveichik has been in our home many times for business purposes. A mutual friend of ours told us that Mr. Soloveichik has a daughter, a very nice-looking girl. She is intelligent, educated, and has *alle mayles* (all the desirable virtues). The background of the family is one of the most reputable in Russia and Poland, and they are descended from the famous Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveichik.

Our family is all for it, now you have to decide, and we urge you to go to Vilno and meet the girl."

Arrangements were made for my trip to Vilno. When I arrived there I registered at one of the best hotels (I could not help showing off). I called Mr. Soloveichik and told him that I had just arrived in Vilno, and he invited me to come to their residence at 9:00 that evening.

When I arrived, a maid showed me into the living room. Mr. Soloveichik was alone. He received me very warmly and we had a pleasant conversation for about half an hour. The living room had two doors leading to other rooms and I had the feeling that the other members of the family might be standing behind the doors, trying to get a glimpse of their guest through the key hole. Suddenly, one of the doors opened and a tall, nice-looking girl with dark brown eyes, dark hair cut very short, and wearing a mini-skirt, entered. This was Luba.

For a while, the conversation was among the three of us, but soon Mr. Soloveichik found a pretext to walk out and leave us alone. I don't remember whether I was nervous, but I do remember that Luba constantly kept turning a ring on her finger. Before leaving, Luba presented me to her mother and I was invited to come to lunch the next day.

When I returned to my hotel I could not fall asleep and tried to make up my mind about Luba, but I could not. Maybe I was just too tense. The next morning I decided to extend my stay in Vilno for several days and to spend more time with Luba, which would clarify my thoughts and would help both of us to know each other better.

During my stay in Vilno, Luba and I spent a lot of time together, walking, visiting places, and making out-of-town excursions. From our various conversations it became clear that Luba would have to leave her family, relatives, and friends to live in Paris. This was a very important decision to have to make, so I suggested that I return to Vilno a month later, and during the interim she and I would be able to think things over and see more clearly.Luba was very pleased with this suggestion and I left for Brest.

That month was very important in my life. Being at home, relaxed and weighing all the pros and cons, discussing the problem with my parents and sisters, helped me to clarify my thoughts, though I did not make a definite decision and wondered what Luba's decision would be. I even started to worry about it. One day I realized that if I was worried about Luba's decision, my own decision had already been made without my realizing it.

When I returned to Vilno, I found the atmosphere warm and pleasant but I did not tell Luba immediately about my having made up my mind. I was introduced to the members of the family; close relatives had been invited and I was also introduced to them. I then felt secure that I would be accepted and in walking with Luba in the park I asked her to marry me. She answered me with a kiss. We returned to Luba's home and I told her parents our decision and asked their consent. The answer was *"Mazeltov!"*

I called my parents and they came to Vilno to celebrate my engagement. My mother took off her diamond ring and put it on Luba's finger. I spent ten more days in Vilno and returned to Paris via Brest. Luba and I then started a weekly correspondence.

8

The Early Years of Marriage

1928-1930

The following July I went directly from Paris to Vilno. We decided to have our wedding in Grodne, a town half-way between Vilno and Brest, and made all the arrangements for our wedding, which took place on September 4, 1928.

From Paris we received 126 cables of congratulations. One of them read "To our voluntary father and future mother our best wishes." It was from "The Jewish Children of Paris."

After the wedding we went to Druskeniki, a well-known resort spot,

for our honeymoon, and from there to Vilno for a week. Then we left for Brest where we spent the Jewish holidays. On our way to Paris via Vilno, we stopped for a few days in Vienna.

To find an apartment in Paris was very difficult, and the rents were expensive. I felt quite uncomfortable in bringing Luba to my bachelor apartment, which consisted of a small room, an alcove (which could only hold a double bed), a closet-sized kitchen, and a toilet. Luba, however, was a good sport and to make me feel better, she told me, "You know, your apartment looks better than I had pictured it. From your description I thought it would be much worse than it is." In a few days the feeling in the small studio apartment changed completely and I saw a woman's touch in every corner.

I recall two particular facts about my bachelor apartment. In France the letter carrier delivers all the mail to the *concierge,* who is usually a woman. She would bring the mail to the individual apartments. After I returned with Luba she stopped delivering my mail and turned it over to me personally in the evening when I returned home. In the beginning I wasn't quite aware of this but after a week or ten days I asked her why she was doing this. She answered, "Perhaps you still have some correspondence which your wife is not to know about." What typically French thinking!

The other memory is that when Luba prepared meals in the tiny kitchen, the steam made the plaster on the ceiling start to peel. One day, Mr. Belenki, a reporter from the French Jewish weekly magazine, came to see me for an interview about La Colonie Scolaire, of which I was president. While he was absorbed in taking notes, a piece of plaster fell on his bald head. It was very embarrassing for Luba and me, but fortunately there was no injury to the man's head—and there were no repercussions in his report to the press!

Luba became a student at the Alliance Française. Both of us were busy all day and when we returned home in the evening, we were happy and content just to be together.

At the end of 1929 we finally found an apartment of five rooms, with a kitchen and a toilet. As it was quite expensive for us, we rented out two rooms to a family of three, two boys and their father. This was additional work for Luba, as she had to heat the rooms in the winter and share the kitchen.

Luba organized "Open House" every Friday evening. Our friends called it "Friday at the Wolsky's." There were always between six and ten people present and the atmosphere was warm and hospitable. Our home also became an "Open House" for the youth from Brest who were lonely and looking for a social evening with a friendly family, as well as moral support and advice. Luba was a very warm, outgoing hostess and made the young people feel welcome, which they greatly appreciated.

This was proved forty years later when we were in Paris and L'Amicale de Brest-Litovsk organized a reception for us. Dr. Danowski, the president of the Amicale said that he and other members of the organization still remembered the ambiance they had enjoyed at our home and in the name of all of them expressed thanks to Luba.

The same thing happened at a meeting of the *Brisker* in New York, where the guest speaker, Mr. Manker from Israel, told the audience how much he had enjoyed the warm reception he received from Luba while he was an immigrant in Paris.

We were also recognized back in 1929 as the activities of L'Amicale were extended to other social areas. In appreciation of my efforts I was decorated with a medal by *Ministère de L'Assistance et de Prévoyance Sociale* (Official Journal of August 12, 1929).

Luba graduated from Alliance Française and received the "Diplôme Supérieur d'Etudes Françaises Moderne" certified by the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts.

On November 24, 1930 our son Albert was born. Luba and I were happy that our first child was a boy and in perfect health. At the time, France was old-fashioned concerning baby care, but Luba carried out this hard work with devotion and love. Luba's father was in London, so he came to Paris to see his first grandchild and spent some time with us before leaving for Johannesburg. This was a very happy reunion.

9

Visit to Moscow

1933

My brothers Miron and Alexander were in Russia. The family's recollection of them was very hazy, since their contact with them for some time had been only by correspondence.

In December 1933 I went to Russia as a tourist. The journey by train was not very comfortable, and in changing trains at the Belgian, German, Polish, and Russian borders, passengers had to carry their luggage to customs for inspection.

When I arrived in Moscow the snow was 12 inches deep. Trolley car windows were covered with frost. Between the closed double windows in the hotel stood a jar of a strong liquid to keep the glass from freezing, but the rooms were heated and comfortable.

Life in Russia was very hard. I saw queues in front of all stores for food and clothing. However, in special stores for foreigners who paid in hard currency, one could obtain practically everything, including imported items, without waiting in line.

Miron, who was a physician in Kubishev and an assistant professor at the University there, came to Moscow to see me. His scientific articles were being published and reprinted in medical magazines. Alexander was employed by the government in the wool industry. Miron was happy with his situation but I cannot say the same about Alexander.

In the week we spent together, friends came, eager to know about life in the world across the border. I left hoping to see my brothers again in a couple of years, without the slightest inkling that a second world war would separate us again for 16 years.

When I returned to Paris from Russia, an evening was organized under the auspices of Nahum Aronson, the famous sculptor, and Dr. Kreinin, Director of H.I.C.E.M., counterpart of the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society (HIAS) in New York, where I gave a talk about my impressions of Russia. The hall was packed; there were approximately

500 persons present. I tried to be as neutral as possible. When I finished my talk, I was criticized by one faction of the audience who told me I had looked at Russia "through rose-colored glasses," and the other faction that "my glasses were black." This was the best proof that my report was neutral; I had told the audience about the progress as well as the short-comings, as I saw them.

10

I Start a New Business

1934-1935

The income from my business, Construction Electrique de Paris (C.E.P.), was not sufficient to support two families. So in January of 1934, I sold my part of it and looked around for a new venture. However, since I did not have the capital to open a new business, I decided to consider taking a job.

One evening I was invited to the home of Dr. Kreinin, former Director of the Union of Jewish Cooperative Banks in Berlin. During our conversation he asked me, "How is your family and how is your business?" I told him that I no longer had a business, that I had sold it. At this remark he rose from his seat and said to me, "Wolsky, open a travel agency. Because of your position in the Jewish community, and with all your contacts, there are great opportunities for you in the travel field. It's a business made for you. You are president of La Colonie Scolaire [a Jewish community organization] and as a member of the

board of directors of the Federation, you are very popular and are greatly respected by the Jewish populace in Paris and the other cities of France. Also, you have great energy and stamina and I am certain you will be a success. I myself have decided to move to Palestine; otherwise I would be your partner."

Mr. Kapelus, an intelligent, experienced, and successful businessman, was my best friend. I asked him for advice and he told me the travel business idea was an excellent one and that I should start immediately to look for a partner because I had no capital, and also for a person who knew the business thoroughly, since I had no knowledge whatsoever of the travel trade.

One of my friends, a Dr. Banchevski, agreed to put up the capital. His wife was to help in the office and Dr. Banchevski and I would be partners.

I started to investigate the travel trade, and also to look for an office. Space on the street level in the center of town was extremely expensive. Eventually I found an apartment of six rooms, one flight up, in a building on Boulevard St. Martin. The reason for taking an apartment was that I was counting on my acquaintances, not necessarily on passersby, as my first clients; they would not object to walking up one flight to make their travel arrangements.

During all this time I was in constant contact with Mr. Kapelus, seeking his advice. When the contract for partnership was ready for signing, Mr. Kapelus told me that he was sorry he had advised me to take a partner who was neither in the travel business nor in business at all. He said, "You are investing your prestige, your energy. You have spent months collecting information and knowledge about the business and you also found an office. You will no doubt work very hard and long hours to make the business grow, and your partner is giving only money. He is entitled to receive dividends on his investment, but not to be a partner. No one is entitled to be a partner only for assisting you with money. We, your friends, have the obligation to find the operating capital for you and you will be the only "partner."

A couple of days later, Kapelus informed me that he had obtained from Dr. Banchevski a loan for three years at 10 percent interest and a guarantee against inflation based on the price of gold; this would allow me to run the business for six months. He urged me to find a person experienced in the travel business and to open my office immediately.

"After six months, if additional capital is required, we, your friends, will procure it for you."

I signed a three-year lease for the office, with options for six and nine years. I found an experienced and capable employee, moved into the apartment-office and divided up the space—the three rooms in the front were for the office, and the three rooms and kitchen in the back served as our living quarters.

On November 4, 1934, I opened my office under the name of Le Tourist. I advertised in various newspapers, in French and Yiddish, and in some magazines. I made up press releases, offered to print the menus of the Jewish restaurants in town at my cost with the condition that the menus would carry an advertisement about my travel agency, and I ordered attractive multi-colored posters which I framed under glass, and placed in clubs, organization offices, cafes, restaurants, and even in some consulates. Luba and I learned the trade quickly, and after six months we were able to run the business without asking for additional capital.

Most of my clients were interested in Palestine, Poland, and Romania, so I organized groups to these destinations. The most successful tours were those to Poland. The railroads offered substantial reductions for groups which made it possible for me to sell reserved seats for trips to Warsaw on the most direct express trains at 20 percent less than the official rate. I reserved a whole car accommodating 54 persons, and it was amazing to see, at departure time, how excited and nervous some passengers were, going from car to car looking for a seat, while my clients, who were paying 20 percent less, went straight to the car marked "Reserved for Agency Le Tourist." Because of the success of this venture, I was obliged to increase the departures from once a week to three and four times a week.

At the same time, the Cunard Steamship Line had organized regular Mediterranean cruises on the transatlantic S. S. *Aquitania.* The cruises were fairly popular, but did not sell out. I offered to advertise the S.S. *Aquitania* for trips to Palestine on the condition that passengers could sail from Marseilles to Haifa, and, two weeks later, return on the next trip of the *Aquitania* from Haifa to Marseilles. Cunard agreed to give me 25 berths on each sailing.

The regular steamer service to Palestine was by medium-sized boats.

My advertising said, "Go to Palestine on the luxury liner S.S. *Aquitania.*" My ads included a photo of the ship with its four smokestacks. At that time passengers judged the prestige of a steamer by the number of its smokestacks, and there were very few ships then with *four!* The success of my endeavor was much greater than I had expected. But I was beginning the practice which became a guiding principle throughout my professional life: to offer something my competitors did not, and always to look for the unusual. Cunard Line was not interested in allotting more berths than the 25 which they gave me, so I had no competition, and my allotment was always sold out.

In order to keep expenses to a minimum, Luba worked in the office. After one year I was able to pay off 50 percent of my loan from Dr. Banchevski; after two years I was able to pay off the remainder.

11

My Travel Endeavors Increase

1936-1938

The Bernstein Shipping Company in Hamburg operated five one-class ships from Hamburg, Germany, to New York. Mr. Bernstein had predicted that, as a Jew, he would have trouble with the Nazis, so in Haifa he had formed The Palestine Shipping Company, and transferred one

of his best ships to that company. It was to sail from Trieste to Haifa under the name S.S. *Tel Aviv.*

One day I received a call from The Bernstein Shipping Company in Paris. A delegation from their headquarters in Hamburg wanted to see me in my office at 4:00 P.M. At exactly 4:00, a group of four people walked in—the general manager of the headquarters in Hamburg, their lawyer, the manager of the Paris office and the general agent for all Europe for the new company.

They told me in detail about their new company, about the S.S. *Tel Aviv*'s regular service from Trieste to Haifa and their decision that their offices on the Place de l'Opéra and the Rue de la Paix in Paris would not, for political reasons, represent the new company in France. After a thorough investigation in travel circles, as well as many talks with the leaders of the Jewish community in Paris, I had been highly recommended to represent the new company in France. They offered me the regular general agency override commission and a budget for advertising. I was to give them my decision the next day at 11:00 A.M.

I went to my friend Kapelus for counsel and we discussed the pros and cons almost all night. We decided the following: they would have to double my override commission because of the hard work that would be involved in launching this enterprise, and they would have to raise the budget for advertising because we were at a disadvantage against our competition.

The next day when I presented my conditions, I explained to them the difficulties I would have in coping with the competition, since the French company Messageries Maritimes had regular service between Marseilles and Haifa with larger steamers than the *Tel Aviv.* The train trip from Paris to Trieste took 10 hours more than the trip to Marseilles, the required Italian visas would be hard to obtain for persons who were stateless, and clients would have to go through customs inspection at the Italian border.

The lawyer and the agent for Europe argued with me for an hour and a half, but I didn't give in. Then they told me that they had a luncheon appointment and asked me to come back at 3:00 P.M.

The general manager from Hamburg had followed our discussion without saying one word. All of a sudden he stood up and said, "Gentlemen, Wolsky is ready to take the job which is not an easy one—don't give him the opportunity to say later 'because you squeezed me, I was

unable to do what I wanted to do.' Give him what he wants and let him be successful. Call off the luncheon appointment and prepare the contract for four o'clock."

I started with active advertising and sending out releases to newspapers and magazines. I wrote an article, *"La Navigation Juive,"* in which I stressed Jewish activities in a new field and in a new profession. The *Times* of Paris printed the article prominently under my name and the article was later reprinted in many newspapers and magazines.

Realizing the public interest in this subject, I worked out a series of articles tracing the history of Jewish maritime activities back to Zebulon, one of the twelve sons of the Biblical Jacob. I also stressed the fact that the S.S. *Tel Aviv* generated jobs for hundreds of Jewish families, and bought ship supplies in Palestine.

Traveling to Palestine via Trieste was a hardship and a big disadvantage *vis-à-vis* my competitors, but I based my hopes for success on the sentiment of the Jews for Eretz Yisrael who would be going to Palestine and drew up my promotion and advertising accordingly:

> Going to and returning from Palestine on the S.S. *Tel Aviv*, you have 10 additional days in *Eretz Yisrael* because the minute you set foot on the S.S. *Tel Aviv,* you are assimilated by the atmosphere of *Eretz Yisrael,* its Hebrew inscriptions, songs, music and life-style. The captain, crew, waiters, stewards, orchestra, entertainers are Jews speaking Hebrew and Yiddish. The food is from the kibbutzim, produced by the hard-working pioneers. The leaders of the *Yishuv* (the Jewish community of Palestine) going to Europe or the United States travel on the S.S. *Tel Aviv,* and you will have the opportunity of meeting them and even chatting with them.

(Golda Meir, in her book *My Life,* mentioned that she used the S.S. *Tel Aviv* for her frequent trips overseas.)

As other means of promotion, I invited personalities, such as the renowned writers Sholem Asch and Zalmen Shneour, to go to Palestine as guests of the company. Their departures were big news in the Jewish press. I also offered free passage on the S.S. *Tel Aviv* through the daily Jewish paper *Haint* (Today), to be given to their readers through a drawing, provided the paper would publicize this free passage on the first page, give the coupons for the drawing, and mention that the S.S. *Tel Aviv* was represented in France by Le Tourist.

I was more successful than The Bernstein Shipping Company had expected me to be, and was named general agent for Belgium and the Netherlands as well.

During my trip to Russia in 1933, I had noted the activities of Intourist, the Government Tourist Agency, and had seen many tourists from various European countries. At that time there was an Intourist office in Paris, but no travel agency specialized in tours to the Soviet Union, despite the fact that many people who originally came from Russia lived in France and were interested in revisiting their place of birth and seeing their relatives.

I contacted Intourist representatives in Paris and with their cooperation, issued brochures in French and Yiddish on travel to the Soviet Union. My clients came not only from all over France, but also from European countries that had no Intourist representatives.

When a Jewish settlement was established in Biro-Bidjan, 90 percent of those emigrating from France to Biro-Bidjan arranged their transportation through my office.

Biro-Bidjan was an agricultural colonization project in the eastern part of Siberia. The Soviet Union had been anxious to improve its agricultural situation by placing more people on farms. In 1927, 226,000 Jews had worked on farms, but their numbers had been diminishing drastically as they went to work in factories and commercial establishments. The Soviet Union, eager to attract Jews to agriculture, established a special section for them in Biro-Bidjan, and moved most of the Jewish cultural and social organizations, including the Agro-Joint and ORT, to the new settlement. Between 1928 and 1933, 18,000 Jews settled there, but because of the difficult climate and lack of machinery, 11,000 left. In order to save the project, Biro-Bidjan was declared a "Jewish Autonomous State" in 1934, and was to represent the Jewish population of the whole Soviet Union. The government expected that this would attract many of the three million Jews in the country, as well as Jews who were oriented toward the left all over the world. Over twenty families left from France, but that was hardly the number the Soviets had anticipated. The "Jewish Autonomous State" was a big failure.

In 1972 when I was in Khabarovsk, I tried to go to nearby Biro-Bidjan, but my request was refused. A resident of Biro-Bidjan I met told

me that there were only about 150 Jewish families, and one Yiddish-language school for children, but few children and a worthless teacher. A small bulletin in Yiddish was published twice a week and a couple of streets were named for Jewish writers, such as Rabinovich (Shalom Aleichem) and Abramovich (Mendele Mocher Sforim).

In the 1930s I continued to seek new fields of activity. An endeavor occurred to me when I noticed the schedule of the S.S. *Normandie,* queen of the French Line fleet, which called for her to be berthed in Le Havre every second Sunday.

Today, some sort of vacation—even by air—is within the reach of many ordinary working people. In those days, when the average Parisian thought of a vacation, it was a week or two in the country during August. Very few average workingclass Frenchmen could think of a trip aboard the S.S. *Normandie.* That was the impossible dream. And as Paris was miles away from Le Havre, the ship itself was rarely seen by Parisians.

I conceived the idea, and organized package tours, for Sunday excursions from Paris to Le Havre consisting of motorcoach round-trip transportation, a stop off in Rouen for a visit to this beautiful city, lunch in a restaurant at Le Havre, and a comprehensive guided tour of the *Normandie.*

Only 25 persons participated in the first tour. Two months later, I had from 500 to 600 persons on each trip. At 8:00 A.M. on the day of departure, 15 to 20 buses lined up in front of my office and an additional police agent handled the traffic.

Later on, the *Normandie* changed her schedule and its day in port was a Monday. Instead of abandoning the program, I did some research and discovered that certain places of business were traditionally closed on Mondays. These included groceries, butcher shops, hair dressing salons, and so on, and the excursions on Mondays continued until the outbreak of World War II.

I also organized all-inclusive tours to Nice, Brussels, and Holland, as well as special holiday tours for Christmas, Easter, and so on. I extended my activities to special tours for various organizations that were interested in meeting their counterparts in other countries, and made arrangements for international congresses and conventions in France and in other countries.

For the 1937 Paris Exposition, called the International Exposition of Art and Technique in Modern Life, I organized all-inclusive package tours of five, seven, ten, or fourteen days' duration, and distributed brochures in French, English, and German to travel agents all over Europe, suggesting that they arrange their own groups so as to take advantage of the lower group rates. The interest in these group tours was greater than I had expected. However, due to the tight hotel situation in Paris I was not able to handle all the orders I received.

My success in business was complemented on February 4, 1938, when our son Gilbert was born, a welcome addition to our family. Luba was still working in the office but our financial situation was much better. We hired a maid who took care of the baby as well as the house.

On the occasion of the inauguration of a monument in Douaumont to honor the Jewish soldiers who had fallen in the Battle of Verdun (First World War), I was in charge of organizing a trip as a pilgrimage to Verdun and Douaumont. This was to be a dignified manifestation of Jewish patriotism with the participation of delegations of the government, army, civil administration and different Jewish organizations, all with their flags, banners, and decorations, accompanied by a few orchestras.

With the help of Baron de Rothschild, owner of the railroad (Chemin de Fer du Nord), I obtained a special train composed of the best cars available going from Paris to Verdun and return. We decorated the cars with flags and appropriate inscriptions, and reserved seats for special personalities and for each delegation, showing the car numbers and the seats. The last three days before the departure date my office was in a state of confusion. Telephone calls came in from the head office of the police department, from City Hall, from different organizations to check the number of seats reserved, to add and to change names. We worked around the clock but we succeeded in satisfying everyone.

The weather was sunny and pleasant and the project was a huge success. All major newspapers and magazines reported the event, and afterwards I received many letters of thanks from different organizations. The most important were from the Baron Robert de Rothschild, president of the Jewish Community of Paris, and General Weiller, president of the Monument Committee.

The services of my office continued to be used by many Jewish organizations, such as Jewish Veterans in the French Army, the H.I.C.E.M., counterpart of HIAS in New York, Jewish Cultural Club, Friends of the Jewish Theatre, and different fraternal organizations. Also among my clients were famous writers, artists, and Jewish leaders, such as Sholem Asch, Zalmen Shneour, D. Charni, A. Mines, I. Opatoshi, H. Grosbard, N. Aronson, the painter Mane Katz, Mrs. Henrietta Szold, founder of Hadassah, Zabotinski, Zroubowil and Sholom Schwartzbard.

12

The Travel Agent's Own Travel Firsts

1938

In September 1938, I went to the International Convention in Stockholm as a delegate of the French section of the Skal Club, an international organization of travel agents, airline, and hotel executives. This was my first trip by plane. When I checked in at the airport I found it interesting that not only was my baggage weighed but I was weighed, too! I had to step on a scale and register the weight of my body and my clothing. In the plane all passengers were given cotton to put into their ears and cellophane envelopes in which to place their fountain pens in

order to avoid spots on their clothes because the air pressure made the pens leak.

That same month, Cunard Steamship Company of Paris invited me to go to the United States to make arrangements for sending groups to the World's Fair, to be held in New York City in 1939. I traveled first class aboard the S.S. *Queen Mary,* a luxury I never anticipated.

The Cunard Steamship Company in New York introduced me to various operators. With these tour operators I made arrangements for the groups which I intended to send to New York to attend the World's Fair, and opened a bank account to handle my planned tour operation. Little did I dream this bank account would be so important to me three years later.

I received allotments for groups on the Cunard ships and on the French ships, and had folders printed describing various tours of five, seven, and eleven days' duration in New York, with extensions to Washington, D.C., Niagara Falls, Montreal, and Quebec. However, when the Second World War broke out in September 1939, all my activities on this project had to be abandoned.

13

World War II Erupts

1939-1940

When World War II began in September of 1939, the population of Paris was afraid that the Germans would bombard the city and panic broke out. Windows were pasted with paper bands as protection

against the sonic boom of the planes, and evacuation of women and children started. Luba and the children left for Poitiers, 350 kilometers from Paris. The office remained open, but all activities ceased. The fighting war was still far from Paris and after four or five weeks the family returned.

Then the Germans started to bombard Paris. Many times in the middle of the night we had to wake up the children, who were now one and eight years old, and run with them to the subway station used as a bomb shelter. When the bombardments became more frequent, it became impossible to run with the children back and forth, and finally we decided to remain at home. At night when the bombardment started we took the children to bed with us. We felt that if a bomb hit our home it would be better that we should all be together.

On May 8, 1940, I was called to the French Army. I passed the medical examination and received the evaluation *apte,* which meant "good for service." I was not actually called to serve because the German Army had advanced rapidly, and it became clear that the Maginot Line was no longer a sure protection as the French Army had believed it was.

Luba and the children left for Mont de Marsan, 125 kilometers from Bordeaux, where our friends from Brest, the Zavidovich family, lived. The Germans were near Belgium and hundreds of Belgian Jewish families were arriving daily in Paris.

As a member of the board of the Federation of Jewish Organizations in France, I was on a committee to provide temporary shelter for refugees and to help them leave France or to go further south toward Spain. Our committee was in permanent session. Evening meetings had already been forbidden by the authorities but because of the arrival of the Belgian refugees *en masse,* the committee was obliged to extend the sessions until midnight.

One evening the police arrived and broke up our meeting. All French citizens were released. One other member of the committee and myself, who did not have French citizenship, were arrested. We were held overnight in the police station for a hearing the next morning. But early in the morning we were released. We learned that after our arrest, the chairman of the committee had called Baron Robert de Rothschild, and through the police commissioner, our release had been obtained.

The Maginot Line was no protection for the French, and the German Army entered France almost without resistance. I left Paris with one

small suitcase on June 14, 1940, one day before the Germans occupied Paris. The railroad station had already been closed to civilians and was surrounded by guards who let in only officials or members of the Army. As a recognized agent of the French railroads, I carried a pass for free transportation in first class on all French trains. Because of this I was able to cross the police barrier and reach the station. All cars of one of the last departing trains to Bordeaux were packed and the doors were already closed. I saw a worker passing with a ladder. For a nice "gift" he placed the ladder near the open window of the toilet of the car and I climbed in. Because I occupied a place in the train which was of dire need to the passengers, I was offered standing room in the corridors up to Bordeaux, from where I was able to join my family in Mont de Marsan.

The German Army advanced faster than we expected, so we decided to move to Toulouse. We hired a horse and wagon, and with other families, started the trip. When we reached Auch, a small town 750 kilometers from Paris, we learned that Toulouse was overcrowded with refugees and that we would have to obtain a special authorization from the police to stay there. There was no other choice but to remain in Auch, which was also overcrowded. It was impossible to find a room, even for overnight.

The man who had driven us with his horse and wagon dumped our baggage in the main square. People from nearby homes took the children for overnight and the adults, including Luba's sister Cyrl and her husband Abraham, who joined us in Mont de Marsan, and a family of four adults from Belgium, spent the night on our luggage in the square.

The next morning, the men of the three families went to surrounding villages to find lodgings, but without results. Finally we came upon a farm house, which had not been in use by the owner for the previous ten years. The house was uninhabitable, with no electricity, no gas, no water, or other facilities, but the roof was in good condition, and we were certain at least to be protected against the rain and wind. We managed to locate the owner, rented the house from him for a small amount, and started to wash, scrape, and paint four rooms, one for each family, and a kitchen for all of us. We bought candles and kerosene lamps, and carried water from a farm one mile away. The owner of this farm showed us a place near our house where years before there had been a well. We dug a deep hole until we reached water. Then the most difficult job started. We had to remain standing in the water in

order to dig deeper. The men took turns digging until we reached the ground of the old well and finally we reached the pure water. Every morning two or three of our group went on bicycles to the market in town for food, papers, and anything else we needed.

The three families lived in a sort of commune. We cooked and ate together and shared the expenses. After dinner we entertained each other with jokes, stories, songs, and in listening to the radio. However, we realized it would be impossible to spend the winter in this house, so in September we started looking for lodgings in town. At the same time I received a letter from our friend Dr. Tcherikover, advising me to come to Marseilles and try to get visas for my family to any country and to leave France as soon as possible because we ran the risk of being picked up by the Germans.

14

Our Move to Marseilles

1940-1941

Marseilles was overcrowded with refugees from all over Europe. I was able to get there myself, without my family. Many of our friends from Paris, from the committee of La Colonie Scolaire, were there, and they helped me to obtain an apartment of two rooms, with a small kitchenette, on the eighth floor of a nice elevator building.

In order to bring my family to Marseilles, our friend Dr. Banchevski and his son, who had authorization to live there, met Luba and the children upon their arrival at the station in Marseilles and passed the guard, showing their identity cards.

The Committee for the Jewish Refugees of the Federation of Jewish Societies of France transferred the main office from Paris to Marseilles, and as a member of the board, I was called to duty as soon as I arrived in this city. The task was great and extremely responsible. The Committee rented the Hotel Marseilles, where nearly 1,000 refugees without any lodgings found shelter. Strict supervision of the sanitary and hygienic conditions was required to avoid an epidemic. Meal coupons were issued for various restaurants and it was important to watch that the refugees got the full value of the coupons. Some of the refugees received visas to different countries and we had to help them with transportation.

Eighteen thousand refugees had been placed in concentration camps at Gurs and Drancy, where they were housed in 300 barracks without windows. The food was very poor, consisting of 300 grams (12 ounces) of bread per person, some coffee in the morning, and meager soup at lunch time, and in the evening. This food comprised only about half of the calories a person needed. Seldom was there milk for the children. The consequences of this regimen due to the quantity and quality of the food was soon evident. The refugees suffered from dysentery, and there were epidemics. All showed signs of undernourishment.

Financial, moral, and judiciary help was carried out by the Committee. The budget was covered by the American Joint Distribution Committee, but it was tight, and expenses were classified into preference categories.

Life in Marseilles itself was very difficult. Food was scarce. One had to stand in line for practically everything. Things like eggs, butter, and cheese were practically impossible to obtain, even on the black market.

Because of my activities on the Committee, the difficult task of obtaining food for the family was Luba's responsibility. She got up at five o'clock in the morning to stand in line. Sometimes she returned and went back again with a small child on her arm. From time to time the elevator in our apartment stopped working and Luba had to carry packages up to the eighth floor.

Our home in Marseilles became an "open house" for members of

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the Committee for the Jewish Refugees, writers, and artists. One of the most frequent visitors was the writer Daniel Charni, who said, "When I am depressed, I go to the Wolsky's. The little apartment is gay, the sun shines through the windows, the baby [Gilbert] smiles and the coffee [ersatz] is hot." The painter A. Wenbaum expressed his appreciation to us by painting a portrait of Gilbert. Mrs. Chagall (the late wife of Marc Chagall) came for consultation about transportation to the U.S. for their family and the priceless paintings. The recitation artist Mrs. Grosbard slept in the kitchen until she was able to find a room.

One day a soldier who had just been released from the hospital, and had a shabby uniform and one arm in a sling, walked in for advice. He needed to find shelter and wanted to know what to do in order to obtain a visa so that he could leave France. The soldier was historian Z. Szajkowski, who was on the staff of the Yivo (Yiddish Scientific Institute). We also had many visits by members of the board of the Committee for Refugees, such as Marc Jarblum, president of the Federation and of the Zionist Organization of France, Leo Shapiro, secretary of the Federation, and Rabbi Langer.

Because of my social activities, I was not secure even in the territory of the Vichy regime. I tried to get a visa to any country, but without success. My only hope was a visa to Mexico. The Mexican Embassy in Paris had used Le Tourist for all their transportation, and my relationship with the First Secretary of the Embassy was very friendly. I contacted the embassy in Vichy and was informed that no visas to Mexico were being issued for Polish citizens or persons without nationality but, as an exception, the embassy would inform the government in Mexico to make an exception for my family and me. However, I would have to be patient because it would take time before the authorization would come through.

March 10, 1941 is remembered as the most happy date in my life. My social activities had always been on a voluntary basis and I never expected reward for them, but on this day I received a letter from the American Consulate in Marseilles advising me that they had received a cable from the State Department in Washington telling them to issue a visa to the United States for my family. The Consulate asked me to appear for a hearing.

I collected all my documents and went to the Consulate. The Consul personally received me and explained that by special decree of the

American government, a certain number of visas would be issued, above the quotas, for persons whose lives were in danger because of their social or political activities. A Presidential Advisory Committee had to decide who was entitled to receive the special visas. The Consul asked me to tell him, in detail, why I was entitled to the special "danger visa." I told him about my activities in La Colonie Scolaire, the Federation, and the Committee for Refugees. When I finished, the Consul told me that the special "danger visa" would give me no right to work in the United States, and that when the war ended I would have to leave the country. He stated, "I would like to help you and if you can wait six weeks, I will try to obtain for you and your family immigration visas." My answer was, "You, Mr. Consul, know better than I whether I can wait or not." "He smiled and told me, "Try to obtain transportation from France in about six weeks. With my letter you will get a French exit visa, and if the situation worsens, you can get your 'danger visa' at any time."

There were no longer any passenger ships going to the United States. However, through my connections in the travel trade, I obtained reservations on the S.S. *Mont Viso,* a freighter which had been converted into a passenger ship, going to Martinique.

Mr. Camille, president of the Syndicate of Travel Agents of the Côte d'Azur, learned about my trip to Martinique and suggested that during my stay on the island on my way to the States, I should contact the Governor, Jean Cassin, and work out with him a plan for the issuance of visas for 500 or 1,000 refugees from France who had trades or professions which would be useful for the country. He had already talked by telephone with Mr. Cassin advising him of my arrival, and he gave me a letter of introduction.

I received a letter from the American Consulate in Marseilles asking me to come with my family on May 5 at 9:00 A.M. for a medical examination and to obtain the immigration visas to the United States. After the medical examinations, we were free to leave. I was asked to return at 2:00 P.M. to pick up the visas. When I arrived at the appropriate hour, other people were waiting for their visas. All of them left and I was still kept waiting. I became impatient and asked the secretary why I had to wait. She went inside and came back to tell me I had to wait until 5:00, when the offices were scheduled to close. At 5:00 P.M. I was the only one in the waiting room and was finally called to the Consul's of-

fice. The Consul explained to me that he had received only three visas on the Polish quota, and as my family consisted of four persons, he would try to issue my or Luba's visas on another quota. He asked where we were born. When I told him he said, "I tried to help you but I cannot." Then I told him that Albert was born in France, making him eligible to go on the French quota. The Consul agreed to this solution, but he said that Albert would not be able to arrive in the United States with us.

When I told him that we were going to Martinique he was relieved, and asked the two secretaries to work late that evening to prepare the visas; he would wait to sign them. He warned me not to go from Martinique to the States with Albert, but suggested that we send someone from Martinique to New York to arrive a few days before us or to leave Albert in Martinique and to send someone from the States to pick him up a couple of days later.

Hours later I left the Consulate, carrying the visas and affidavits in lieu of passports issued by the Consul, like a mother carrying her newborn baby home from the hospital.

15

An Interrupted Sailing

1941

On May 10, 1941, my family and I embarked on the S.S. *Mont Viso,* which had two dormitories—one deck for 150 men and one deck for 150 women and children. The ship made stops at Algiers, Tunis, and Casablanca.

One day after we had left Casablanca, the ship well into the ocean, we suddenly stopped, turned back, and anchored six kilometers from Casablanca. We learned that the British Navy was requisitioning French ships to avoid their being taken over by the Germans. How long we were to be anchored off shore, no one could say. It was up to the Vichy Government to decide.

The 300 passengers were divided into two "camps": the pessimists, who believed that all their hopes to save their lives and to reach the "Golden Land" were being drowned in the ocean, that their visas would expire, and they would end up in a concentration camp; and the other "camp," of optimists, which was certain that this was only a delay of a couple of days, that we were waiting for instructions from Vichy, or an escort by the French Navy. Every day both the optimists and the pessimists found signs for justifying their convictions. I was in the optimists' camp.

Days passed. The food was horrible and always the same: a meager soup, bread, and potatoes and, from time to time, a thin, small piece of meat. The Arabs from Casablanca came in small boats to the *Mont Viso* and sold us rolls, butter, cheese, and sardines. They were not allowed to board the ship so we used a bag or a basket lowered with a string in which we placed the money. The Arabs put in the food and the change, and we pulled the container back on deck.

The majority of the passengers were German Jews. They organized themselves into a committee and sent cables to various Jewish organizations in France and to the H.I.C.E.M. in Lisbon. The Jewish passengers of Russian and Polish origin were excluded from the committee, whose activities were kept in secret. The rest of the passengers were of various nationalities and were not organized.

After a week, the passengers realized that their stay on board would not end soon, and they started to make arrangements to improve their accommodations. It was impossible to remain in the dormitories during the daytime, so wooden boxes were converted into chairs, benches, and tables for sitting and relaxing on deck. Even Jewish services were held. The most precious time was the twice-a-day "news hour" on the radio, which was also used for entertainment. For more "intimate" entertainment, the life boats were popular, but only at night when the lights were out. Some young ladies found "shelter" in the cabins of the ship's officers.

The days were very long and monotonous and the hopes of our proceeding on the voyage to Martinique decreased from day to day.

After a month, rumors started to circulate that the H.I.C.E.M. in Lisbon was trying to do something for the passengers of the *Mont Viso,* but just what, no one knew. The H.I.C.E.M. in Paris had used my office there for the transportation of immigrants, and I knew the executives who had been transferred to Lisbon. I sent a cable to Lisbon telling them that my family and I were on the *Mont Viso* on our way to the States, and asked their feelings as to what hope there was of our reaching the States before the visas expired.

Two weeks passed and I had received no news from Lisbon. Then one day a police motorboat arrived and asked for Boris Wolsky. Luba almost fainted, but the policeman assured her that some people were waiting for me in Casablanca and that he would bring me back to the ship before the day ended. Whether the policeman's promise was enough to calm Luba down I do not recall, but one could not fight with policemen, especially in the situation in which we found ourselves.

I was brought to the law office of Mrs. Benatar, president of the Jewish Community in Casablanca. Present were Mr. Vanikuff, president of the Jewish Veterans of the French Army, and Mr. Chomski, a lawyer, both personal friends of mine.

I was told that in a day or two the passengers of the *Mont Viso* would be taken to concentration camps in Morocco, and that H.I.C.E.M. in Lisbon had chartered a Portuguese steamer, the S.S. *Guine,* which would take 250 passengers from Casablanca to New York. The passengers would be taken from two concentration camps in Morocco in the order of the validity of their visas to the United States. Visas which were to expire in two or three weeks were in the first category; those due to expire in four weeks were in the second category, irrespective of whether the passengers were able to pay their passage or not. But effort was being made to get payment in full, or at least partial payment, from the passengers who could pay. I was assigned by H.I.C.E.M. in Lisbon to visit the camps in Morocco, check the visas, discuss with the prospective passengers the matter of payment, and contact the American Consulate in Casablanca for legal proceedings and immigration forms which would have to be presented to the authorities upon arrival in the United States. Mr. Spanian, of H.I.C.E.M.'s office in Marseilles, would join me in a few days to help make the decisions and reduce my moral responsibility.

When the police motorboat returned me to the *Mont Viso,* passengers were on deck waiting impatiently for my return. I relayed to them in detail the information I had received in Casablanca, and it was received with a spontaneous explosion. Now they felt that the six week limbo would end soon. In one minute, I—the "Polak"—became the "Messiah." As soon as the first reaction of joy was over, each person started to wonder how my message would affect his family. Shortly afterward I was surrounded by a crowd bombarding me with questions. When would our boat anchor in Casablanca? To which concentration camp would they be transferred? What kind of food would they get? Was there any protection against flies and mosquitoes? How many people were already in the camps? Which nationalities were present? How many persons on our ship would be accepted on the S.S. *Guine*? Would older persons and families with children have priority?

Since the majority of passengers were German, a line was organized in a few minutes and each one had to wait his turn to explain his problem. I was not able to answer the questions. I jumped on a table and, in a loud voice said, "I have no authority and I am not capable of answering your questions or give advice or assistance. I can only tell you that families with small children will be transferred to the camp Sidi El Ayachi, not far from Casablanca, and others to camp Kasbah Tadla, in the desert. The United States visas are valid for four months only, and the families with visas expiring in four or five weeks are in the priority category. As to those in the second or third category, I do not know as yet."

I was completely exhausted, and as soon as the meager dinner ended I went to my dormitory but could not fall asleep. I was asking myself the same questions everyone had asked me and I could not find an answer because I had not asked about my own personal status during my meeting with the officials of the community.

The next day all the passengers were dressed to disembark, but the atmosphere was tense. Everyone was absorbed in his own thoughts about what the next day and the day after that would bring, how long our stay in the camps would be, who would be selected to leave in two weeks on the S.S. *Guine* or in four weeks when the other ship chartered by H.I.C.E.M. was expected in Casablanca.

For me personally, the atmosphere on the ship had changed. The passengers passing me smiled and most of them greeted me with "Good morning, Herr Wolsky." Some of them stopped me and

started to talk about the weather, the news on the radio. Most of them, at some point during the conversation, showed me their passports and asked if their visas would be in the first, second, or third categories. I knew how important all this was to them. However, I had no choice but to answer, "Sorry, I really don't know."

Late in the afternoon of June 23, the captain of the ship announced that the boat would dock in Casablanca the next day, and that buses would be available to take the passengers and their luggage to the respective camps.

The next morning the ship arrived in Casablanca and I noted that posters had been put up listing the names of the passengers and giving the respective number of the bus each passenger was to take. There was no indication of to which camp the buses were to go. This procedure was adopted purposely to avoid any arguments or discussions among the passengers who were assigned to the camp located in the desert, far from Casablanca.

Because of my small children I was brought to Sidi El Ayachi. When our bus stopped in the main square of the camp, we were greeted by refugees who had learned of our coming and were eager to find friends or relatives among the new arrivals. As soon as I stepped off the bus, I met a member of the Provisional Government of Spain. When in Paris, this gentleman had been in charge of transferring to Mexico the leaders of the Spanish Revolutionary Government and the Fighting Volunteers of the Spanish Civil War. The Mexican Embassy in Paris had recommended my office for arranging transportation by ship from Le Havre to New York and by Greyhound bus from New York to Mexico, and paid for in cash by this member of the Provisional Government.

He now embraced me—Spanish style—and asked if I would like to join him in the Spanish barracks where I would be an honored guest. However, he said that if I preferred to be with my people, his advice was that as soon as we were shown to our barracks, my family and I should lie down near the door on the floor. This way we would retain the space during our stay in the camp and near the door we would have fewer flies and more air. Thanks to this advice, I had four straw sacks for sleeping near the door, and was envied by my barracks-mates.

The next day I was called to a meeting of a committee of the inhabitants of the other barracks who had arrived in the camp many days before us on the ships *Wajoming* and *Alsina.* Rabbi Shochetman of Paris, the head of the committee, told me that the commandant of the

camp had informed him about the arrival of the *Guine* and that I was to be the spokesman to the French authorities for the prospective passengers concerning such matters as exit visas, currency, and customs. The committee accepted my assignment, offered me their assistance, and wished me success.

On June 30 I was called to the administrative office of the camp where the commandant told me that a hotel room in Casablanca had been reserved for me. My family would have to remain in the camp. I was to get my baggage ready and a car would take me to the police commissioner in Casablanca, Mr. Bourrell, from whom I was to receive information and instructions. This was a repetition of the situation in Marseilles. I thought, "I am in a hotel in Casablanca, busy with humanitarian work, and the burden to keep up the family under extremely difficult circumstances again rests upon my wife, Luba."

Two days later, Mr. Spanian of H.I.C.E.M. in Marseilles joined me in Casablanca, and we worked out a plan for selecting the passengers of the first and second priorities. We divided the job between the two of us. Mr. Spanian was to screen the list of those at the Sidi El Ayachi and I would go to Kasbah Tadla because most of the passengers from the *Mont Viso* had been assigned to the latter camp. Since I had been with them for two months, I was in a better position to judge whether each individual could pay full passage rate, or 50 percent, or was to travel free of charge.

I had received a letter from the Commission des Refugees for a priority seat on a bus going from Casablanca to Kasbah Tadla. When I arrived at the bus terminal to board the bus I showed the letter to the Manager of the G.T.M. Bus Company. He took me to the coach which was ready to leave for Kasbah Tadla and which was packed with Arabs. Two male Arabs were seated in the front row. He grabbed them by the neck and shoved them with his foot out of the coach. When I told him I required only one seat he said, "Well, you cannot share a seat with these people." That was the way the French Colonial Administration treated the natives of Morocco.

Upon my arrival at Camp Kasbah Tadla, I, the "Polak," was warmly received by the camp committee, comprised mostly of German Jews. I explained to them the reason for my coming and asked their assistance. All persons with visas due to expire within two months were to fill out the forms I brought, answering all questions. I also needed a room where I would be able to ask questions in privacy.

After lunch I was taken to the administration building, where to my astonishment, I saw six persons sitting at typewriters, with lines of people standing near each typewriter and people already waiting near the door where I was to interrogate them, with their completed cards in their hands. I was surprised at the order, efficiency, and speed with which this procedure had been organized.

I checked the date of expiration of each visa, the number of children in the party and their ages, the health situation, the age of the adults, the name of the sender of the affidavit, his relationship to the passengers, and his financial situation, and whether the passenger could pay his passage in full, in part, or whether he could not pay anything.

Late in the evening my job was finished. I spent that night under a screen to protect me from the mosquitoes, and the next day I left for Casablanca. On my way back there was a tornado and the sand of the desert blew into my face and stung like needles.

In Casablanca Mr. Spanian and I classified the forms of both camps into first, second, and third categories, and we composed a list of the passengers for the *Guine*. The assignment of the passengers for the first and second categories was no problem, but we had nine berths left for an additional 160 applicants who were entitled to third category classification. We could not decide which of the 160 persons should get the nine berths. We eliminated the least crucial. It was a long procedure but we finally satisfied our consciences. Not until 3:00 A.M. was the list of passengers completed. Still, we could not fall asleep because we continued discussing the nine persons we had allowed passage and whether we had been fair to the remaining 151 persons.

My family was on the list of the accepted ones because I had two small children and I paid the full amount of the transportation cost. I was assigned as purser on the *Guine* during the voyage.

I contacted the American Embassy about the immigration and customs regulations in the United States, and the police commission in Casablanca as to exit visas, as well as French Customs. At the American Embassy I learned that the passengers would have to fill out an immigration form which listed thirty-two questions, but the Consulate had only a couple of forms and I had to print 300 additional ones. The police commissioner asked me to bring all the documents of the passengers—their passports, identity cards, and residence cards.

When I had collected all the documents from the passengers and brought them to the police, they found many which were not in order: some had expired. I interceded with the commissioner and he told me not to worry, that all the passengers would get the necessary exit visas to enable them to leave the country and he would arrange with the customs officers in Casablanca to be courteous and cooperative upon the departure of those passengers.

The S.S. *Guine* arrived at the port of Casablanca on July 21, two days before the scheduled departure date. All the passengers were brought to Casablanca from the camps. By intervention of the police commissioner, the Banque de France kept longer banking hours than usual and opened a special section to change French francs into American dollars for the passengers, upon presentation of their passport and visa to the United States and their French exit visa.

On July 22 at 7:00 P.M. all passengers had already boarded the ship, scheduled to sail at 5:00 A.M. on July 23.

After dinner, the captain called me to tell me that two couples would have to leave the ship because their visas had expired on the day of embarkation. I called the police commissioner at home and he told me that in the early morning he would bring official documents certifying that the two couples had embarked one day earlier, when their visas would have still been valid.

The news spread like wildfire. No one went to sleep. All passengers assembled in the public lounge to discuss the situation and made suggestions as to how to save the two couples. Long after midnight a decision was made and accepted by all the passengers. If the captain tried to force the two couples to leave the ship, all the passengers would be on deck to physically prevent their disembarkation, despite the fact that all the passengers were eager to leave France without delay. This was a manifestation of humanity and solidarity.

At 6:00 A.M. all the passengers were on deck. The commissioner of police and Mr. Spanian boarded the ship. I went with them to the captain's cabin and the commissioner presented to the captain the promised certificates. The captain was not sure that the immigration officials in the United States would accept the certificates, stating that he could be fined $1,000 per person and would be obliged to take the two couples back to Europe, according to United States immigration regu-

lations. After two hours of discussion and bargaining a compromise was reached. The two couples signed an affidavit on official paper (*papier timbré*) that they would pay the fine and absolve the company from all other obligations. Their signatures were witnessed by the commissioner of police and Mr. Spanian.

16

The Long Trip to America Ends

1941

At 10:00 A.M. the police orchestra played the "Marseillaise," and the ship sailed, amid shouts of joy from all the passengers.

The next day in the early morning, I was called to the captain's cabin. "Mr. Wolsky," the captain said to me, "I didn't sleep all night. It is the first time I am going to the States. I know that the Immigration Service there is very strict, particularly in war time, and I cannot jeopardize my career because of the two couples, and I have decided to return to Casablanca." I told the Captain that his decision would endanger the lives of over 250 human beings and that he could not make this decision without the consent of his company. I urged him to send a radio message to the company's headquarters in Lisbon, asking for instructions, but to tell them to contact H.I.C.E.M., who had chartered the ship, before giving him instructions, and that I would send a radio message to H.I.C.E.M. explaining the situation. I went to my cabin, composed a message to H.I.C.E.M. in Lisbon, suggesting they guarantee the company any fine involved and to see to it that a radio message be im-

mediately sent to the captain instructing him to continue on the voyage to New York.

I rushed to the radio office and sent the message "Express." On my way back to my cabin I was stopped by some passengers who asked me what had happened. I told them that nothing had happened but they did not believe me and rumors started to circulate. I wondered how the passengers found out that something had happened. Was it intuition? Was it my running to the captain's cabin, the radio station, and back? Was it the expression on my face? Was it my nervousness? I did not know but I was questioned by so many passengers that I could no longer bear it. I shut myself in my cabin to avoid panic.

In the middle of dinner I was called to the captain. All the persons in the dining room turned their faces to me and their eyes were questioning. I returned five minutes later, smiling, and told the passengers what had happened and that the captain had received an order to continue to New York. Applause broke out, champagne was ordered, and after dinner there was singing and dancing. It was one of the gayest evenings on the trip.

Neither my children nor my grandchildren may understand why I have described in such detail the sailing of the S.S. *Guine.* It is extremely difficult to describe the atmosphere and feeling of over 250 people from all walks of life, who had gone through forced labor, interment in concentration camps, or prisons for political reasons, war, misery, fear, danger, hell—who were happy to grab a life line, their visas to the United States, in order to survive and who could have missed that last chance because of small technicalities. It was heartwarming to find that people of different classes, normally not friendly to each other, were ready in time of danger to join forces, even at the risk of their own lives.

On the fifth night at sea, the British Navy stopped our ship. I was awakened and presented to the British officers who had boarded our ship. I was asked whether I was in possession of the passports of all the passengers, and if so to give them the passports of an Italian couple. The couple was already awake, dressed, and waiting in a private room. I was asked to wait outside, and half an hour later I got the passports back. They freed the two Italians, authorized the captain to proceed, and left the ship. (Six years later when I was in Paris, I learned that the husband of this couple had been a political refugee, and after the war he returned to Italy and became a minister in the Italian cabinet.)

On August 2 the British Navy ordered our ship to Bermuda where we anchored for 24 hours. A staff of ten civilians, men and women, boarded the ship and ordered all letters, cables, and other correspondence and printed matter to be put into sacks, labeled with the names and nationalities of the passengers and brought to them. Because from time to time they needed information on one of the passengers, I was allowed to be present in the room where they checked the correspondence, which was in about two dozen languages. I admired the speed and efficiency with which the censoring of the letters was carried out. Almost everything was read very quickly and from time to time notes were made. Very few documents were confiscated.

A day before our arrival in New York, at dinner, I found on my plate the following letter, signed by all the passengers, which took up three pages for the signatures:

S.S. *Guine*
August 5, 1941

Dear Mr. Wolsky:

As we are finally about to attain the goal of our voyage, we wish to express our deepest gratitude to you. We know all the unimaginable difficulties which had to be surmounted in order to enable us to leave. We know that these difficulties could not have been overcome were it not for the superhuman effort, the persistent labor and the obstinate will of several men, among whom you are in the forefront. We do not wish to use unnecessary rhetoric and so we simply say: Thank you from the very bottom of our hearts and good luck to you and your family.

I was very moved by this spontaneous expression of the feelings of my fellow passengers.

After dinner, I called everyone to the public room and told them that the following day should be the happiest day of their lives, that their dream was going to be a reality, that they will share their joy with their relatives and friends, but in these festive days—and even later—when each of them would be absorbed by their own worries as to how and where to find a place to live, how to find a job, they must think about the thousands and thousands of people who remained on the other side

of the ocean and do everything in their power—as well as through their relatives and friends in the United States—to save those still in Europe. I told them, "You are the lucky ones and you must remember that Jewish organizations and individuals made it possible for you to come to the United States and to save your lives, and you must support and help those organizations to bring over more people and to save more lives."

On August 6, 1941, early in the morning, most of the passengers were already on the deck. Our ship passed the Statue of Liberty and the passengers, in a joyful mood, discussed the meaning of the Statue, on which are imprinted the immortal words of Emma Lazarus:

> Give me your tired, your poor,
> Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
> The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
> Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me.

Before the ship reached port a representative of HIAS in New York boarded the ship with the Immigration officers. He had been advised by cable from Lisbon to contact me and I told him what had happened with the two couples and gave him the names of other passengers whose visas had expired during the trip. He asked me to stand by and not to disembark before the last passengers left the ship, saying that perhaps Immigration would require additional information.

This was the first ship arriving in New York after all the shipping companies had stopped their regular transatlantic service, and reporters from all the major newspapers boarded the S.S. *Guine.* I was interviewed by the press about the trip and I told them that we had twice been stopped by the British Navy, and also that on the ship we had celebrated the 70th birthday of twin sisters. All the photographers ran around the ship to find the twins.

My uncle Morris and his family were waiting at the pier and became worried when most of the passengers had already disembarked and my family had not. They felt perhaps our visas were not in order. I don't know whether they were or were not in order, because when the last passenger left the Immigration Office, I was called in and the HIAS representative introduced me to the officers with a speech telling them, in brief, what I had done for the arriving immigrants. The officers shook my hand and said, "Welcome to the United States," and they

placed their official seal on our documents without asking any questions.

The next day I went to the New York office of the President's Advisory Committee to thank them for the visas they had sent for me and my family. I was told that they knew about my arrival from the *New York Times* of that date in which there was the story, in detail, of the arrival of the *Guine* with 250 immigrants, including doctors, lawyers, teachers, students, engineers, architects, artists, scientists, survivors of concentration camps and forced labor prisons. The *Times* also stated that I had been in charge during the trip and had served as the spokesman for the passengers, also that I was born in Russia, had lived in Paris for 20 years, and had been a travel agent in that city. Approximately the same report appeared in the *Herald Tribune, The Daily Mirror, The Jewish Forward, Jewish Morning Journal,* and *The Day* (another Yiddish newspaper of the time).

This was the end of an exciting, but agitating and troublesome life during the Second World War.

This was my first day in the United States and the beginning of a new life.

17

A New Life Begins—in America

1941-1942

I had reached the end of an odyssey and the beginning of a new life. It would certainly not be easy without a profession that could be practiced during wartime, without capital to invest, and with no knowledge of the English language. I expected hardship, disappointment, and failure, but my family and I did not have to fear for our lives; we did

not have to run from city to city; there was no need to hide. The dread of being put into a concentration camp was ended.

Uncle Morris gave us an apartment in his building on Avenue K in Brooklyn and we furnished it on a very low budget.

My first priority was to save the lives of the members of our family still in Europe—Lucien and Sonia, Sara, Paula, and their families, and Luba's sister and her family. The only way to get them out of France was to obtain Cuban visas for them.

Uncle Morris sent an affidavit to Lucien and he and Sonia arrived a couple of months later. Sara decided to stay in France because her husband, Iser, was promised protection against the Germans by the president of the company where he was employed. Unfortunately, he ended up in a concentration camp, from which he escaped. They came to the United States after the war.

Uncle Morris bought a visa to Cuba for Paula and her family and they waited two years in order to get a quota-visa for the United States.

During my visit to America in 1938, I had deposited some money in the First National City Bank of New York. With this money I was able to open, one month after arrival in the United States, my first travel agency, Global Travel Service, at 11 West 42nd Street in New York. It was a two-room office with an annual rent of $600.00. I hired a French-English secretary, a refugee from Belgium, for $75.00 a month, and in the German weekly *Aufbau* and the Russian daily *Posledniye Novosti,* I started to advertise the possibility of bringing relatives from Europe to Cuba.

The Cuban Government granted tourist visas to applicants regardless of nationality or religion, for a period of six months, with the possibility of extending these visas after six months. In order to obtain such visas, one had to arrange a letter of credit from an American bank in the sum of $2,000 per person. Children under 18 years of age were excluded. The Bank would pay back this amount in six equal monthly installments to the visitor after his arrival in Cuba. A sum of $500 per person had to be deposited with the Cuban Immigration Department as a bond which would be refunded to the refugee upon departure from Cuba. A deposit of $150 per adult, and $75.00 per child, to cover the cost of a ticket to the United States, had to be deposited in a Cuban bank and would be returned to the depositors when they left Cuba.

Once the above prerequisites were met, the Cuban authorities would cable their consulates abroad and a visa would be obtained in approximately 7 to 14 days. Should the tourist or his family be unable or not wish to comply with the above requirements, it was possible to arrange financing at a cost of $200 per person. The Cuban visas obtained in this way saved the lives of thousands of people.

Before I had a chance to see if my new venture would be successful, the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, and the Declaration of War by the United States made it very difficult to proceed with my travel business endeavors. First, I had to renew my license to conduct business each month, and by the end of the month I had to report to the Treasury Department how much money I had deposited in the bank in cash and checks, showing who gave me the money, and for what purpose. The same applied for checks issued, as well as a reconciliation of my bank balance in two parts—checks issued for business, and those issued for personal expenses. Also, I was obliged to submit to the Censor all cables to foreign countries. These rules and regulations effectively stopped my activities in the travel field.

Because of my lease, however, I had to keep my office open until May, 1942. I tried to organize a new service. Thousands of Jewish families in the United States were anxious to find out about their families in the Soviet Union with whom communication was cut off; others wanted to find out about their relatives in Poland who had been evacuated to Russia during the war.

I cabled the president of the Jewish Community in Moscow, and the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, asking if they would agree to help me locate these persons in Russia and if they would permit packages to be sent to these persons. I received the following answers.

> Send regularly lists persons whose addresses are desired we will locate them Stop Parcels should be addressed to Red Cross which distributes material aid among all evacuated from Soviet territories occupied by the German invaders.
>
> Mikhaelis,
> Chairman Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee
> —Kubichev

Send us names people you are interested we shall help investigate their addresses.

Chairman Chobrutsky—Tashkent

From the above cablegrams, I realized that the civilian population had been evacuated from Moscow, Mikhaelis to Kubichev and Chobrutsky to Tashkent in Central Asia. The answers were very encouraging, but because of Stalin's murderous campaign against Jewish doctors, artists, and writers, Mikhaelis, himself a famous artist, esteemed and respected throughout the Soviet Union, fell victim to this infamous calumny and was murdered by Stalin and his henchmen.

I ceased my activities, and closed my travel agency.

18

My Entrepreneurial Experiences

1942-1945

After I closed my travel agency and was without means of making a living, I looked for a job, a business, or a partnership. Mr. Lesnik, a committee member of the Jews from France, encouraged me to learn the trade of cutting diamonds, and located a small factory where the owner

agreed to teach me the trade for a fee of $600. The owner was a very ordinary person, a good worker, but without any knowledge of how to instruct. He showed me how to do it a couple of times, and if the work was not as he expected, he yelled and cursed and made me shiver with fear. One day when I lost a small stone he beat me with the pincer. The fear helped me to learn fast and after three months he started to pay me $50 a week.

My boss was a naturalized Belgian citizen, and on Belgian Independence Day he was invited to a reception at the Belgian Consulate. When he returned he came directly to me and asked, "Why didn't you tell me who you are?" It seems that at the reception he met the sculptor Aronson, and when he told Aronson that he was a diamond cutter, Aronson told him that his friend Wolsky was a diamond cutter. When he told Aronson that I worked for him, Aronson told him so much about me that he felt guilty at his having yelled and cursed at me. After that, he began to treat me with silk gloves, but for a short time only.

My coworkers in the shop told me that my work was very good and that my boss was exploiting me. I asked for a raise, but was refused. A week later when I left the shop, an exworker was waiting for me and asked me to come to his shop where I could get double the salary I had been receiving. I went to his place for a test, to polish a stone, and when I finished, I was offered $110 a week.

A friend of mine from Paris, Mr. Leon Kapelus, the son of my friend Kapelus who had advised me about the travel business, was also a diamond cutter. I was trained to cut the top off the diamond while Mr. Kapelus cut the bottom; we were a good team. We registered with the War Production Board, Diamond Section, under the trade name Wolsky and Kapelus, rented a cutting wheel in a small diamond shop at 516 Fifth Avenue, and became "diamond manufacturers." Kapelus' uncle, Mr. Lubell, a well-known diamond dealer, bought rough diamonds for us, and when a parcel of stones was finished he sold them. Certainly, neither one of us was a very fine technician because our finished diamonds were sold at a small profit, but we made enough to live on. This gave me the courage to leave Brooklyn and to rent an apartment at 12 Dongan Place, Washington Heights.

My diamond factory had a short life: there was a recession in the diamond trade and I was obliged to close the shop. While looking for a

business I was advised to start a business in costume jewelry and ladies' handbags. To rent a store in Manhattan was too expensive, but with the help of my cousin Isidore we found a store in a nice business location at 68 Mamaroneck Avenue, in White Plains, New York. I obtained a loan from Uncle Morris and on October 20th I opened Gilbert of Paris.

Transportation from our apartment in Washington Heights (New York City) to the store in White Plains was very complicated: subway to 125th Street, bus to the railroad station, train to White Plains, and a 15- to 20-minute walk from the station to the store. Running the business posed a heavy burden on Luba. She was in the store every second day, and daily in December and before holidays. At the same time she had to take care of the house, two young children, and to feed a family of four. Through the whole month of December we left home at 7:30 A.M. and returned at 10:00 P.M. In addition to the long store hours we had to shop for merchandise in New York, which in wartime wasn't too easy to obtain. We had to carry packages to White Plains, decorate the windows, shine the jewelry, clean the sidewalk of snow and ice, and keep the inventory and bookkeeping in order. Despite the hard work, we were happy to be able to support our family.

We were content, but it was too difficult to keep going. The income was too small to hire help, but we tried to find a solution.

My diamond factory partner, Mr. Kapelus, and his wife operated a boutique at 524 Madison Avenue, New York City, by the name of Chez Molyn. We met many times to analyze the pros and cons of different projects to improve the situation of both stores, such as cooperative shopping and promotion, partnership, or merger. In October 1945, we merged and formed the corporation Gilbert-Molyn, Inc.

In the Madison Avenue boutique we opened a section of costume jewelry and ladies' handbags. Because of the merger of the two stores, shopping saved time and energy, our rating for credit increased, we received more consideration from the manufacturers and importers (it was war and merchandise was difficult to get), and bookkeeping and general expenses were reduced. This allowed us to hire a saleswoman for the boutique, reducing the burden on the two women partners. Income improved and our life became normal.

19

My Postwar Return to Paris

1946

After the war ended, Pan American announced that in February of 1946 they would resume passenger service to London. I decided to go to Paris for many reasons, the most important of which was to see postwar France and to decide if we should return to Paris or remain in the States and to build our future lives here. On February 27th I left on a Pan Am Clipper via London to Paris.

As soon as the plane took off, my thoughts turned to Paris. How would I find my sister Sara and her family, other relatives, friends, my apartment, La Colonie Scolaire, the Federation? Who had been deported? Who had been killed? Who would still be alive? What about food, clothing? How would Paris look after the war? I was so deeply absorbed in my thoughts that I did not realize that the stewardess was near me waiting for my attention. She asked me if my name was Wolsky. When I told her it was, she asked me to follow her; the captain wanted to talk to me. It was like waking up in the middle of a dream and before I had time to become alarmed, I was introduced to the captain. He started to talk to me in Polish, but when I told him I didn't speak the language, he was very disappointed and in English he told me that because my name was Wolsky he thought that I was Polish. He revealed to me his background. He was born in a village in Poland where his father repaired shoes. There was not enough bread for all the children, and they led a very miserable life. At 14 he had left home and after a three-year odyssey, arrived in New York. Through hard work in high school, he received a scholarship for college. At the time we spoke, he had a nice job, a nice family, and a beautiful home in California. As a senior captain, he traveled all around the world and would soon retire with a substantial pension—this was America!

In Paris, the effect of the war and the German occupation was visible everywhere. Many stores were closed, the streets were dirty and almost

dark at night, food was rationed, restaurants were open only three hours, and offered a meager menu at a fixed price. I was depressed and almost cried.

The reunion with my sister, Sara, and her family, was most exciting. Sara managed to feed me without food coupons, and had enough cakes and cookies for the guests and neighbors who came to greet the "Americaner."

One day a man approached me on the street. He spread out his arms and screamed, "Wolsky, you are alive!" He embraced me and cried. I was moved but I didn't know his name and was ashamed to ask him. Even now, 31 years later, I see his face, his excitement, his devotion, and I ask myself, "Who was this wonderful human being?"

Upon my return to New York I shared with Luba my impressions of Paris after the liberation, and for weeks we discussed the pros and cons of returning to Paris for good. We were able to get back our apartment there, and the office. My license for the travel agency was still valid, my name and reputation intact, and I would have been able to open my travel agency without delay. In New York we are still greenhorns and in a small-income business. When we considered the problem of our children, the situation changed. We thought about their education, the change in languages. When we arrived in New York, Albert had been ten-and-a-half years old and had been accepted in a school with small children. Gilbert was then three and would come home crying, "I can't play with the children, they don't know how to talk." But by the time the war ended, both of them were talking English. If we were to return to Paris, their education would suffer. We realized that their future in the United States was more promising than in Europe. This determined our decision to stay in the United States, and to endeavor to improve our financial condition.

20

A New Business in New York

1947-1948

After Luba and I decided to stay in the United States, I began looking for the possibility of becoming a partner in a factory, business, or an existing travel bureau, or buying a small agency. I advertised in the *New York Times* and received many offers, but nothing was attractive to me except one from Fred Hann, a refugee from Czechoslovakia, who owned a small shop making stuffed toys. Mr. Hann gave the impression of an honest person who knew the toy business. We agreed on the following terms. We would form a corporation in which both of us would have the same amount of stock and the same salary of $35 a week. I would have to pay Mr. Hann for the tools, sewing machines, drills, models, and raw materials per inventory. As good will, I agreed to lend the corporation $4,000, to be repaid to me from its net earnings. It was a fair agreement, but I postponed signing it because my desire was to further exploit activities in the field of tourism.

My trade colleagues from Paris, Mr. Rubenfeld and Mr. Jaffe, both former executives of a large international travel agency in Paris, bought a travel agency, Consolidated Tours. I went to see them and talked to them about my desire to get back into the travel trade. Their opinion was that the travel business was still dead, but it would be good to be ready when conditions improved. They asked me to join them at a salary of $50 a week, and 40 percent of the net profits of business which I would bring in.

I accepted their conditions, printed announcements, and mailed them to all my friends, relatives, and some organizations. Luba remained active in Gilbert-Molyn.

Because of my community activities in behalf of France, I had become acquainted with Mr. Jacques Ferrand, the executive secretary of One World Awards Committee, which was devoted to peace and the world struggle to preserve civilization. The Committee sent delega-

tions to Europe to take part in the International LaGuardia ceremonies, during which streets in Poland, France, and Italy were named after the late mayor of the City of New York. Mr. Ferrand designated me to be in charge of organizing the trip for this delegation of 15 personalities, their transportation, and their stay in Europe. Handling such an important group proved a good start on my new venture.

On Friday, May 14, 1948, at 4 P.M., David Ben-Gurion read the *Scroll of Independence* proclaiming the establishment of the Jewish State of Israel. It brought an end to the British reign, an end to the camps in Cyprus, an end to the tragedies and the heartbreaking scenes. The 600,000 Jews of Palestine opened the State of Israel for all liberated from the concentration camps; the oppressed, the homeless, the stateless became Israel's citizens the minute they touched the land of Israel!

The World Congress of Jewish Culture was scheduled for September 16 to 21 in New York City. Through the recommendation of the Jewish Labor Committee, it was requested that I organize a charter from Paris to New York and assemble all delegates from the different countries in Paris prior to the flight departure. It was not an easy task, but because of my connections with travel agencies all over Europe before the war, I succeeded in bringing all delegates to New York on time. I issued a *Guide Book of New York* in Yiddish, giving all information to the visitors on what to see, how to go there, addresses of Jewish organizations and consulates, and so on. The congress was a success and the committee sent me a letter of appreciation for my job, which had contributed to its success.

21

My Business Expands to Israel

1949-1950

My business improved after Israel became a state because many people were interested in seeing the Land of Israel. In my quest for pioneering I organized the first group to Israel for the Passover holidays. The tour included hotels, meals, and sightseeing, but I warned the members of the group not to expect the same comforts as they had at home, as not all rooms would have showers and the food would not be gourmet style. Yet the group of 30 was a sellout. The sightseeing tours were made in military buses and when the group left Beersheba for a tour of the Negev, a soldier in combat dress joined it for protection. Life in Israel was difficult, food was rationed, milk and eggs were given only for children, apartments were scarce, and the refugees lived in tents and in miserable conditions. But morale was high. People were proud to maintain their dignity; they were no longer homeless, stateless, and unwanted. "It is a hard life but we will overcome" was their philosophy.

This was my first trip to Israel and it was an exciting experience. The highlight and most interesting part was our visit to a kibbutz (collective farm). Not one of its members owned anything, not even the clothes on their bodies or pocket money. But nobody would ever go hungry, do without enough clothing, books, cigarettes, or drugs. A couple had only one room without a kitchen, but their meals were prepared for them in the grand dining room. The Baby-House took care of their babies (one nurse for three babies), the Children's House (four children to a room) and Playrooms took care of their children, in cheerful, gaily-decorated places. The parents did not have to worry about their children and could stay with them after work. There were no worries about education, health, welfare, or even old age. Everyone did his work willingly, and received in return whatever he required.

Operation "Magic Carpet," to airlift the Jews of Yemen from the camps in Aden to Israel, was organized by the Joint Distribution Com-

mittee and operated by Consolidated Tours. Planes, C-4 and DC-4, were chartered from Alaska Airlines. The airlift started in January with one planeload daily, but the influx of emigrants from the camp in Aden was growing and additional planes from Flying Tiger Lines were chartered to airlift 500 to 600 persons daily. On August 7th, 1949, I was sent by Consolidated Tours to Israel to supervise the operation of the airlift; to check the number of adults, children, and infants arriving, and to report to Consolidated Tours.

I left Israel at the end of October. During my stay there I had checked 142 planeloads and almost 18,000 people, which is an average of 125 persons on a plane containing 60 seats. Because of their long walking journey from Yemen to Aden they were so skinny that the average weight-per-person was 80 pounds. Watching their arrival at Lod Airport was most thrilling. When the planes touched down, many of the refugees kissed the earth and said *Sheheyonu*—"Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who hath preserved us alive, sustained us, and brought us to the Holy Land."

There was a tall young man with long earlocks, dressed in a tuxedo and pajama trousers; there were women dressed in colorfully embroidered blouses and dresses; there was a woman with an infant—she raised her arms with the infant to the sky and murmured a blessing to God. There was a tent in which long benches and tables were set up to serve bread and peanut butter. When we walked in we found all of the Yemenites sitting on the floor. One of them explained in Hebrew that they were more comfortable there than on the benches.

One night while at the airport when two planes arrived from Aden, I met Captain Wooten of Flying Tigers Airline, Mr. Vitalis of the American "Joint," and a controller of the American Aviation Board there to check that the operation was in accordance with the regulations of the Aviation Board. The controller asked Mr. Vitalis, "Why do you spend a lot of money to bring these people from Aden? They are almost dead bodies and will not survive." Mr. Vitalis answered, "Some of them will die but they will be buried like human beings and their bodies will not be left for wild animals and birds, but 75 percent of them will become useful citizens."

When I left Israel, the office in charge of the operation presented me with an album of pictures of the Yemenites, which I cherish very much.

In 1950 the Government of Israel organized the Israel Tourist Co. to promote tourism to Israel, and named Mr. Chaim Barlas to open offices in New York, Paris, Zurich, and Rome. In order to avoid great expenses, he was to open the offices in existing travel agencies accredited by the airlines and ship companies.

In New York, the Israel Tourist Company was opened in the offices of Consolidated Tours and I was assigned to manage this department. All Zionist organizations, Israeli officials, and invited personalities such as Jan Peerce, Sergei Kusovitzki, Leonard Bernstein, and Isaac Stern traveled through my department. An Israeli official once asked me what my first name was in Hebrew. I told him that my Jewish name, Berl, in Hebrew means Dov. In order to please the Israelis, I printed cards saying "Boris Dov Wolsky," and since then my middle initial has been "D."

I was invited to Israel for a conference with the director of the Government Tourist Office regarding the development of Israel as a tourist center and to investigate the situation concerning hotels, restaurants, buses, taxis, guides, and interpreters. Plans were made to convert Elath into a tourist haven, so I went to that destination. The plane touched down on a field covered with grass. There was a sack suspended on a stick to check the direction of the wind, and a booth nearby. This was the airport, in a fisherman's village with wooden houses, huts, and tents. It was very hot; I had half a glass of water and was told that I would get another half glass later, but no more until my departure because water was scarce.

The setting of Elath was most beautiful. Multi-colored mountains surrounded it. There was a beach and the clear blue water welcomed swimming or skin diving. A Maritime Museum, containing an outstanding collection of coral and fish from the Red Sea was very interesting. I left with the impression that to make a tourist paradise of Elath was unrealistic, it was like a dream.

I was wrong. During my yearly trips to Israel I saw Elath grow into the flourishing port town of over 18,000 inhabitants it is now. It has a children's forest where a tree is planted in the name of every child born in Elath, an art museum dedicated to the memory of European artists deported during the holocaust, a municipal library, zoological garden, hospital and synagogues. It is a modern resort city with luxury hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, cabarets, and bars. The coral beach offers a

full range of water sports, a ride in the glass-bottom boats shows a forest of multi-colored corals, fish of every size, and all the beauties beneath the clear blue water. It offers a dream vacation in the desert, with all the luxury of the civilized world.

22

My Interest in Consolidated Tours Increases

1950-1951

In February 1950 I bought 17½ percent of Consolidated Tours's shares for $7,000. My salary was raised to $175 a week, the same amount received by Rubenfeld and Jaffe. I organized packages of all-inclusive tours to different countries in Europe and Israel, using connections I had made there before the war when I operated my travel agency Le Tourist in Paris. The result was satisfactory, but at the end of the year the profit was insignificant and Rubenfeld and Jaffe decided to close the tourist department and to devote their activities to charters. I offered to take over the tourist department at my risk until September 1, 1951. If it were to show a profit, my partners would get 40 percent of it and I would have the option to buy the tourist department and the licenses of the airlines and steamship companies. My offer was accepted.

In order to make the business succeed, I had to extend my activities to many more foreign countries, and to visit these destinations to see for myself the hotels, restaurants, sightseeing, and all other tourist facilities. This was the first year that Luba and I traveled to England, France, Switzerland, Austria, Israel, and Spain. I say the first year be-

cause this was the beginning of 26 consecutive years of visiting and revisiting between six and eight countries annually. During these trips we learned all about the countries, what to advise our clients, where to go, where to stay, and what to see. We also assigned correspondents in each country to take care of our tourists.

The tourist season was good and by the end of August the profit was $20,000. I paid my partners 40 percent of the profit and told them that I accepted the option to which we had agreed and would pay for the business, which would be mine as of September 1st. My partners refused to honor our gentlemen's agreement, and offered better conditions in a new partnership, which I refused.

Since it was very difficult to get a license for a new travel agency, I was compelled to join an existing one. It was not easy to find what I really wanted but I couldn't wait and bought 50 percent of a small agency, World View Tours, owned by a Mrs. D. for $8500. I had to establish a tour department and make connections with agents abroad, and was to earn $50 a week more than Mrs. D. On October 1st I was in my new office.

23

World View Tours

1952

The cards announcing my association with World View Tours, which I sent to organizations, travel agents, and friends, were rewarding. Friends and travel agents proceeded to use my new agency, as did important organizations such as the United Jewish Appeal, Histadrut, and the Workmen's Circle, for whom I organized trips to Europe—France, Belgium, and Italy—and Israel for large groups. For the Hista-

drut Group, a reception by the American Ambassador in Paris, Mr. Charles Bohlen, was included in the itinerary. The group was received by the Ambassador and pictures were taken with him.

When in Israel, I discussed with the officials of the Government Tourist Department the problems of American tourists in Israel. They organized a press conference for me. The daily *Haaretz* and the *Maariv* of October 19th reported the comments of "Mr. Wolsky, director of an American Tourist Agency." I had noted that because the value of the dollar on the black market was almost double the legitimate value, tourists were induced to buy only their tickets in the United States, to make all other arrangements in Israel and to pay with Israeli currency purchased on the black market. To put a stop to this the government could grant a reduction of 25 percent for tours purchased before arrival in Israel, and paid for in foreign currency.

Also, I commented that various political and charitable Jewish organizations in the United States, without experience in tourism, were organizing tours to Israel at very low rates, and, naturally, the tourists were returning to America full of bitterness and disappointment. The advertisements, I instructed, should read, "Book through a recognized travel agent."

Suitable publicity would increase the number of tourists considerably, but the publicity was to be set up to appeal to the taste of the tourist and not to please the supplier.

And because of inflation, I suggested that the government stabilize prices in the hotels and for tourist transportation for one year.

The same report appeared in most papers, and I was congratulated by members of the tourist trade.

During our stay in Israel, we were invited to the opening of the Histadrut Convention where we met the President of Israel, Ben Zvi, Prime Minister Ben Gurion, Foreign Minister Sharett, Minister of Labor Golda Meir, Ambassador to the United Nations Abba Eban, and other leaders of the State of Israel.

24

Business Gets Better

1953-1954

The business grew more quickly than we had expected, necessitating a move to a larger office, at 752 Fifth Avenue. We hired an additional clerk, increased promotion, and succeeded in securing more business from travel agents and organizations. In 1953 we operated tours for the Zionist Organization of America, ORT, Jewish Music Alliance, Workmen's Circle, Palestine Economic Corporation, National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, and a pilgrimage "de la Custodia di Terra Santa" from Venezuela to Rome, Israel, and Jordan. Looking for new vistas, I decided to extend our activities to Eastern Europe and on our yearly trips overseas, we included Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

The "all-inclusive tour packages" which I had introduced at World View Tours were very successful; we received orders from travel agents all over the United States, most of them from the West Coast. My partner was very happy. She told me, "You made a supermarket out of a candy store." I was happy but dissatisfied with the setup. I carried too great a workload compared with my partner. I felt that a fifty-fifty division of profits was unfair because the tours which I had introduced brought in 80 percent of the company's profit. I discussed this with Mrs. D., and she agreed that I was entitled to a bonus at the end of the year based on the profits of the tours. I accepted, but I was still not satisfied.

In 1954 I extended my activities all over Europe including Turkey, and in Eastern Europe to Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, and Yugoslavia. My all-inclusive package tours were booked by travel agencies not only in the United States, but in Mexico and Cuba. One of my agents in Havana, Bassols-Volpe, asked me to organize a special tour to Israel from Cuba, emphasizing that my agent in Israel would announce in the Israeli papers the arrival of the group from Cuba, giving the names of the participants. Relatives and friends wishing to meet them could register in the office of my agents in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem.

Bassols-Volpe invited me to Cuba where the Israeli Consulate was to organize a reception for me at which I was to talk about my visits to Israel, and especially about tourism to Israel. For three days I was to receive at the Consulate, from 10 A.M. to 12 noon, those people interested in participating in tours to Israel. The Jewish press in Havana announced my arrival and the reception was most successful. During the following three days I received over 70 persons, most of them interested in the tour to Israel, but some asked questions which I could not answer, such as, if during my visits to Israel, I met his or her nephew somewhere in a kibbutz.

The tour from Cuba left with 34 persons. Over 100 people registered in Israel to meet their relatives, to inquire about persons whose names were familiar to them, or to find out from the tour members if some of their missing family members were in Cuba. This trip from Cuba to Israel was more than a tourist vacation or a pilgrimage tour—it was a family reunion.

On the day of the group's arrival, the registered people met after dinner with the tour members in a large hotel hall. Relatives met for the first time since the Second World War; some found relatives in the group they had believed perished in concentration camps or learned from the group members that their friends were alive in Cuba. The tears, weeping, excitement of joy overran the building. However, there were also tragic scenes—some learned that their relatives had died in the holocaust.

This was the first contact between the Jews of Cuba and the State of Israel, and when the group returned to Cuba, the Jewish community in Havana gave a welcome-home party for the group. Tour members shared their impressions about Israel with the audience, and told of the exciting moments of the meeting with their relatives. Because of the success of the tour, many more tours were planned, but the revolution in Cuba put an end to this plan.

25

My Contributions to Israeli Tourism

1955

The Tourist Office of Israel in New York asked me to send to their headquarters in Jerusalem my suggestions on how to increase tourism to Israel from the United States. In my five-page report I made a number of recommendations: transportation, hotel, sightseeing, and car rental costs should be reduced during the off-season, for families traveling together, tourists staying in Israel three weeks or more, for "all-inclusive tours," and for large groups; more entertainment, sports activities, events, festivals, and sites of historical and tourist interest should be offered, and a "Be my Guest" service should be instituted in which the tourist would be invited by an Israeli family for a Friday night dinner, lunch on a Saturday or holiday, or to a simple cup of coffee to give the tourist an opportunity to see from "within" what family life is like in Israel, and to enjoy the atmosphere of a Sabbath or holiday in an Israeli family circle. Through this intimate contact the tourist would better understand the daily problems of the population, their difficulties, the sad memories of the past, their courage, great hopes for the future, and pride in their country. These conversations from person to person would be more effective than the best speeches of professional propagandists. The results would still be better if the tourist could be entertained in accordance with his religious feelings, grade of education, and profession.

I am proud to say that "Be My Guest" was introduced and is a success to this day, 24 years later.

As my business grew, the airlines and steamship companies started to offer us free familiarization trips and cruises overseas. There is a French saying, "*L'appétit vient en mangeant*" (you get the appetite when you eat). Once my partner sampled some of the trips, she started

to accept all invitations and the burden of the work fell on my shoulders. I decided to terminate my association with Mrs. D.

She rejected my suggestion to sell the corporation at the highest price offered by either myself, herself, or any other person. Since my agreement with Mrs. D. provided for arbitration of any dispute between the parties, I applied to the American Arbitration Association for the process. Mrs. D. applied to the Supreme Court to stay the arbitration, but the court decided against her claim for lack of jurisdiction. My lawyer presented to the Arbitration Association the background and experience of the parties, and the manner in which the good will had been developed. He submitted folders prepared by me, documents, and some files showing the manner in which tours were organized and the details with which they had to be planned, and the mass of work behind the scenes which had to be done to secure a smoothly-executed tour, all of which involved a special skill, experience, and intimate knowledge of travel conditions and facilities in different parts of the world.

The arbitrators, one lawyer and two businessmen, one of them familiar with the tourist trade, determined the value of the good will, and decided that I had to pay Mrs. D. one-half of the good will value, and one-half of the net worth of the business as set forth in the books, or Mrs. D. was to pay to me the same amount. The difference between paying and collecting was the full value of the good will and the net worth of the business, which was a substantial amount of money. Mrs. D. preferred to collect, and I was glad to have the business. However, my partner was bitter about losing the business, and during the transition period (the month of December) she tried to destroy the business. She discharged my secretary, a clerk, and a woman working only on commission. She kept records, correspondence, and bills in a bag which she carried with her. She drew a check to her order for $750 and issued other checks not in the regular course of business. My lawyer filed a bank resolution requiring both signatures on all checks and Mrs. D. agreed to sign it. But when I signed it and submitted it to her for signature, she failed to sign it. By holding my signature on the resolution she could, at her pleasure, terminate my authority to sign checks alone. I could stop her through the court but the transition period was to be over before the court could act. The atmosphere in the office was unbearable and I counted the days until this horrible situation would be over.

Two weeks before the end of the transition period (end of the year), Mrs. D. told me that she had changed her mind, that she would pay me and keep the business. I did not have to honor her new decision, but I realized that I would always have trouble with her because of her emotional attachment to the office, so I accepted her offer.

I could not afford to open a new office and apply for appointments by the International Air Transport Association, the Air Transport Conference, and the Trans-Atlantic Passenger Conference. This procedure would take a year or more and I was looking to buy a small agency which had the above appointments, and to build up its business. I learned that Consolidated Tours, the agency with which I was associated until 1951, was for sale. Mr. Rubenfeld, the owner (his partner, Mr. Jaffe, had died), was the representative of a foreign ship company in the United States, and according to regulations, he was not permitted to own a travel agency. He was happy to sell me Consolidated Tours at a bargain price, with the condition that his wife was a silent partner. My experiences with Mr. Rubenfeld and Mrs. D. warned me not to accept a partnership: my answer was "no."

Consolidated Tours would have been an ideal opportunity for me. I could have used the agency as it was, a retail travel agency, and open a subsidiary for wholesale and tour operations. I was anxious to buy Consolidated and for Mr. Rubenfeld to sell it to me, but the obstacle was the "silent partner." There was a battle of nerves between us; each one thought that the other would give in, but to no avail.

The New Year was at the door and within a couple of days I would leave World View Tours and would have to advise my clients, the travel agents, organizations, and individuals about my moving to a new office, and the name and address thereof without delay. I had to make a decision.

I decided to see Rubenfeld the first day after the New Year for the last time, and if he insisted on a partnership, I would buy a small agency in downtown Manhattan which was available, from its Greek owner, and start from scratch. My New Year wishes were that Rubenfeld would change his mind, but it was not a joyful holiday for my family and me.

26

I Buy Consolidated Tours

1956-1957

On January 2, 1956, I told Rubenfeld, "This is my last meeting with you. I could accept your proposition to take your wife as a silent partner and it would be easy for me to cancel this 'silent' arrangement in six months or one year, but I will not take advantage of your trust in me, and prefer to tell you now that I will never accept any kind of partnership. If you insist, I will today buy a small agency which holds all appointments because I can't wait any longer. Your idea of a silent partner will not work and you must sell the business in the regular way. In this case I have the preference. I worked hard to build up Consolidated Tours; it is my baby and I am entitled to get it." Mr. Rubenfeld realized that I would not accept a partnership and told me that the price he had been asking for the business was on the condition of partnership, but without a partnership he would ask $10,000 more. This was exorbitant, but I was so eager to get Consolidated Tours that I grabbed his hand and said, "It is mine." Mr. Rubenfeld was very much surprised and told me that because he was not allowed to take care of the business he had named three of the most important clerks as officers; that he was paying them a very high salary, and had promised to sell them the business, but this would not be any obligation to me.

My feelings were mixed. I was glad to have a name and address, but I worried about the budget. I was short by between $8,000 and $10,000. When a preliminary agreement was signed, I announced the news to my friends and relatives. Sam and Ceil Wolsk congratulated me and asked if I had enough money to run the business, and when I told them I would be short by $8,000, their answer was, "We will lend you the $8,000; you will pay us back when your business will improve." I could have gotten the same loan from my Uncle Morris or Isidore Wolsk by a simple telephone call, but it is unusual to get a large loan from a relative over the telephone. Also, before calling you think twice

about which one of the relatives to call first. When you decide which one, you try to decide when to call him; you can't call him at his place of business nor at dinner time; maybe he has company in the evening and you can't disturb him during the weekend. You postpone it for a couple of days, maybe you will have occasion to talk to him. It is an unpleasant situation even when you don't expect a refusal.

Now, consider how wonderful it was when I didn't ask and Sam and Ceil presented it to me on a silver platter. I experience the same pleasant feelings now while I write about it, 23 years later.

On January 20, 1956, I took over Consolidated Tours and told the staff that no wages would be reduced, but that I would not sell them the business as had been promised by Mr. Rubenfeld. This was a blow to the three principal clerks because they had expected to own the business at a later date. One by one they invested money in different travel agencies and took with them those clients or organizations with whom they had been in contact for many years. It was an unexpected blow, but I was not discouraged.

My son, Albert, had just returned from Japan and had been discharged from the army. We had once talked about his joining me in the business and this seemed the right time for both of us. I hired H. H. as a technician. Almost all the travel agents, organizations, and individuals to whom I had introduced World View Tours followed me to Consolidated Tours, which remained a retail agency for individuals.

To build up my image in the trade as a wholesaler and tour operator, I founded a new, strictly wholesale corporation, "American Travel Abroad." I selected this name to emphasize that the activities of this company would be abroad and not domestic, wholesale and not for individuals, tour operators, packaged tours and not transportation only. The travel agents, on whom the success or failure of my business depended, realized that I would not handle domestic business and transportation alone, which was their bread and butter, that I would not compete with them, and that their clients couldn't buy the tours from me. Requests for tours poured in. The staff was small and we worked very hard to satisfy everybody.

In accordance with my plans to expand my activities into new territories, I decided to make a move into the Soviet Union, which was just opening its doors to tourism. I went to the State Department in Wash-

ington for advice. Officials there informed me that it would be difficult for them to protect me because I was born in Russia, but they did not discourage me.

On August 20th I arrived in Moscow. I went to the headquarters of Intourist, the Government Department of Tourism, and asked to see one of the directors. I was asked dozens of questions and after 15 minutes was introduced to the president, Mr. Ankudinov. Our conversation was in Russian and lasted more than an hour. He asked me about my background, my business, tourism in the United States, and my plans for tours from the States to the USSR. At the end he told me that he would advise the Intourist managers in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev, where I planned to go, to show me different hotels, as much sightseeing as possible, and anything of interest for tourists. When I returned to Moscow, I was to report to him my impressions, criticism, and suggestions.

A secretary took notes on my report and of my answers to the questions Mr. Ankudinov asked me. When it was finished he gave me a sheet of paper and asked me to apply for a subagency of Intourist in the United States, which I did. He accepted my application on the spot, and wished me luck. I returned home satisfied with my successful trip and started planning how to exploit the new venture.

I didn't dream that war would break out in Israel, as it did on October 29, 1956, almost at the same time as the abortive Hungarian Revolution. Not only did people cancel Israel, but alarm spread in the ranks of tourists, and they cancelled European tours, also. I finished the year with a big loss.

I had many disappointments in life. I went through two world wars; I had my ups and downs, and the losses of 1956 didn't discourage me. I knew that the basis of my business was solid, and with hard work I would overcome difficulties. The war in Israel and disturbances in Hungary ended. I expanded my tours to Europe and Israel and added tours to the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, which was a new area for American tourists. The tour brochures were received by the travel agents with interest; orders started coming in and for the first time there was an order for two charters to London for over 300 members of the Ottawa Civil Service Recreational Association. The forecast for 1957 was encouraging.

The war of 1956 had greatly reduced tourism to Israel, and from time

to time I submitted to the Government Tourist Office in Jerusalem reports on the situation of tourism to Israel in the States, and suggestions to improve it.

During my annual trip to Europe and Israel, I was invited for lunch by the Israeli Government Tourist Office, where I was told that my suggestions sent to them were valuable and many of them had already been implemented. I was asked to continue this friendly service which they appreciated.

I extended my trip from Israel to Moscow, where I was very cordially received by the president of Intourist. He was very pleased with my activities the first year, especially the way my office observed all the regulations, some of them complicated. He prepared a trip for me from Moscow to Yalta, a Black Sea resort in the Crimea, Sochi, at the Black Seacoast of the Caucasus, Sukhumi, at the coast of Abkhazia, Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, and Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. Like the previous year, on my return to Moscow, I reported to Mr. Ankudinov my impressions. When I finished my report the president ordered that an official certificate be prepared designating my agency as subagent of Intourist in the United States, and that my commission should be raised from 7½ to 10 percent. At the end of the year the statement of accounts showed that we had covered the loss of the year before and we had made a small profit.

27

My Trip Around the World and Results

1958-1959

My son, Albert, carried a large part of the business responsibilities, which permitted me to make long trips. Always in quest of expansion of my activities to new continents, Luba and I left for a comprehensive tour around the world on the following itinerary: Hawaii (Honolulu and the islands); Japan (Tokyo, Yokohama, Kamakura, Hakone, Miyanoshita, Atami Kyoto, Nara, Lake Chamingi, and Nikko); Hong Kong; Singapore; Indonesia (Djakarta, Denpasar, Tjeluk, Bali); Thailand (Bangkok); India (Calcutta, Benares, Delhi, Agra, Bombay); Nepal (Kathmandu); Pakistan (Karachi); Iran (Teheran, Isfaham, Shinaz); and Turkey (Istanbul, Bursa, Izmir).

On my return I shared my impressions with Albert and the staff, we selected which tourist agencies in the above countries to appoint as our representatives, and made plans to add the Orient to our tours for the next year.

We had not realized that the Orient would not be as popular as Europe, that it did not have a sentimental or cultural attraction like Israel, that it did not pique people's curiosity to see a different type of society like Russia. But we didn't give up. We thought advertising, promotion, and passion would help.

Tours to Europe, Russia, and Israel improved; new agents and organizations such as the American Red Mogen Dovid and the Union of Hebrew Organizations started to use our services. Tour business (tours which included transportation, hotels, meals, and sightseeing) became popular and most airlines opened "tour desks" at their offices. I organized a seminar in my office for the staffs of the tour desks of Air France, showing them how to prepare a tour, how to compose an itinerary to make it attractive, how to find out which of similar itineraries

was more valuable, and how to read the terms and conditions to find out the cut-corners hidden in the small print. It was a success, and I was asked to repeat the seminar for the staff of Pan American and later for the staff of Lufthansa.

On April 1st I received an invitation from the Scandinavian Airline System (SAS) to attend a cocktail party on April 10th, at 6 P.M. at the Hotel National in Moscow. I thought this was an April Fool's joke, but while carrying the envelope to the waste basket, I found therein an air ticket, first-class from New York to Moscow and return. The party was comprised of eight leading United States tour operators, four editors of the trade press, and two SAS representatives.

I was the only one in the group who spoke Russian, and the others were appreciative of my help. All signs, banners, and posters in Moscow were in the Russian Cyrillic alphabet, some letters similar to ours, but pronounced differently. The only Russian sign which the group could read was PECTOPAN which means restaurant. There were many restaurants in and around the tourist hotels so our group members were able to practice their Russian. "Pectopan" became a part of our vocabulary.

One evening at dinner we decided to found an American-Russian Order "Pectopan." One week later the magazine *Travel Weekly* printed on the top of page two a picture of our group with the following inscription: "Founding Fathers. The above, participants in a recent trade visit to the Soviet Union, paused in Gorki Street, Moscow, to announce the creation of the 'Grand Order of Pectopans.' Charter members were: Ivan Bullot, George Brownell, Hans Helbling, Boris Wolsky and Irwin Robinson."

Pan American recommended me to be in charge of organizing an official business trip to the Soviet Union for 84 presidents of the largest industrial, commercial, and financial organizations in the United States. It was a big challenge to me and a problem to transport them from Frankfort, Germany, to Moscow and back. There were only a couple of European Airlines serving Moscow and there was no regular service on the days on which the group was scheduled to arrive or leave Moscow. I made a special trip to Moscow and chartered a plane from Aeroflot, the Soviet Union Airlines, to fly the group from Frankfort to

Moscow and back, at a reasonable price. I arranged with Intourist for official receptions, visits to factories and commercial enterprises, meetings with their counterpart trade organizations, and VIP treatment. Everything was executed to the satisfaction of all participants.

The same year I went for the third time to the Soviet Union with a large group of people of different professions which included a young black woman. Except in Moscow, in all cities the group of Americans, and especially the black woman, attracted the curiosity of the Russians. In some cities large groups of people followed us. I filmed the activities of this group, and at the ASTA Convention in Cannes (France) in 1961, I received the Award of Merit for it.

Some of these accomplishments sound elementary and commonplace in today's computerized, push-button world, but twenty years ago they were unique and pioneering.

28

Business Growth Brings a Move and Parting

1960

To meet the challenge of the jet age, I moved to larger offices, mechanized various steps of the overall operation, installed an automatic itinerary machine, semiautomatic bookkeeping machine, and put in a new "call director" telephone system and dictaphones at all executive desks.

When the work was completed I organized a reception for the executives of the airlines and steamships, for trade press, and important clients. Over 150 people enjoyed the drinks and food, and the trade press described the new offices in their report about the reception. *Travel Agent* magazine, in its issue of October 10, 1960, described the new offices in a three-page article, "American Travel Abroad Streamlines Office for Jet Age."

I was selected by Sabena, the Belgian world airlines, to participate in their jet Boeing 707 inaugural flight to Moscow. On April 6th I left with five other travel agents, two dozen magazine and newspaper editors, and members of the Belgian embassy and government agencies in the United States. When the jet touched down at Moscow Airport, the captain proudly announced, "10 hours and 38 minutes." This was a big record.

We spent five days in Moscow as guests of Sabena, and the airline did the maximum to make our stay there most interesting and pleasant. It was not a business trip; no meetings, no planning new itineraries, no checking accounts, no discussions about conditions, but a relaxing trip, a real vacation. I enjoyed it without thinking, dreaming, or having any idea about the sad news awaiting my return to New York.

During my short trip abroad, Albert told his mother that he would like to leave the business—to become a costume designer. As the business was now very well organized with an experienced staff, he felt that this was the time to make a move. He knew that this would be a blow to me and asked his mother to break the news to me gently.

I left Moscow in the early morning and arrived in New York that afternoon. After dinner I told Luba about my trip, how we had spent the five days, about the people we met, and so on. I felt there was something strange in Luba's attitude. Normally she asked questions about details but this time she asked nothing, and I got the impression that she was not even listening to what I was talking about, because her mind was elsewhere. I tried to tell her a funny story about my trip, but got no reaction. Then I started to ask questions. Is something wrong? You don't feel well? How are the children? At this point she took my hand and calmly, like a diplomat, started to tell me the story about Albert's leaving the business, and added, "Now, since you moved to the

new offices with the automatic machines, dictaphones, call directors, his absence will not fall too hard on you." She then started to tell me how Albert disliked the business, how anxious he was to go into the designing field. Because this was so unexpected, I was shocked and confused. I didn't realize what was happening and the first thing that came to my mind was, Luba, the pessimist, and I, the optimist; she was "acting." I would act, too. I told her that I knew that Albert did not like the business and he was there only to help me. I said I felt guilty and was glad that he had made the choice; that he was very capable and I was confident that he would succeed in the field of his choice. The next day I would tell him the same thing during our lunch. Luba was satisfied that I had accepted the situation calmly, but I was sure that she wasn't happy.

I had been awakened in Moscow at 5 A.M. (10 P.M. the previous night, New York time); went through the complicated passport, currency, and customs controls; traveled 6,000 miles and 25 hours without sleep. When I went to bed at 11 P.M. I was very tired, but couldn't fall asleep. Albert's leaving the business was on my mind. I didn't worry about the financial impact or the hardship that his departure might create, but it was a deep blow to my hope of continuation.

I was proud to see that the business was growing and had earned a name in the trade of integrity, efficiency, and reliability, and my desire was that it would become a "family" establishment, from father to son, and maybe one day my son Gilbert would join. I knew that Albert had joined me only because of the situation which existed when I bought the business in order to help me, but he had quickly learned all the aspects of the business and the airlines, ship companies, travel agents, and representatives abroad respected him and loved to deal with him; I thought he was in. That evening, my dreams and hopes vanished. Depressed and tired, I fell asleep.

The next day in the office, I shared with Albert and my assistants the impressions of my trip, and after closing I told Albert of my thoughts during the night and concluded, "Since this is an occurrence which couldn't be avoided, it is better when it is over. Don't worry, I will recover quickly and I am most grateful to you for the four years you sacrificed in order to put the office into a position where your departure will not harm the business, and you may leave any time at your convenience." Albert was moved and answered, "I will stay till the end of

the season when all the files which I handle will be closed." This was devotion!

My son Gilbert escaped a situation like this. During his vacations from school he worked in the office and traveled with us all over Europe and Israel. He also escorted a group on a comprehensive tour through the Soviet Union. He enjoyed the advantages of being a tour operator—the transportation and hotels—but he learned how much hard work, skill, and responsibility was involved in preparing and operating a tour. He expressed his opinion about the tourist business in one word: "Slavery."

In 1961 my itinerary in the Soviet Union included the Baltic countries: Estonia; Latvia; Lithuania; and Byelorussia. Still in quest of something new and unusual, I proposed that Intourist organize group tours to the United States. In principle, Intourist accepted the idea.

Back at home I went to the State Department in Washington for instructions. They were pleased with the idea, but just as only a certain number of cities were open in the USSR for American tourists, many parts of the United States were closed to the Russians. I got special maps of the United States on which the white part was open for the Russians and the shaded part was closed, and a folder of instructions. It was too complicated on both sides, and I decided to postpone this idea for the Russian inbound market, but to apply it to Europe.

29

Transamerica—A New Corporation

1962

I registered a new corporation, Transamerica, hired an experienced person to handle this department, printed a folder *Visit the U.S.A.*, and mailed it to my representatives abroad. The first order was from our agent and friend in Paris for a group of 35 average Frenchmen for a 30-day, 8,000-mile tour over the United States.

The planning and preparation was very difficult. There was the problem of having French-speaking guides along the route. Luba and I went along as interpreters, but we really weren't guides. The project was publicized both here and in France. CBS heard about this first group of Frenchmen visiting the United States and sent along a crew of seven technicians to film the tour for a prime time "Eye Witness" show narrated by Charles Collingwood.

Unfortunately, most things that could have gone wrong did. For example, we chartered two rail sleeping cars out of Chicago. The railroad knew we had one group that was to be kept together, yet one of the cars was the first car behind the locomotive, and the other car was the last one. I spent the night walking back and forth along corridors of 23 intermediate cars to keep up my liaison and to help overcome the language obstacle.

But the worst part of the experience was something I had never anticipated—the attitude of the French tourists. They expected perfection everywhere. They resented being served water or coffee as soon as they sat down in a restaurant, and the idea of not having wine in many restaurants was to them an abomination that made them nasty.

This situation disappointed me, but I remember with satisfaction the reception the group received in Logan, Utah. Our bus arrived hours late and the bellhops had already gone home for the night, but the

mayor of Logan and a committee of leading citizens were there to meet us. They rolled up their sleeves and took care of the porterage. The group was welcomed as distinguished guests and was received at City Hall and in many Logan homes. In Logan the French saw America—they witnessed a football game, ate turkey hash at a town picnic, had corn on the cob, toasted marshmallows over an open fire, and did square dancing.

In New York, the group was received at City Hall by Commissioner Cavanaugh.

This first group of Frenchmen to travel all over the United States had revealed an interest in the tourist trade, and in my interview with the press I summarized my experiences. I noted that the American people were ready to receive tourists and accord them a warm welcome, but there was a lack of cooperation and follow-through on the part of hotels, railroads, and bus companies, and a scarcity of American foreign-language-speaking guides. *Travel Agent* magazine displayed my interview on three pages under the headline "Operator Hits U.S. Travel Industry," which incited "Letters to the Editor" from the railroads, buses, and hotel associations.

Travel Weekly's headline read: "U.S. Highways FORMIDABLE!" "Food not so good," the French tourists were reported as having said. The long article read:

> The tour, set up by Boris Wolsky, American Travel Abroad, was selected by CBS as the subject of an "Eyewitness" documentary. The program gave an estimated 9,000,000 American televiewers a rare glimpse of how tourists from abroad react to what the U.S. has to offer. More important it provided the trade with a realistic appraisal of what needs to be done if the predicted flood of westbound traffic is to materialize.

After that unhappy experience, I realized that the United States was not yet ready to receive foreign tourists. I forsook the project "Visit the U.S.A." and expanded my operation to South America, Africa, and India.

30

Jordan

1963

Mr. Tukian, Chief of the Jordanian Mission to the United Nations, invited me, as one of the leading tour operators to Israel, to discuss tourism to Jordan. I explained to him that Jordan allowed gentile tourists visiting the Jordanian side of Jerusalem to cross the border to Israel, but did not allow gentile tourists visiting Israel to cross the border to Jordan, and there could be no double crossing. These two restrictions would have to be eliminated to allow tourists in Israel to extend their trips to Jordan.

Tukian then invited me to Jordan for a meeting with the Ministry of Tourism. When I told him that I was Jewish he didn't answer but gave me visa application forms for Luba and myself and asked me to return them completed to him with our passports, and he would issue the visas. When he received our applications he called me to tell me that he could not issue the visas because on the application form under "Religion" I had written "Jewish." He knew my religion, but said I should not have mentioned it in my application. I insisted that the word "Jewish" was not to be changed or eliminated. He then suggested that I send my documents to Washington; that only the Ambassador would be able to issue a visa on such an application. I did so and received visas for Luba and myself for one year for multiple trips.

Before my departure to Jordan, I met with the Director of the Israeli Government Tourist Office, who encouraged my trip, and we discussed items which would be of interest to Israel, and he asked me to report to the Tourist Headquarters in Jerusalem as soon as I crossed the Mandelbaum Gate.

In Amman, the capital of Jordan, I had a three-hour meeting with Mr. Barakad, Director of the Government Tourist Authority. I showed him statistics as to the number of gentile tourists visiting Israel and the number of international conventions and congresses in Israel

which could bring to Jordan over 100,000 tourists annually, if Jordan would allow tourists to cross the gate in Jerusalem from Israel to Jordan, and to cross the gate to Jordan and return the same way to Israel.

Mr. Barakad agreed with me and told me that tourism was their only source of foreign currency because Jordan had no oil like their neighbors. He thought the civil authority would certainly accept my suggestion, but the military authority would oppose it. He advised me to spend more time in Jerusalem, to meet with Mr. Yannaim, director of the Government Tourist Office in Jerusalem-Jordan, and with Mr. Khaldi, Exterior Liaison Officer (the head of the Mandelbaum Gate), and a group of travel agents who were personally interested in tourism, some of whom were members of the Parliament. He was to arrange all these meetings and I would find the schedule in the Hotel Inter-Continental in Jerusalem, Jordan, where a reservation for us had already been made. An English-speaking university professor of history would be our guide to all the places of interest.

Everything was executed as per the arrangements; everyone was interested and courteous, but I felt some mistrust. The most important meeting was at the Tourism Authority in Jerusalem. The director, Mr. Yannaim, said to me, "Why do we have to make changes? Next year all Jerusalem will be Jordan and tourism will expand." I had the impression that even he did not believe his own words, because he added, "We cannot allow double crossing, but tourists entering Jordan from Israel will be welcome." I couldn't believe that he was serious and very tactfully asked him to confirm it in writing. He called a secretary, dictated in Arabic, and gave me an official letter, in English, stamped and signed, which read,

> Concerning your inquiries, I would like to point out the following:
>
> 1. Persons of the Jewish faith are not permitted entry into Jordan.
>
> 2. Any tourist who goes from Jordan to "Israel" will not be allowed to return to Jordan, nor will any tourist arriving in Jordan via "Israel" be allowed to return that way: that is a one-way crossing.
>
> 3. There should be no Israeli visa affixed to the passport of a tourist wishing to enter into Jordan.
>
> 4. And therefore any tourist conforming with the above-mentioned regulations *is most welcome to enter Jordan at any time from "Israel" to Jordan.*

("Israel" was in quotes to mean "land so-called Israel." This was the Arab mentality, and why the Six Day War broke out three years later.)

I didn't get the double crossing, but I was glad to obtain authorization for tourists coming from Israel, so my trip was worthwhile. Luba and I were very happy to visit the Jewish historical places: the Western Wall; Rachel's Tomb; and the Patriarch's Tomb. All of these places were clean and kept in good order. It was emotional and exciting. Also, the visits to the Dome of the Rock, via Dolorosa, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre were of great interest.

When we left Jordan, the Tourist Authority sent two boys to carry our baggage over the no-man's land up to the Israeli border where Jewish boys carried them to the border security office in Israel. We were the only tourists and when we showed our passports, the officer in charge told us that he had a message from the Government Tourist Office asking that he telephone them upon our arrival so they could send a car to take us to their headquarters.

When we arrived there, the director took me to a private office and called in a secretary and two young men, who asked me to tell them every detail from my arrival to my departure, the names of the persons I met, our conversations, my impressions in general, the places I visited, the name of my interpreter, and so on. They made a copy of the letter I had received from the Tourist Authority in Jordan, told me that this was of value to them, and thanked me for a job well done.

31

The Danube Expedition

1964

In January 1964, a delegation from the Dartmouth College Canoe Club came to consult me about an expedition planned for the next summer. The Club wanted to canoe down the Danube from Germany to the Black Sea, 1,685 miles through eight countries, six of which were members of the Eastern European bloc. Entry visas were required, and there were special regulations in connection with them.

Many problems were involved. Where were the borders between Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Roumania and the Soviet Union on the water of the Danube, called "the dustless road"? Could visas be issued without entry and exit points or dates of arrival and departure to allow for weather conditions? What kind of scrutiny and questions awaited the group? Would the people they would have come so far to meet and with whom they wanted to weld mutual respect, show them imposed politeness or even hostility?

I was told that I had been highly recommended as an expert in this field and the only one who would be able to obtain the complicated visas. The National Geographic Society had expressed interest in this venture and was ready to subsidize the Club if I would give them a letter stating that I would be able to obtain the visas. I asked them to come back in the afternoon for my answer.

I consulted my assistants, and both of them were against the proposition. They felt it would be impossible to get the visas; it involved negotiations with six different countries, meetings, discussions, and exchange of arguments. Also, this adventure would bring no business for us; the boys would sleep in tents and buy their food at the stopovers. They would buy from us only their air tickets from New York to Europe and back, and this would not cover even a small part of the time involved. In a practical sense they were right, there would be

no business in this Danube trip, but these boys were ready to work very hard, would paddle for three months under the burning sun, heavy rains, winds, storms, and cold nights without financial gain, with only a humanitarian goal of meeting with the people of these countries who rarely saw Americans, in order to build mutual respect and friendship. I felt it my duty to help them in this noble task. When the boys returned, I told them that I would try to help them, but I was not sure I would succeed and I could not guarantee anything. The delegation was displeased with my response but thanked me and left.

One week later the delegation returned and handed me an official letter from the Canoe Club stating that I would be in charge of obtaining the entry and exit visas for the nine students on the expedition team.

Then the complications began. After World War II a change on the frontiers had occurred; there still weren't new maps and nobody knew where the borders on the Danube were, not even the consulates. My communications with the embassies were without results, and I decided to try diplomacy, one by one, with each of the countries.

I started with the most liberal country, Yugoslavia. Its director of the Office of Tourism was very intelligent and businesslike. I told him that this sports event was to be sponsored by the National Geographic Society, and one of their monthly magazines would dedicate the cover and a special section to this cruise on the Danube and to all the countries visited by the team. This would be free promotion for tourism to their country by this prestigious and international publication. Receptions, covered by the mass media, would take place in Germany and Austria. Yugoslavia could do the same and later gain exposure on American television.

The problems concerning entry and exit points and dates of arrival and departures could be resolved: the canoeists would stop at the piers where the regular Danube cruise boats stop and wait until an officer from the Emigration Office came to check their documents; or they would walk to the Emigration Office. The visas had to be valid for a minimum of 10 days in case of bad weather when the travelers might not be able to keep to their schedule. After three weeks of urging, demanding, and pressing, I received the visa for Yugoslavia.

This one visa helped me to obtain promises from two other consulates that they would intervene with their governments in my behalf.

To each of the additional three consulates or embassies I said that I already had three visas and hoped to obtain two more. I then called their attention to the consequences when the European and American media and pictures would report this historical event about how a group of American sportsmen on a mission of friendship and peace were received by the sports organizations in their neighboring countries, and their countries were omitted because of visa denial. It wasn't easy, but it helped.

After four months of discussions, arguments, and shuttling between New York and Washington, I finally obtained all the visas. My assistants opposed my spending so much time and effort, but I was so involved that I couldn't stop. When I received the visas I spun around the office with the passports in my raised hand like a toreador after a bullfight with the ear of the bull.

On June 21, 1964, in Ulm, Germany, the canoeists, armed with guitars, cameras, and dictionaries, got a champagne sendoff by the Ulm Kanuklub. Two days later I saw this departure on television.

At the end of July when Luba and I returned from the Soviet Union, we traveled from Yalta to Vienna on the Danube cruise ship *Amur,* which was scheduled to stop in Belgrade the same day as the canoe group was expected to be in Yugoslavia. I told the captain of the ship the story of the canoe expedition and asked him if I could invite the canoe team for breakfast on the ship should they be in Belgrade. The captain agreed and I cabled to the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade asking them to inform the group about my invitation. Thirty-six hours later, at six in the morning, I was awakened—nine boys were at the pier to see me. I went down to the pier to invite them aboard, but the border control would not let them pass. I called the captain, he guaranteed their return, and the control permitted them to board the ship. The breakfast was a six-course meal, with vodka, wine, and cognac, American songs, and guitar music. When the group attacked the "seconds," the captain smiled and told me in Russian, "I thought these boys didn't have a hot meal for weeks, now I see that I was right." After the meal the captain showed them the ship and introduced them to the passengers, who applauded them warmly. It was an unscheduled good will manifestation!

The Harvard University Alumni Club in New York arranged a lecture by the leader of the group on the Danube expedition, along with the showing of a film made by them. I was invited, and when I arrived,

the 800 seats were already taken, but I was given a seat reserved for me in the first row. The lecturer told them the story about the visas, and at the end of his speech he told the audience, "We succeeded in this odyssey thanks to one person who is here—Mr. Wolsky, take a bow." I was presented with one of the paddles used on the expedition, covered with inscriptions of thanks, and signed by the members of the expedition.

32

After 30 Years in Travel

1964-1966

On November 4, 1934, I had opened my first travel office in Paris, Le Tourist. We do not celebrate birthdays or anniversaries in our family, but some people in the business learned about this, and I received some cables of congratulations from Mr. Ankudinov, chairman of the State Foreign Tourism in Moscow, General Ben Ari, president of El Al in Tel Aviv, Mr. Gluck, president of Centre Technique de Tourisme in Paris, and others.

Creative Tour Operators Association was founded by a small group of seven top tour operators in the United States and Canada with very strict requirements for membership. I was invited to join the interim committee but I refused because I was not as big and important as the other seven. One of them, Mr. Bronel, insisted that I join them because

of my experience, reliability, financial stability, and name in the trade, so I did, which was good for the business.

For the professional travel agent who possessed the requisite professional skill and business integrity to serve the vocation, the Institute of Certified Travel Agents was created. I was nominated by the Board of Trustees of the Institute to be a founding member, limited to those individuals who possessed, among other requirements, good moral character, a reputation for ethical, responsible business dealings, and 10 years in the travel industry.

Ever in search of the new and different, I extended my trip to the Soviet Union and Siberia to Mongolia, a country unique on the globe, with a population of one million and 23 million animals of all sorts. Most of the population lived in "yurts" (collapsible tents), cooking was done on sheet-iron stoves, and the national drink was *kumyss* (milk from the mares). Attractions for the tourist included overnight accommodation in a "yurt," Mongolian folk dance performances, horse and camel breeding stations, state and cooperative farms, and observation in a hospital the Chinese system of acupuncture. The people were pleasant and friendly.

Upon my return to New York I organized a group tour to Mongolia for 1966. Visas were obtainable in Moscow only, so I scheduled my annual visit to Russia to coincide with the timing of the tour in order to help them receive the visas.

All regulations to enter Mongolia were executed as per letter, but the Mongolian Embassy had not received any advice from their Tourist Department. I cabled but received no answer; I called by telephone but nobody there could speak English, German, French, or even Russian. On my second call I got the general manager, who spoke Russian, and I insisted that he telephone the Embassy to tell them to issue the visas because the Russian visas would expire and the group would not be able to cross the border. He did so, the group got the visas, and enjoyed their trip to Mongolia, but I didn't send tourists there again.

A travel agent, specializing in Jewish religious groups, asked me to arrange a tour to the Soviet Union for a delegation of R.C.A. I understood that the initials were a cover in order to obtain the visas because

the Russians would not admit religious groups, and I asked him, "Is General Sarnoff accompanying them?" He smiled and answered, "The name of the group is Rabbinical Council of America, but with this name the members will not be able to secure visas."

I told him I would not try to enter this important group to the Soviet Union through the back door. It would be difficult to obtain visas for them, but I would try only if they allowed me to give their proper name. He left and returned one week later telling me that the group was very anxious to study Jewish life in the Soviet Union and the majority wanted to accept the offer of another travel agent to obtain the visas under the name R.C.A. But their president, Rabbi Miller, refused to go, so the committee decided to use me to request the visas under their official name.

When I cabled Moscow I received no reply. I cabled again and three weeks later I received the answer that first-class accommodations were not available, but that Intourist offered deluxe class, which was 50 percent more expensive. The committee accepted, and applications for visas were sent to the 30 members all over the United States. Only six days before the scheduled departure date were we able to present the applications, passports, and confirmation from Intourist Moscow to the Consulate in Washington. I knew the Consul personally and called him to rush the issuance of the visas because the group's departure was imminent and he promised to do it. The next day when I called him he asked me to be patient one more day; a day later he gave me the same answer. The agent and the committee members became nervous and called me every hour, but I could not give them the reason for the delay, nor the assurance that I would have the visas. One day before their departure a farewell dinner was scheduled for the evening, at which time the visas were to be distributed. Early in the morning I left for Washington and went to see the Consul. He told me that these kinds of groups, when in the Soviet Union, are in contact with Jews who are waiting for exit visas, and when they return to the States they make slanderous speeches about the Soviet Union. The Embassy had cabled to Moscow for instructions and were awaiting an answer. I explained to the Consul that the situation was critical and could be very embarrassing to the Embassy, and I requested that I see the First Secretary of the Embassy, or the Ambassador. He went to another room to call the

Embassy. One-half hour later he returned to tell me that the Ambassador was out of town and that the consultant of the Embassy would see me at three o'clock.

When I arrived at the Embassy, the Consul met me at the door and took me to a private room on the first floor. When the consultant joined us 10 minutes later the Consul introduced me and added that I worked with Intourist for nine years and was one of a few that observed all their regulations, and that Intourist hadn't had any inconvenience with my clients all these years. The consultant told me about his meetings with Senator Javits and other Jewish leaders concerning the distorted reports about the Jews in the Soviet Union, and this was why they are waiting for instructions from Moscow. I explained to the consultant that I had cabled to Intourist the correct name of the group, Intourist could have answered "no space available," and nobody would have objected. Intourist had, though, confirmed the reservation, applications for visas had been mailed to all members of the group, which had been completed correctly, and presented to the Consulate. The participants of the group had arrived in New York from all parts of the United States. Within a couple of hours they would be assembled for the farewell dinner.

There were two alternatives. The Consul could issue the visas and then worry about distorted reports which may be made after the group's return. This is not an adverse political group looking for material to criticize Russia's political order, but a group of distinguished rabbis interested in the Jewish life in the Soviet Union, and in bringing the Jews there brotherly greetings and moral support. I believed that when the group returned, most of their reports would be positive, the fact of obtaining the visas was already positive, the Jews in the Soviet Union were not hungry, they had jobs and were well dressed. Some reports would be negative, but who would listen aside from the members of their community or those who saw a notice in their local paper.

On the other hand, the visas could be refused. It would be like the explosion of a bomb. The news would be dispersed like wildfire; there would be meetings and the media would grab the news, and reporters, greedy for a story, would run to the members of the group asking all kinds of questions. This would be more harmful to Russia than a disagreeable report of some rabbi to his congregation.

The consultant agreed with me and asked me to wait until the next

morning, that he was hopeful he would be able to give me the visas. I suggested that he issue the visas and give them to me, while I solemnly promised not to distribute them without his authorization. If his answer was negative, I would return the visas by messenger. If he were to agree, I would call the organizer and tell them that I had all the visas and they could send two of their members to my home at 10 P.M. to see them but I would not turn them over until the next morning because of a legal technicality, since the Embassy was awaiting confirmation from Moscow. The organizer could announce this plan at the farewell dinner and would calm the rabbis' nerves. The consultant and the Consul excused themselves and 20 minutes later returned and told me that they accepted my proposal. The Consul drove me to the Consulate where I called the leader of the group in New York. The Consul stamped and signed all the visas and drove me to the airport.

I arrived home at 10:30 P.M., and found the leader of the group waiting. I showed him the visas. He checked them and asked me to give him one to show the other members of the group, but I refused. The next morning at 9 A.M. the Embassy called and authorized me to give the visas to the passengers. Thus ended the incessant pressure of the previous few days. I mimeographed instructions for the passengers to take only one talis and one prayer book—no more than one, no printed matter, magazines, and the like, which was against the law.

When the group arrived in Moscow, the Intourist guide-interpreter met them, passed their luggage through customs without opening even one suitcase, and asked the group leader to consult with him about the menu for meals because there was no Kosher food. Saturday, the group went to the synagogue in Moscow. The rabbi invited the president of the group, Rabbi Miller, to make a speech in Yiddish. This was the first time a foreign religious leader had been permitted to speak in a synagogue. The synagogue was packed and the audience pleasantly surprised and moved to tears by the greetings Rabbi Miller brought them from their brothers all over the United States. Two days later the *New York Times* reported this event and the picture of Rabbi Miller speaking to the people in the synagogue appeared on the front page.

33

I Move to Larger Offices

1967

The business had grown and the staff was now 22 persons. I therefore needed larger quarters. I had already moved from a two-room office to a four-room and six-room suite in the same building. Now the building manager offered me a 10-room office with a great deal of daylight (14 windows)—an ideal office. The rent was too high but the manager, anxious to keep us in the building, reduced the rental with the condition that I sign a lease for 10 years. Following my policy of not signing any obligation before being sure I could fulfill it, I paid $2,500 for permission to cancel the lease after five years. I bought new furniture and desks, decorated the office, and made it beautiful and impressive.

On May 16th, Nasser demanded that the United Nations Emergency Force get out at once, U.N. Secretary U Thant gave in to Nasser, and three days later the last Unit of the U.N. Force had pulled out, leaving the Egyptians in full control of their border with Israel. Nasser, encouraged by the success of his dismissal of the U.N. Emergency Force, announced that Egypt was reimposing its blockade of the Strait of Tiran, which cut off Israel's only marine connection with the world. A war was imminent and broke out on June 5th. In the first six hours Israel's Air Force put out of action more than 400 enemy planes and gained full command of the air from Sinai to the Syrian border. Five days later the war was over and cease-fire arranged.

Tourists avoid any trouble. As soon as the U.N. Emergency Force pulled out from Israel, tourism stopped, and even when the war was over it was not clear if the tourists would be able to see old Jerusalem, the East Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai, and the Strait of Tiran. Despite this uncertainty, some of my competitors started to advertise tours including these liberated places. Following my policy of integrity, I refrained from printing folders, advertising, or accepting tourists desiring to

visit these places. I couldn't get any official information and left for Israel to learn on the spot what the tourist would be permitted to visit, and what would be of interest to the American tourists.

It is impossible to describe the life and atmosphere in Israel four weeks after the war. There were proud people full of joy and the hope of living in peace, people mourning husbands or children, or both, and hospitals full of casualties.

When I went from my hotel in Jerusalem to the Old City, and didn't see the concrete barricade and barbed-wire fences that had separated the two halves of the City of Jerusalem when I crossed from Jordan to Israel in 1963, I stopped, and recalled my visit to the Tourism Authority in Jordan, when the director told me: "Why are you asking me to make changes in the crossing regulations from Israel to Jordan? Next year the whole City of Jerusalem will belong to Jordan." But three years later, the entire City of Jerusalem belonged to Israel. I realized what this meant to the Israelis and the Jews all over the world.

I do not believe that any writer or poet could describe the picture at the Western Wall where thousands of people—high military officers and soldiers in combat uniform, rabbis veiled in talisim, Israelis from all walks of life, tourists from various countries—were praying and thanking God for the miracle, and people mourning and crying, why? Why? Again my visit to Jordan came to my mind; then Luba and I had been the only visitors to the Western Wall and our Arab guide had explained what the Western Wall was. How depressed we felt then and how happy we felt four years later.

The Golan Heights was closed to visitors but we received permission to enter and saw miles of reinforced concrete bunkers filled with antitank guns and artillery. On the roads were burned tanks and military trucks marked in Russian. On both sides of the road were signs, "Danger, mine fields." This was the "Syrian Maginot Line." From the Heights you could clearly see the streets, the houses of the Israeli settlements, and kibbutzim in the valley, and realized how great and brave these inhabitants were, living in reach of the enemy's cannons, guns, and hand grenades.

We visited the West Bank, Bethlehem, birthplace of King David and Jesus, Hebron, the City of Abraham, Jericho, the oldest city in the world, Gaza, an important Arab city, large market, and export center of citrus fruits (the oranges were stamped "Jaffa" in order to get a bet-

ter price), Khan Younis, where in a closed school an exhibition of children's work remained, the inscriptions and drawings showing how deep the hatred for Israel was planted in the children, Bir Lahfan, assembly point of the wrecked or damaged tanks, cannons, jeeps, armored trucks, and the like, El-Arish, place of heavy fighting, where many houses had been destroyed by bombs, most houses were left with bullet holes, but the roads and runways were intact, ready for use by the army, Santa Katarina Monastery, built as a fortress in the sixth century to protect the monks from pagan tribes, and Sharm-El-Sheikh, the Egyptian stronghold which had controlled the Straits of Tiran.

Everywhere we met Israeli patrols moving about amid dirty looks from the Arabs.

The world-admired victory brought unexpected problems. The occupied territory was three times larger than Israel, inhabited with enemies. Before the Six-Day War, the Arab population in Israel was 300,000. After the war it was 1,400,000—an additional 1,100,000 to feed and provide with work, gas, electricity, schools, and hospitals. The Arabs had previously accounted for only 9 percent of the population, but with the war had swelled to 36 percent. With a birth rate four times higher than that of the Israelis, by the end of the century the Arabs would be the majority in Israel.

The people of Israel were aware of this danger, but no one offered to give any territory back to the Arab nations.

I checked with the Government Tourist Office to find out which of the occupied territories would be open to tourists, and upon my return to New York was able to arrange an interesting itinerary.

Because of my trip and having to wait for the decision of the Israeli Authority as to which places would be open for tourists, my brochures came out later than those of my competitors. To meet this competitive challenge, I pioneered a new plan, "Cooperative Tours," in which the travel agent got, in addition to his regular commission, 1 percent on the land portion for each passenger between 10 and 20 passengers at each departure. A departure with 13 passengers entitled the agent to an additional 3 percent commission, 15 passengers 5 percent, and 20 passengers or more, 10 percent. Two days after each departure a bulletin was sent to the participating agent showing the number of passengers that departed, and a check covering the additional commission due him. "Cooperative Tours" improved the situation, but it was not a success.

34

Travel in the Age of the Jumbo Jet

1968-1971

I recognized the advent of the jumbo jet as a challenge to the travel agent. The airlines, anxious to fill up the hundreds of additional seats, offered reduced rates to groups and special reductions to larger groups. Hotels, sightseeing buses, guides, and local transportation were less expensive for larger groups. Big business, banks, and Wall Street investors had already started to show interest in the travel field. The only solution to meet this growing challenge was to join forces.

The Soviet Union had special rates for groups, and there were heavy penalties for canceling a group or reducing the size of a group. I invited three of the most important tour operators for the Soviet Union to meet, and suggested that we combine our activities. It wasn't easy to find a formula which would satisfy four competitors and for Intourist to digest the idea. We succeeded and decided to operate group tours under the initials J.T.O. (Joint Tour Operators). Each week, one of the four of us had full responsibility for air transportation, hotels, final itineraries and documents, correspondence, and accounting. The first summer season was a success, with 1,750 tourists.

Some people get intoxicated by success, as did one of our group, Mr. X, who went to Moscow and made reservation for J.T.O. for next season, without the consent of the other partners. At the J.T.O. meeting to organize the following year's tours, Mr. X. told us that he had already made reservations for the next year, and that he would take care of the accounting with Intourist. It meant that he would have all the credit. We refused to accept this and replaced him with another tour operator for the Soviet Union.

The experience of J.T.O. showed that combined activities were eco-

nomical and profitable, and I decided to apply the same principle to group tours to Israel. I showed the three most important tour operators to Israel the results of the J.T.O. operations. A formula for joint activities for Israel was established for air travel only; land arrangements were to be handled by each operator on his own.

Air transportation to Israel was a big business. We established guaranteed group departures five days a week under the initials T.O.F.I. (Tour Operators for Israel). We opened an office with direct telephone connections to the four offices, and hired a person to control all air allotments, the number of seats sold, and the number of seats available for each departure. Reports and payments to the airlines due on the first and sixteenth of each month were done by turn, and the same office got the payment for the tickets when issued. This was a smooth and successful operation.

In 1970 I was able to take two trips abroad. During the winter I did a comprehensive study tour around South America, visiting Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Bogotá, and Venezuela. We had representatives in all these countries and did some business with them. The tourist potential was great and operating group tours on a larger scale was possible.

In the autumn, we made a tour of the Pacific, Tahiti, New Zealand, Australia, New Caledonia, Yanuca Island, and Fiji Island. Again we had representatives there and did some business in these countries, and felt the potential for group tours was great.

35

Improvements in Israeli Travel

1973

From time to time, the Ministry of Tourism in Israel arranged meetings in New York with the tour operators for Israel, to discuss ways and means of improving tourism to Israel. It was important, but we, the operators, realized that our suggestions were not heeded, not because the Ministry was against them, but because the hotel owners and the transportation companies in Israel were on the spot and their lobbying was strong to protect their interests. To protect our interests we formed American Organization of Tour Operators to Israel, Inc. (AOTOTI), which represented 24 tour operators in the United States who prepared, advertised, promoted, and merchandised 80 percent of the tours to Israel from the United States. The voice of a strong organization would be considered by the Ministry which would not allow itself to be subjected to manipulations and maneuvering by the hotels and other enterprises connected with the tourist industry.

I was elected vice president of AOTOTI. As per the by-laws of the organization, a "Code of Ethics" and a "Grievance Committee" were to be formed. At a general meeting when these items were discussed, the following was accepted: "In order to avoid the cumbersome machinery of a full-fledged committee, or any semblance thereof, we ought to have an arbitrary person who would operate quite informally and yet have a good deal of power. The person must be an individual of high calibre, great experience, and enjoying the highest respect in the trade."

It was suggested that names for this position be submitted at the next meeting. I do not know who submitted my name, but at the next meeting I was elected the one-man committee of "Ethics and Grievances." It was an interesting job. I applied a system of "both parties are right but you have to compromise." I talked to the parties separately and

used "shuttle diplomacy." This worked satisfactorily. For important grievances, I invited two members of the Committee to join me.

At a ceremony celebrating the 25th Anniversary of Israel at the Waldorf Astoria in New York, I was decorated by the Ministry of Tourism of Israel with the 25th Anniversary Silver Medal #363 in recognition of my contribution to the development of tourism to Israel.

36

Attempts to Sell the Business

Mr. Rubenfeld, during a social get-together, told me that a relative of his was interested in buying a travel agency, and he suggested that he buy my business. I refused to consider the offer. He explained to me that his relative was a lawyer in Washington and would like to buy the agency for an investment, and that I would be permitted to stay in the business for three years, maybe more. He noted that it was time to take it easy and to protect my family should something happen to me. The last argument worked, and I changed my "no" to "yes."

Meetings, debates, and bargainings produced an agreement which I submitted to our lawyer. In the meantime, the purchaser proposed our deal to another investor for a 15 percent brokerage fee. When our lawyer investigated the financial status of the new investor he found some irregularities. I was disappointed, and left for my annual overseas trip.

In Europe I met a colleague and good friend, Mr. M. When I told

him the story of the prospective sale of my business, he expressed interest in buying and merging it with his travel organization, the largest in organizing trips to Israel. We spent a full day working out conditions acceptable to both sides. These conditions were less attractive concerning price and payments, but alluring concerning the reliability and financial standing of Mr. M. We decided to meet again in New York with my associate and smooth out the differences.

We met in New York in September and reached an agreement which we submitted to the lawyers. When the contracts were ready for signature, the Yom Kippur War broke out, and the signing of the agreements was cancelled.

When Mr. I., a travel agent, learned that my agreement with Mr. M. had been cancelled, he offered to buy the business for the same price, but not on the same conditions because it was not to merge the two companies but to keep my business as it was, under my management for the first three years. During two months of meetings, discussions, and bargaining, the agreement was hammered out and ready for signature. Before signing, the prospective buyer made a new request: if I should die during the first two years, the agreement was to be cancelled. I walked out of the meeting and never talked to Mr. I. again.

The tentative agreements to sell my business were done "off the record" and quietly, but you cannot keep a secret in travel trade circles. I received some very tempting proposals from conglomerates and nonprofessionals, which I rejected because these people were mostly interested in the "cash flow," and I wanted, in selling my business, an assurance that the prestige and confidence which American Travel Abroad had enjoyed in the travel industry would remain intact. When my advisers asked me, "What do you care? Your money will be guaranteed," my answer was, "American Travel Abroad is my 'baby'." Its birth was painful, its childhood full of its share of diseases—shortage of capital, staff leaving and taking with them clients and organizations, the Sinai War, and revolution in Hungary. During its youth were concerns about its behavior, connections, and responsibilities. When the time came to give it away, I would have to check the background, finances, and conduct of the other party to make sure that the good record, behavior, and reliability would be preserved.

In November 1974 I had celebrated my fortieth anniversary in the travel business and, as the only owner and at my age, it was not advisable to jump too high. The future in the travel business was charters and different types of charters: ITC, OTE, TGE, and ABC, and I had to leave it to others to push in this area.

Mr. Rubenfeld introduced me to Mr. Laszewski, a travel agent in New York, and Mr. Wegiel, a travel agent in Springfield, who desired to buy my business and form a syndicate. All three are respected travel industry professionals. They believed in the future of the travel business as I saw it—large group movement, and charters. All complicated details of warranty, inventory, bookkeeping, and so forth were easy to settle among reliable people, but the price for the business which these people offered was impossible to accept. The time element was important and I had to make a decision. From my experience with the pretended buyers of the previous year, I realized that I had to sacrifice either the prestige of my business, or money. It was a very difficult decision to make. The past year I had explained to my advisers that American Travel Abroad was my "baby." I decided that you don't sacrifice a baby for money.

I sold my business to the syndicate for 25 percent of the amount offered to me the last year, and an employment agreement that I'd act as a consultant during seven months in 1975, and three months in 1976 and 1977. The money sacrifice was painful but being a realist, I felt relieved when the operation was over. When it became known that I had sold my business, I was asked how I felt. My answer was, "I feel like a mother who just married off her daughter; she is sad to give her away, but happy that the husband has a good background and will treat her daughter with dignity."

I invited the staff for champagne, introduced them to the new employers and explained to them why I sold the business, and that their positions are unchanged and stable. In March 1975 I went with Mr. Wegiel to Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union, to introduce him to the tourist authorities of these countries and to advise them about the change in ownership.

In August when Luba and I spent our vacation in Divonne les Bains in France near the Swiss border, Mr. Rubenfeld called me from New York and urged me to go to Moscow because he had received a tele-

gram from Intourist advising him that all arrangements with American Travel Abroad were cancelled because of the change of ownership. I went to Moscow and asked the manager of Intourist why he didn't object when I had introduced one of the new owners to him six months before. The answer was that he had gotten the impression that I was a partner of the syndicate, but he had learned that I was not, and there were rumors about the financial condition of one of them. I asked for a meeting with the president of Intourist. The next day when we met I explained to him that I was not a partner but I would be the new owners' consultant for three years and would see that everything concerning Intourist would be executed as heretofore. I told him that the partners were honest and reliable and would make an application for a new contract with all the required financial statements attached. The president, with whom I had very friendly relations, to a point where his subordinates called him "Wolsky's lawyer," agreed and ordered that all arrangements with American Travel Abroad be re-established.

37

The 78-Year-Old Zinger

Aaron Krumbein, a contributing editor to *Travel Scene,* interviewed me for his magazine and in the April 15, 1976 issue the interview was spread out on three pages under the above heading:

> Even at his age, the founder of one of America's leading tour operators is still speeding around the halls of his Manhattan offices. He had pioneered packaged travel for Americans to Israel and to Eastern Europe, was second to land his programs in Russia, and set up one of the first Visit U.S.A. packages—a highly unusual idea at the time. He always looked for the unusual and this was his guiding principle during his entire professional life—to offer something his competitors did not.
>
> Over the years his New York-based firm has developed a wide reputation for integrity and reliability—something getting harder to come by in these days of "fly-by-night" operations that reflects badly on all tour operators.
>
> How does a man with all this experience see the travel industry today? "In order to survive, a tour operator must fight inflation, recession, the fluctuation of the dollar, fly-by-night agents and, above all, the high cost of air transportation," replies Wolsky. "As I look ahead, I realize the future is in charters—any charters."
>
> Does he have any advice for young people entering the business? "Get some experience working for a large company. The outlook for the small (mom and pop) business is questionable. To go into business," he continued, "you need a large amount of capital to operate charters and cover the certainty of losses during the first year or two. Amateurs who invest should be careful and do so only in collaboration with trustworthy experts," advised Wolsky.

The article inspired letters to the editor, such as the following, written by Peter Rothholz of Policano/Rothholz, Inc. in New York:

> I was delighted to read Aaron Krumbein's warm and sensitive essay about Boris Wolsky in your April issue. Perhaps I'm getting old myself, but I often think that "they don't make them like that any more." Boris

Wolsky was one of the first of the major tour operators with whom it was my privilege to deal when I joined KLM Royal Dutch Airlines as their enthusiastic but oh-so-green tour manager back in 1956.

Wolsky was important to KLM and I was concerned about handling my relations with him well, for I realized that the loss of his business could have been a serious blow to the company. At that time, quite a number of other tour operators did their very best to impress upon me how important they were, how knowledgeable they were, what great connections they had and how I had better listen to them carefully.

Boris Wolsky was different, however. He never told me about his importance. On the contrary, he gave me confidence when I needed it and extended himself at all times. In fact, it was not until I read Krumbein's piece that I became aware of Wolsky's accomplishments.

To sum up, one might say that above all, Boris Wolsky is, and always was, a true gentleman. I'm glad that he has been so well recognized by you. The recognition is well deserved and, I hope, will serve as a shining example to the entire travel industry.

38

My Semiretirement

October 31, 1975 was my last day in the office, and per the agreement, I was to return in June of 1976 for one month, and again for two months, September and October. This was the beginning of my semiretirement.

Was I ready to retire? For the previous 12 years I had been at the retirement age. Many times I was asked, "Are you retiring soon? Why

don't you retire?'' My answer was, ''As long as I can physically come to the office, even in a wheelchair, I will not retire.''

Why did I sell my business? Not because of my health or age. Operating international tours is very complicated and subject to political, economic, and monetary situations in different countries; also on weather conditions, strikes, wars and revolutions, and even on the change of the technical progress of airlines from planes carrying 55 passengers to planes carrying 380; propellers, jets, jumbo jets, and super jets. The airlines announce new rates one month or less before the date of applicability and the tour operator has to change his advertising and reprint his brochures which normally were prepared six months in advance.

I coped with all difficulties, thanks to my devoted staff, the friendly atmosphere in the office, and the facilities of the automatic office equipment. I could have gone on, but I had to include charters in my activities which meant additional substantial responsibilities, great capital, headaches, pressure, and risk. Then, my age and the responsibility to my family came to my mind, and I decided to sell my company without being ready to retire. I thought that for over fifty years I had led a very active life, and the first day after retirement I would wake up in the morning and would not know where to go and what to do. I decided to sell my business in 1973 and sold it in 1975. I used these two years as a therapy period to adjust myself physically and mentally; to use my energies and to keep my mind busy.

When I sold my business, I had made arrangements for semiretirement; to work seven months the first year and three months the next two years. When I left the office on October 31st to return the next June, I went to Israel to settle outstanding business; one month later I went to Paris to receive the Medal of Vermeil from the City of Paris. Where to spend the first six months of my retirement was no problem: my apartment in Miami Beach was the answer.

One morning in 1973, our friends, the Berenholzes, called from Miami telling us that they had bought an apartment in a condominium at the ocean in the best section of Miami Beach, at an attractive price. Two days later the price would be $1,000 more per apartment. They urged me to come and see the condominium; it was a good investment.

When I arrived in Miami, the Berenholzes met me at the airport and drove me to different condominiums with apartments ready to rent or buy, and apartments under construction. The next day, when I saw

their furnished, rentable condominium, with its large rooms, excellent location, attractive price, and 7 percent mortgage, I bought it.

During the first month, I familiarized myself with conditions and possibilities, socialized with people, and established my daily program of activities.

During the first two winter seasons in Miami, I was pleased to always be busy but in a relaxing way—a half day in writing my memoirs, the rest of the day exercising, taking long walks, attending lectures or discourses, reading books, and meeting with friends.

In August 1977 I went to Moscow to see my brother, Alexander. When in Moscow, I called Intourist and told them that I was in Moscow for three days and wanted to bid farewell to the management and staff because my connection with American Travel Abroad would terminate three months later. In the late afternoon, Intourist called me at my hotel advising that my message had been transmitted to Mr. Boichenko, Chief of the State Foreign Tourism, and that arrangements had been made. The next morning, August 10th, I was to have a friendly chat with the management staff with tea at Intourist headquarters. At 5 P.M. a cocktail party was to be given by Intourist in the banquet hall of the Hotel Intourist. An invitation was extended to attend a concert at 7:30 P.M. at the Tchaikovski Theatre. On August 11th, a dinner was to be given in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Boris Wolsky by the State Foreign Tourism Administration of the USSR.

The cocktail party was held according to protocol. At the entrance, the management of Intourist stood in line to greet the guests, representatives of the tourist press, and photographers. Inside, there were long tables filled with all kinds of delicacies—caviar, sturgeon, smoked fish, Petsha, knishes, and the like. Vodka, cognac, liqueurs, and wine were served. Uniformed waiters served hot Zulien. At the end of the meal, decorated ice cream plates and champagne were served. Over thirty guests filled the hall. I knew most of them when they were with Intourist and now they are in high positions somewhere else. I was presented with an engraved plate in appreciation for many years of cooperation. The editor-in-chief of the magazine *Travel to the USSR* presented me with a splendid book illustrated with 250 color photographs, an intimate portrait of the vast and varied land of the Soviet Union. Toasts, toasts, and toasts, *à la Russe.* In acknowledging this honor, I summarized some humorous occurrences during my twenty-

one years of cooperation with Intourist and thanked Intourist and guests for the excellent reception, friendly atmosphere, and warm toasts.

After the reception, a waiting limousine took us to a performance of the Donski Kosaks, and back to the hotel.

The dinner the next day was hosted by the chairman, Mr. Boichenko, his assistants, the vice president of Intourist, and the chief of protocol. Again there were drinks, toasts, and an elaborate menu: Ikra, salmon, ham, borscht with tart, broiled fillet, vegetables, ice cream, fruit, white and red wines, and champagne. There were toasts and gifts: to Luba an amber necklace; to me a Samovar, engraved, "To B. Wolsky, President of American Travel Abroad in the United States, in appreciation of many years of cooperation to develop tourism from the U.S. to the Soviet Union. State Foreign Tourism Administration for the USSR, Council of Ministers. Moscow, August 11, 1977."

When I was ready to leave, the Chief of Protocol told me, "Take your table card with your name as a souvenir. The emblem of the Soviet Union is engraved on the card. This shows that you were a guest of the State."

These two days were so impressive and exciting that Luba told me, "If I weren't with you I wouldn't believe that this could have happened." It was a wonderful surprise, unexpected, without solicitation, or provocation. This is why Luba and I were so impressed and appreciated it immensely.

Travel to the USSR, the magazine of State Foreign Tourism Administration For the USSR Council of Ministers, in the November 1977 issue, said:

> Mr. Boris Wolsky, President of American Travel Abroad, has visited the Soviet Union 24 times, and all 24 trips have been fruitful. Each one took him to new tourist centers and cities and helped him to organize Soviet tours for Americans. His company has helped tens of thousands of Americans to see the Soviet Union for themselves.
>
> Speaking of his more than two decades of cooperation with Intourist, Mr. Wolsky said he was pleased with the results. "I always bore in mind the interests of our clients, the wishes of the tourists," he declared at a reception given by Intourist on the occasion of his farewell visit to Moscow. "What did they want to see? What did they want to learn? That

was what decided the itinerary and program of each tour. I wasn't mistaken, because after having traveled the length and breadth of your huge country I knew it well. Intourist and its employees have always been dependable and friendly partners. They have taken my comments and my wishes into account. My collaboration with Intourist has always been friendly."

Mr. Wolsky knows our magazine well. "It helped me in my work," he said. "I often made clippings from the magazine to use them in our firm's travel brochures." Mr. Wolsky has been included in the list of Honorary Readers of *Travel to the USSR* in recognition of his fruitful work in promoting American-Soviet tourist contacts.

A dinner was given in honor of Mr. Wolsky and his wife by Victor Boichenko, First Deputy Chief of the State Foreign Tourism Administration for the USSR Council of Ministers.

Book II

LUBA, ALBERT, GILBERT, AND BETTY

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My Wife Luba Soloveichik Wolsky

Luba was born in Lachowitz, Russia, in 1903. Being the first child, she was a welcome guest to her parents, but she didn't take advantage of this.

Luba had two teachers, one for Hebrew and Yiddish and the other for Russian and other subjects. She was a good student in Hebrew, but her Russian teacher was too strict, and she didn't make any progress.

Religious Jews avoided placing their children in the public schools, because Saturday was a school day (Jewish children were, however, allowed to refrain from writing on their Sabbath). But, being concerned about the education of his children, Luba's father registered her in the public school. This opened the doors of the public school for many more children of religious families.

Mr. Soloveichik took part personally in Luba's Jewish education. He conversed with her about Jewish history, about the long martyrdom the Jewish people had suffered over the centuries, and about their survival brought about by devotion to their religion and to their people. He told her about the heroes who had given up their lives for the Jewish cause, and advised her to help people, to associate herself with plain people, and to fight for justice.

At the age of 12, Luba left for Vilno and registered at the *gimnazium* (a state-owned secondary school). While in Vilno, she lived with her aunt Cyrl (her father's sister) but missed her family and anxiously awaited the holidays and vacations, when she could return to Lachowitz to join her family.

In 1914, when the German army began to occupy Poland, the Soloveichik family moved to Minsk in Russia and Luba registered at the *gimnazium* there.

It was an exciting time. The revolution broke out in Russia, people celebrated the fall of the Tsarist regime, and became involved in many

different political parties. Even school children discussed politics and propagated the advancement of one or another of the political factions.

The Jewish population in Minsk was very large and during the elections for the leadership of the Jewish community council *(Kehila),* Luba worked for the Zionist list, while her father backed the *Aguda* religious group.

Luba graduated from *gimnazium* with a silver medal. Graduates from the seventh year were accepted at the university, or they could take an additional eighth year, where study of Russian literature, physics, mathematics, and Latin were emphasized, and after examination, receive a special diploma. Luba attended this additional year and was accepted at the mathematics department of the University of Kharkov.

In Kharkov, she lived with her aunt Cyrl, who had moved from Vilno. During a vacation, Luba went with her aunt to Sevastopol (Crimea), which was under the regime of General Wrangel. During this time, Kharkov became occupied by the Red Army, and Luba was not able to return there to continue her studies at the University. When Wrangel was defeated, she returned to her family in Minsk and became a mathematics teacher for adults. The students were workmen, laboring all day and attending classes in the evening. Many of them were most interesting people and all of them were eager to learn, since they had not been able to study under the Tsarist regime. Despite the fact that Luba was younger than her students, and though some of them had children her age, they were very attentive and treated her with respect. Relations between teacher and pupil were friendly and sociable. Luba used to say, "I received more than I gave."

Because of the extended civil war, food, clothes, shoes, coal, and wood were scarce and rationed. The school received only one pair of shoes, and although almost all of the teachers wore tattered shoes, some bound with strings to keep them together, all voted to give the one pair of shoes to the principal. During wintertime, when the school received a cartload of wood, all voted to give it to Luba. There prevailed a pleasant atmosphere at the school; teachers and students were dedicated to study and to spreading education among the working class.

When the political situation became unstable, the whole Soloveichik family moved to Vilno (Poland), a cultural city, but the Polish lan-

guage was strange to Luba and the Polish population was anti-Semitic. Nevertheless, life was easy; the family had a nice apartment, ample food, clothing, shoes, coal, and wood, but Luba missed the atmosphere of Minsk.

Her only enjoyment was the family; her grandmother Yachna (father's mother) and grandfather Yehuda Gelin (mother's father) admired the Russian classics and often debated and quarreled about the subject of their reading. This was most amusing. Her love for her grandmother Fradel Gelin was tenacious—Fradel was beautiful, intelligent, and her devotion to her family without limit. It was a special joy for Luba to sit near her and listen to her stories, especially about her father, Michael Zalmen Pines. His business was floating forest timber in barges to different destinations. He was very rich and spent a lot of money for charities, but not for himself, and he always dressed plainly. One day, while on a business trip, he stopped overnight at a small inn and ordered dairy food for dinner since he ate meat only at home. The owners of the inn were busy preparing an elaborate dinner and forgot the old man. Mr. Pines asked the owner why he hadn't gotten his dinner, and the man answered that they were preparing dinner for a distinguished client who supervised the floating barges of Mr. Pines. As soon as they finished with this, they told him, they would serve his dinner. Mr. Pines answered that it was all right, he would wait, and did not mention his name, which would have placed his employee in an awkward position. This and similar stories brought to light the personality of Luba's great-grandfather.

Luba regarded her grandmother as a companion, she told her her problems and asked for advice. Some men asked Luba to marry them, but she refused. When I proposed, the answer was yes. If this was the advice of her grandmother, I am very grateful to her.

Since September 4, 1928, Luba has shared my life and has participated in all my activities. This book is her life, as well as mine.

I did not take part in her activities in New York and Miami. Luba was a volunteer at the Jewish Guild for the Blind, reading to the blind in Yiddish from Sholem Aleichem and other humorist writers, also the Russian paper, *Russkoe Slovo*, for the Russian-speaking blind. The blind were very pleased with her work, and she received an award for unselfish and devoted volunteer assistance given to blind and visually handicapped.

When the refugees from Russia began to arrive in New York in 1973, Luba volunteered as a translator at the New York Association for New Americans (NYANA). She helped the immigrants with the social workers and hospitals, and also assisted them in getting Social Security cards, medicare, or medicaid.

Since 1976 Luba continues her volunteer work for the Russian immigrants at the Federation of Jewish Organizations in Florida.

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My First Son Albert

Albert was born in Paris, France, November 24, 1930. He was our first child and, for eight years, the only one. We, his parents, gave him love, but not enough attention because when he was young, I was becoming a travel agent. I was busy organizing the new business and Luba, also working in the office, was unable to give Albert the attention to which a four-year-old child is entitled.

We found a boarding school for children his age in a suburb of Paris. The school was surrounded by trees, a lot of greenery, and a playground. In addition to songs, games, and dancing, there were classes to prepare the children for regular school. We visited him on Sundays and spent the day there. But at that age, the child should have been with his parents and we are still sorry that we chose this solution; our only con-

solation is that this helped him to mature earlier. He was affectionate and of fine character; when Luba went to a restaurant with him for a meal, he told her, "Mother, don't buy ice cream for me, but give a better tip to the waiter."

Albert was not even nine years old when World War II broke out, but he was already subjected, as was the rest of his family, to the cruelties of war: bombardment, running to the shelter, being a refugee 300 miles from home, long hours of train travel to return home when the fighting subsided and, when the Germans advanced on Paris, running again from city to city until arrival in Marseilles five months later.

In Marseilles, he attended the public school and adapted himself to the difficult life there. Albert participated, with his parents and his brother Gilbert, in the trips by freighter from Marseilles to Casablanca, internment in a concentration camp in Morocco, and another freighter trip from Casablanca to New York.

In New York, without speaking one word of English, Albert was placed in an elementary school class with children younger than himself. Being almost eleven, he suffered morally, but worked hard and progressed rapidly. He was lucky to have had a nice teacher who understood how he felt. She invited him to her home, talked to him, and helped him to advance toward his regular class.

When Luba got a job in *Boiberik,* a camp for Jewish children, Albert and Gilbert spent two summer seasons there, getting some Jewish education: stories from Jewish history, Jewish holidays, traditions, and songs. Albert attended a Jewish school for a couple of years after public school, and was also active as a Boy Scout.

In June 1946, he graduated from Inwood Junior High School, and at the same time was elected Senior Patrol Leader of the Boy Scouts. He registered at George Washington High School and during the summer worked at different jobs. In January 1949, he graduated from high school with the Arista Award.

We couldn't afford to send him to a private college, but he was accepted at the City College. After school, he worked as a cashier at Klein's Department Store; during the summer, he worked at Far Rockaway Amusement Park from 4 P.M. to midnight at 75 cents an hour. He saved a couple of hundred dollars and gave the money to me.

In February 1953, Albert graduated from college with a Bachelor of Arts. The same year, he designed the costumes for a play performed

by New York City College actors, *The Ascent of F6.* Although he had been accepted by Columbia University, he was called to the army.

His basic training was in the South and I don't know how he reacted to the process of being "broken." Before sailing for duty somewhere in the Pacific, Albert came home for two weeks. Our joy was mixed with apprehension. There were still daily casualties in Korea from some fighting and snipers, and we were afraid he would be sent there. On the day of his departure for Seattle, Albert, dressed in his uniform, a large sack marked U.S. Army on his shoulders, with Luba and me on either side of him, walked to a taxi and on to the airport.

Three sleepless nights passed until we received a cable: "Going to Japan." In Japan, he was assigned as liaison to keep the U.S. Army people informed of the regulations of the Japanese authorities: when a ship of U.S. Army personnel arrived, Albert met them by motorboat and informed them of the regulations before the ship docked.

One day, the wife of General Taylor, Chief-of-Staff of the U.S. Army in the Orient, arrived with her mother from the States. The General, accompanied by a group of high-ranking officers, went out to the ship on the same motorboat as Albert to greet his wife. When the party boarded the U.S. ship, Albert asked the officer who had escorted Mrs. Taylor from the States about her and her mother's documents. The officer became confused and rushed around looking for them. Taylor's mother-in-law spoke only French and asked Albert some questions through her daughter. Albert volunteered to answer in French. She exclaimed, "I have to come from the U.S. to Japan to meet an American soldier who speaks French!"

The army staff in Japan was permitted to use the American army planes, flying different missions over the Orient, for their vacations. Albert accumulated his vacation and days-off to take advantage of this privilege. During his two years in Japan, he was able to visit most of the Orient. He made many friends in Japan and was even invited to Japanese homes, which happened very seldom to a foreigner. Albert organized free evening lessons of English for the Japanese. When Luba and I were in Yokohama, we went to see the school where Albert taught English to the Japanese.

At the time Albert returned from Japan and was discharged from the army, I had just bought Consolidated Tours from Rubenfeld. Albert learned that I had had to borrow money, and brought me $2,000 in

government bonds which his grandfather (Luba's father) had sent to him and Gilbert, $1,000 each for their bar mitzvahs. It was a very generous deed on the part of the two young men, one just out of military uniform, and the other a freshman at Brandeis University.

I talked to Albert about his joining me in Consolidated Tours, which was to be in the interest of both of us. He agreed to consider it. He did join me, learned the business very fast, and soon carried a large part of the responsibilities. The airlines, ship companies, travel agents, and our representatives abroad respected him and loved to deal with him. He handled the relationship with the staff to a point that they called him "our union."

The business grew, and Albert's involvement grew with it. I was happy, and it looked to me that he, too, was happy. I misjudged him. He had lost interest in the business and was planning a way to leave with the minimum of harm to me. This is why his decision to leave the business was so unexpected and so painful.

After Albert left the business, he often came to have dinner with us to keep us informed of his plans, his ups, his downs, and his successes.

When I started to write about him, I realized that I was speaking casually about a very interesting story and an important period in his life. I asked him many times to write it for me, but he refused. I couldn't even get enough material and information to enable me to do it myself. I had no other choice but to tell him: "I will stop the press." This got me a promise, which he kept. Here it is in his own words:

> When I joined my father in the travel business in 1956, I truly hoped that it would solve a problem that had plagued me until then. I never felt any main goal and hoped that indeed this move would put me on the track of a career that was interesting and meaningful.
>
> However, after the bloom of learning wore off and I became more expert in the field and all the absorptions of learning wore off, I was left with the feeling that this business was not for me. The feeling created a tremendous sense of panic since, while I felt that I could not spend my life as a travel agent, I had gone back to my original state of being without a goal.
>
> This was perhaps the most agonizing period of my life and by far much more difficult than the career which I pursued later—for I felt that on the one hand I would have to sooner or later go and tell my father that I was leaving and on the other I didn't know what I was leaving for.

However, perhaps under the stress of the necessity to make a decision, and with my back really against the wall, I began slowly to reexamine a field which I had previously felt was not for me and on which I had turned my back. At one time I had been interested in fashion but did not feel the drive or that it was "serious" work. And so I had simply walked away from the entire field. But on re-examination, I realized that perhaps the answer was to combine what was a still very much alive interest in clothing, and an interest in how people dress with theater, which had also been a major interest in my life. I felt that by combining these two elements, I could take clothes out of fashion and turn them into some sort of creative character contribution.

I had two immediate problems: how to get started and how to tell my parents. I knew it would be very difficult for them. For my father, it meant that I would not be working by his side any more. For my mother, it meant fear that I would fail and be hurt and miserable. And it was very hard to bring up the subject. Even though they were both in shock and of course deeply upset, they recovered quickly when they realized how much this move meant to me and that I had to do it. From that moment on they were, and have continued to be, supportive.

The problem of how to get started was perhaps less dramatic and painful, but in some ways harder. I had no idea what to do. I felt that I had to go back to school and study. I had no financial pressure for the time being so I was fully prepared to take a year off to study, and set about trying to find out where to go. Through friends I was introduced to working designers and went to see them seeking advice. Except to tell me not to pursue my interest, and that I was crazy to leave a field as interesting as the travel business, I could get no help.

Finally, one designer told me to see Helene Pons, who at that time was a designer and had a small costume house which had executed the costumes for *My Fair Lady.* As it turned out, she had to fly to Rome very quickly and I was asked to assist her, since tickets were hard to get at that point. I did and after I confirmed the air space to her, she told me that she had heard that I had wanted to see her. I told her why and said that I would very much appreciate meeting her upon her return from Rome. But she was a quick and volatile woman and told me not to wait and come right over. I left the office and went to see her. I sat and talked and explained what I wanted to do. She, on the other hand, kept mumbling about executing the costumes for a new show called *Camelot,* and this and that. It was all very confusing.

I returned to work and my father, noticing my puzzled look, asked me what was the matter. All I could say was that I was very confused and I

may sound crazy, but I thought that she had offered me a job. Oddly enough, she had. Upon her return from Rome she began working on *Camelot* and over the Fourth of July weekend in 1960, I left the travel business and began work in my new field. It was my entrée into this field and put me in a position to both learn and meet designers.

I worked on *Camelot* as Helene Pons' assistant, sweeper, confidant, errand boy, accountant, fabric and material controller, in short, anything and everything. It was the best learning experience I could have had. I was thrown immediately into the eye of a hurricane and had to survive or drown. I seemed to have survived.

For the next three years or so I assisted and tried to get into the union. That was a terrific problem since at that time admission was very tight, once a year, and with a very difficult test. So I began to study a bit formally, going at night, since I always seemed to be working during the day. The first year I took the exam, which was in the summer of 1961, I failed. It was a bit of a nerve on my part, since I truly was not qualified. I took it again the following year and again failed, but this time I felt that I was ready and got quite angry, and finally I passed in 1963 on my third try. I don't know whether I passed it because I had gotten so good, or whether they were tired of me. At any rate, looking back on that period I realized that I passed the exam when I was truly ready.

The exam out of the way, I then began assisting officially, and little by little I also began doing small shows on my own, mostly off-Broadway. I kept working in this manner for three or four years, when I realized it was time to get moving to the next plateau, and that was to begin to do my own work exclusively. By that time I had assisted every known designer on Broadway and had a very good list of assisting credits. In fact, I was about the top in assisting, but nowhere as a designer.

One of my first big breaks came from a friend who could not do a couple of television specials for David Susskind. This led to my doing *Of Mice and Men* and *The Desperate Hours* back-to-back in four weeks. It was a very important experience, for it helped me get through my first film when that fall I was again recommended by a colleague to do *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter.*

That was in 1968. As of this writing, I have been working in films, television, and theater for 10 years. I moved to California, which has given me a mobility on both coasts. And while my television career has not been extensive and I don't do much theater, films have kept me occupied and I am very grateful to be in a position where I do get offers of good films by top directors.

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My Son Gilbert

Gilbert was born in Paris, France, on February 4, 1938, one year and seven months before World War II erupted. Even as a baby he was subjected to the atrocities of war. Many times, in the middle of the night, he was awakened and carried to the subway station, which was used as a bomb shelter. When the bombardment became frequent, Luba went with him and Albert to Poitier, while I remained in Paris. They returned to Paris four months later and, when the German army advanced, they went to Mont de Marsan, Auch, and Marseilles.

In Marseilles, his mother carried him from store to store to get food (there was a priority for babies). At the age of three, Gilbert traveled by freighter, converted for carrying passengers, in a dormitory of 150 women and children. After five days at sea, the freighter anchored away from the shore for six weeks with inadequate food. Later its passengers were transferred to a concentration camp in Morocco which had no facilities.

In New York, Gilbert suffered because of the language barrier; he would come home crying, "I can't play with the children, they don't know how to talk!" This bothered him very much, and when he learned some English, he stopped speaking French. (Thirty years later, he had to work hard to regain his knowledge of French, which was required for his Ph.D.)

Luba got a job in *Boiberik,* a summer camp for Jewish children, and she was there with Gilbert and Albert for two summer seasons. Gilbert was the youngest and smallest child in camp; he was cheerful and attracted the attention of the camp director, who included him among the performers for their weekly shows. At one performance, his role was to open the show and call in the others. I can recall the applause when a tiny boy, dressed as a Mexican with a very large sombrero, opened the show and then yelled, "Come on, boys!" and the other "artists" appeared. After the performance, many people asked: who were the parents of this little boy? (An extinguished star!)

In school, Gilbert was a good student; at the end of each term he received an honor certificate for an excellent record of scholarship. In June 1952, he graduated from Inwood Junior High School.

The same year, he passed his examination and was accepted by Stuyvesant High School. He spent his summer vacations in my office or at a job punching cards for computers. In June 1955 he received his Stuyvesant High School diploma, and chose to attend Brandeis University. It was not easy to get in, but he was accepted and completed his studies in three-and-a-half years instead of four. He graduated five months before the other students of his class and was not at the graduation ceremony.

From Brandeis Gilbert went on to the University of Maryland, where he continued his studies in physics and mathematics, specializing in elementary particle physics. He did several experiments at Brookhaven National Laboratory and was a member of the team that discovered an important new particle. Most of his work was done on large computers, and as a graduate student, he became an expert in the use of them.

In 1960 he met Betty Ann Bernstein. They were married on February 3, 1963. For their honeymoon, they went to Israel and Paris.

On April 17, 1967, his first child Marissa was born. That same important year he completed his thesis and was awarded a Ph.D. He also got a job as a research associate at Tufts University, so the family left Maryland and moved to the Boston area.

On August 16, 1968 his son Emile was born. Gilbert was appointed assistant professor of physics that year, and at Tufts pursued both of his interests: he taught courses in physics and continued his research in elementary particle physics. He also became more involved with computers. Tufts did not have a computer science department, so he developed and taught computer science courses. He organized the computer center and eventually persuaded the University to buy a large computer for use by the students as well as for research.

In 1974 Gilbert left Tufts and went to work for Digital Equipment Corporation, the major manufacturer of minicomputers. Years of research in high energy physics which involves much computer usage resulted in an expert knowledge of software. He became the project leader of the program to develop the Automated Product Test system which automated product testing in Digital manufacturing facilities.

As a result of his efforts and particularly his contributions to the TRAX product of his company, Gilbert was recently promoted to Consulting Software Engineer, a position held by only four other members of the engineering group. This position recognizes those individuals who have obtained an exceptional knowledge and capability in a technical area. He is currently leading a team in the development of a new operating system.

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My Daughter-in-Law Betty Ann Bernstein Wolsky

Betty was born in New York on December 31, 1940, at 11:50 P.M. (just in time to be a tax deduction). She was educated in the New York public schools and graduated from Hunter College in 1962 with a degree in art education. She taught elementary school for six months and married Gilbert Wolsky on February 3, 1963. After a honeymoon in Israel and Paris, she moved with Gilbert, when he was a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Maryland, to Hyattsville, Maryland.

After a few months of settling in, she was hired by the Montgomery County Board of Education as an "art supervisor." For this position she had to travel from school to school and help elementary school teachers teach children art more effectively. This was not easy, as she had to learn how to drive a car. After failing the parking test twice, she

finally got her license and was able to start her career. On April 17, 1967, her four-year art career was put aside because Marissa her first child was born, and a new career—"Motherhood"—was also born. By this time Gilbert had earned his degree and was offered a position at Tufts University, so Marissa, Betty, and Gilbert moved to the Boston area.

On August 16, 1968 Emile was born and the family began looking for larger quarters; the apartment they were living in was too small. They found a large Victorian house at 18 Oxford Street in Winchester, Massachusetts, in which they are still living.

While the children were growing, Betty resumed her job of training teachers to teach children art more effectively, where to get materials, and how to use them at various colleges and adult education centers.

Currently she is a coordinator of various projects funded by the government for the De Cordova Museum in Lincoln, Massachusetts, and she teaches at the Cambridge Center for Adult Education, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Book III

HELPING OTHERS

43

L'Amicale de Brest-Litovsk and La Colonie Scolaire

1925-1926

The young people of Brest-Litovsk, seeing no future in their war-torn city during the early 1920s, emigrated to various countries. Quite a few of them went to Paris. They arrived there with no knowledge of the language, no special trades or professions, and no capital. Many of them contacted me for information, advice, assistance, and moral support, but I was in no position to give them much help.

I discovered that about a dozen families from Brest had been living in Paris prior to World War I, and with their assistance, I organized a fraternal club under the name of L'Amicale de Brest-Litovsk. Rabbi Tchernaia was named president, Mr. Tilles vice-president, and Messrs. Prisand and Guttmacher members of the board of directors. I was made general secretary. Rabbi Tchernaia, the son of a tailor in Brest, had graduated from the Ecole Rabbinique in Paris and was the spiritual leader of the Jewish community in Enghien-les-Bains near Paris. Because of his prestige and connections he was able to obtain legal residence for those who arrived with tourist visas and to find jobs for the immigrants among members of his congregation. For those who preferred to go into business for themselves, Mr. Tilles, a reputable fur wholesaler, was able to secure credit. Mr. Prisand had a dry goods store on the Rue de Rosier, similar to stores on Hester Street on New York's East Side. Since the store was open from 9:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M., newcomers could arrive any time for information and advice, and were sure to receive it regardless of how busy the proprietor was. Mr. Guttmacher, a war veteran, repaired shoes in a booth so small that no client was able to go inside. I always admired this simple man who worked so hard to make a living and yet was always ready to close his booth and accompany the new immigrants from Brest to the police or other institutions. He was a small man with a big heart.

Another one of the important projects of this club was to establish a fund for loans without interest.

Thus the newcomers to Paris found moral support, advice, guidance regarding jobs, and credit for merchandise to sell on the *marché* (a market which each day of the week took place in a different suburb of Paris).

Those who entered the field of the *marché* were so successful that most of the newcomers left their jobs, and with the help of the fund, became merchants. Later they extended their activities to various towns in France, as far as Toulouse and Bordeaux. Some of the younger people were able to continue their studies, and with the help of L'Amicale, found part-time jobs.

In connection with my activities in L'Amicale, I often visited The Pletzl in the fourth arrondissement (section) of Paris (equivalent to New York's Lower East Side) where many of the immigrants from various countries lived, under miserable conditions. On Sunday afternoons I would walk through the streets of this district, appalled to see hundreds of children playing in the dirty, air-polluted streets. I wondered what could be done for these underprivileged children. The question bothered me for many weeks. I did some investigating on summer camps for children and learned that there were some camps for poor children but not enough. Although I worked on various plans to enable more children to enjoy summer in the fresh air, none of them seemed feasible.

In 1925 an idea came to mind. I knew that there were over 200 Jewish fraternal organizations in Paris. All of them were interested in the welfare of their children. Would it not then be a practical idea to get these fraternal organizations to join together and build summer camps for their own members' children as well as for children from poor families?

At one of the meetings of L'Amicale I invited representatives of five different fraternal organizations and explained to them what I had in mind. It would be a very heavy burden on our organization, but it could easily be accomplished if 10 or 20 organizations were to join forces. The proposition was unanimously accepted.

For almost one year I spent my Saturdays and Sundays at meetings of different fraternal organizations. At the end of 1926 a new organiza-

tion was formed, by the name of La Colonie Scolaire. A committee of thirty-six persons was appointed, representing eighteen different organizations and a cross section of the immigrant Jewish community in Paris: doctors, lawyers, manufacturers, businessmen, storekeepers, workers, union people, all of whom had originally arrived from Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Romania, and Hungary. I was elected president.

The first meeting was a shambles, with each member suggesting his own idea, and it was impossible to come to a decision. The situation changed when I divided the committee into small sections of five members each for organization of programs, finance, membership, publicity, real estate for renting a home for the summer *Colonie,* and so on. After six months I managed to keep the meetings orderly and productive. I also learned diplomacy, in dealing with critics and in giving all parties to a dispute the right to express themselves while keeping them in line.

La Colonie Scolaire became very popular in Paris. The number of members grew and the activities were expanded. We acquired a five-story building in Berck-Plage, close to the beach, where we were able to shelter 500 children during the summer on three-week holidays for four groups of 125 children each. The departure of the children from Paris to Berck-Plage was always on a Sunday morning and very exciting. Two cars of the train to take them were marked with "La Colonie Scolaire" posters. The platform was packed with hundreds of people—the children, their parents, relatives, and friends as well as members of the committee. There was joy and laughter and noisy "good-byes" as parents saw their children off. When the train whistle announced the departure, the children started to sing and parents waved handkerchiefs and wished all a "Bon voyage."

In addition to the summer camps La Colonie Scolaire provided other services:

The Mother and Child Dispensary (Dispensaire La Mère et l'Enfant), situated in the heart of the Jewish district of Paris, provided 1,000 medical examinations every month, X-ray treatments, and laboratory service. Nurses would visit the homes of those persons who, for one reason or another, were unable to come to the Dispensary, and free pharmaceutical supplies were also provided.

A school for Jewish culture offered courses in Jewish history and tradition, and arranged visits to museums and exhibitions.

Assistance was given to large families in supervising hygienic and sanitary conditions in their living quarters. And each month, approximately 1,000 articles of second-hand and new clothing were distributed free of charge.

Because of the many activities provided for the poor children, La Colonie Scolaire was recognized by the French authorities as a *Utilité Public,* and on the honor committee were members of the government and people important in political, social, educational, and artistic circles. Among them were Leon Blum, Deputy and former Prime Minister; Justin Godart, Senator and former Minister; L. O. Frossart, Deputy and former Minister; F. de Tessan, Deputy and former Minister; A. Honnorat, Senator, former Minister, and President of the City University; Lucien Boussoutrot, Deputy and President of the Commission on Air; Henry Torres, attorney to the Court of Appeals and chief defense lawyer for Schwarzbard, who killed Petlura, the Butcher of Jews; Marc Jablum, President of the Federation of Jewish Societies of France; Naoum Aronson, sculptor; Matei-Roussou, Vice-President of the Syndicate of Authors and Playwrights; Pierre Paraf, literary writer; and Zadoc-Kahn, Chief Doctor of the Rothschild Hospital.

Our annual Ball was an event in the Jewish Community of Paris and was always chaired by a minister or a senator and the guests were greeted at the entrance by an honor guard of the *Garde République* in their lavish parade uniforms.

I was re-elected president every year for 15 years until 1940, when the Germans occupied Paris. This gave me the assurance that my activities were appreciated by the members, despite the fact that many were aspiring to this prestigious position.

It is true that I gave to the organization all the free time which really belonged to my family, and I give thanks to Luba, who voluntarily accepted the situation. I was rewarded for my work, which enriched my life and kept me happy.

To keep the fraternal organizations which comprised La Colonie Scolaire as members, and to attract even more organizations, I began the publication *Almanac Juif* in 1931. It included descriptions of over 200 Jewish organizations in France and articles by well-known French per-

sonalities. The *Almanac* was warmly received by the Jewish associations and praised by the Jewish press. All major libraries asked for copies.

44

A Meeting with the Baroness de Rothschild

There was a cool relationship between the Jews who had been born in France and the immigrant Jews who became French by naturalization. However there was a sign of recognition for La Colonie Scolaire when I was invited by the Baroness de Rothschild to her residence for a meeting on summer vacations for Jewish children. During the meeting the hostess asked me, "How is it that we French Jews have had summer colonies for years but we do not have our own building? Your organization has been in existence for only five years and already you have your own building at the beach in Berck-Plage." I replied that our working system was different. The French Jewish organizations accumulated capital as a fund and used only the dividends of the capital in the budget for their activities. We new immigrants all came from different countries and had experienced currency devaluations. Therefore we only collected money to be used as a deposit and bought the building with a mortgage, which we asked the Jews of Paris to pay.

Mrs. Dreyfus, widow of the famous martyr Captain Dreyfus, was present at the meeting. She invited me for a cup of tea at her residence

to exchange views about improving the colonies for Jewish children. During my visit, Mrs. Dreyfus showed me a wall hanging made of blue velvet embroidered with Hebrew letters in gold and asked me the meaning of the words. I told her that this was used on Saturdays and holidays to cover the *chaleh* (Jewish braided bread) and the Hebrew inscription was the blessing of the bread. She then told me that her late husband had received it from a gentile upholsterer who had done some work for them, and that he had cherished it greatly. At this time Captain Dreyfus's picture was in almost all Jewish homes and on Jewish calendars.

In 1894 the High Military Staff in France had discovered that classified material was being leaked to the Germans. As anti-Semitism was rampant in the French Army at this time, suspicion fell on Captain Dreyfus, the only Jew in the High Command. A Military Tribunal was called and found him guilty, and on Saturday, January 5, 1895, the ceremony of his disgrace took place in the courtyard of the Invalides in Paris, where hundreds of military men in all formations were assembled. Outside the gates, thousands of people were assembled yelling "Death to the Jews!"

Dr. Theodore Herzl, an assimilated Jew and correspondent from the *New Free Press* in Vienna, was among the members of the press present. He observed the painful ceremony of the cutting of the epaulettes, the removal of the medals, the breaking in two of the sword of an innocent officer condemned only because he was Jewish. This grim and dramatic moment and the mob yelling "Death to the Jews" made him aware of his own Jewishness, and upon returning to his hotel, he wrote the following: "If a big cultured nation can descend so low and the hate towards the Jewish people is so deep, what can the Jews expect from other, less evolved nations?" This introspection gave him the idea of writing the now-famous book *Judenstadt* (The Jewish State).

45

The World Jewish Congress

1932

Because of my activities in La Colonie Scolaire I was elected to the board of directors of the Federation of the Jewish Societies of France. This was an additional burden and a time consuming job, but most interesting and rewarding because the activities of the Federation included all facets of Jewish life in France: education, society, welfare, ethics, and even politics. I was elected by the Federation as a delegate to the Jewish World Conference, held in Geneva August 14-17, 1932.

I made a speech in the name of the Federation, which represented 83 societies with a membership of 150,000 Jewish families, stating:

> I am for a World Congress, but this present Conference cannot be used as a model for the future. The platform should not be used as a tribune for Zionist propaganda, or as a battlefield for political differences. Anti-Semites are against us, not because of political or ideological differences but only because we are Jews, and when we have to protect ourselves we should do it all united—as Jews. A Congress in which all segments of the Jewish people—irrespective of their political or ideological beliefs—participate actively will achieve the goals for which we all strive. (From the published report of the Conference, page 146.)

At the Conference I was introduced to Dr. Chaim Weitzman, president of the Conference. He asked me where I was born. When I told him Brest-Litovsk, he smiled and told me "We are neighbors. I was born in Motele, near Pinsk" (200 miles from Brest).

46

The Underground Railroad—Paris-New York

As soon as the leaders of the Jewish organizations in German-occupied Paris learned about my residence in New York, a regular underground correspondence started with the help of our friends in Free France. This correspondence, still in my possession, documents Jewish life under Nazi occupation.

Some of the remaining active members of the Jewish organizations in Paris joined forces and reopened four popular kitchens where 1,200 to 1,400 daily meals were distributed. La Colonie Scolaire opened its dispensary, La Mère et l'Enfant, for medical assistance to children and adults, and the Vestiaire was opened for distribution of clothes, underwear, and shoes.

The Germans tried to establish a *Judenrath,* where all Jews had to be registered and all Jewish organizations and social institutions united and controlled. The Jewish leaders understood the dangers of this proposition, which would give the Nazis control over their activities, and refused to cooperate. S. S. Officer Daneken, in charge of the Jewish population of France, imported two Jews from Vienna—Mr. Israelevich and Mr. Biberstein—to help him convince the Jewish leaders to accept his proposal. They succeeded in establishing a coordinating committee, which later was transferred to the Union of Jews in France (UJIF). Most of the Jewish organizations, including La Consistoire Israelite, refused to participate, but under pressure and threats of deportation, they gave in.

La Colonie Scolaire and the leaders of the four free kitchens united under the code name "Rue Amelot" (street address of La Colonie Scolaire) and refused to participate despite the risk of deportation. It is a miracle that they were able to continue with their activities, distributing 1,200 to 1,400 meals a day, providing medical assistance to children, distributing clothing, providing Jewish education for children twice a week, juridical consultation, food packages to the concentra-

tion camps in France, and most important, food cards for persons hidden from the Germans.

Rue Amelot was a real bastion of the Resistance against the Nazis for three years.

I received weekly reports from Paris about their activities and needs, but as an individual I was unable to do too much about their numerous and important requests. With the help of some active members of the Jewish Community in Paris, now in New York, I founded the organization Jews from France under the presidency of Naoum Aronson, the famous French sculptor; I became vice-president. Jews from France as an organization was able to function through the Joint Distribution Committee, World Jewish Congress, Jewish Labor Committee, and other organizations. Every Wednesday I met with Baron Robert de Rothschild, former president of the Jewish Community in Paris, and informed him about the requests from Paris. In some cases he tried to use his connections and got results. The most urgent was to obtain visas for important persons in France whose lives were in danger. We were successful in individual cases, but we failed in our efforts for a group of 30 families.

The correspondence from Paris reported on measures taken by the Germans to control the activities of Jewish organizations, elimination of Jews from commerce and industry, and activities of Jewish organizations and their struggles with the Germans and with their budgets.

Two letters copied here in their entirety illustrate the contents of the correspondence.

Extract from an Order of the German Occupation Administration:

The administrators of Jewish enterprises have the duty to eliminate any Jewish influence in the French economy. All enterprises have to be kept active without their Jewish owners or Jewish staff.

The following procedures are to be applied:

1. When a Jew is transferring his enterprise to a non-Jew, the Commissioner has to make sure that the non-Jew has not now nor did he previously have any connection with the owner of the enterprise.
2. If the Jewish owner refuses to transfer his enterprise to a non-Jew, the Administrator has to sell it to a non-Jewish competitor, if impossible

to any one of his choice, but the transaction has to be authorized by the military authority.

3. If the Jewish enterprise is not very important to the economy, the Administrator has to get the authorization from the military to sell the stock as soon as possible and liquidate the enterprise.

4. All revenues (the assets minus the liabilities) have to be deposited at the Caisse des Depots et Consignations. The ex-owner would receive 2½ percent (dividend) interest, but no part of the revenue.

5. All Jewish accounts in banks or other repositories will be blocked.

Translation of Letter Received from La Colonie Scolaire:

Dear Friend, Mr. Wolsky: We are sending you from time to time reports about our actual activity but I do not know if you are fully aware of the manner in which this activity is organized.

On the day after the Occupation, Messrs. GL, GR, and JAC took the initiative to reorganize the work of aid. Several days later four popular kitchens and our dispensary combined under the following conditions. Each institution remains autonomous but will all together be managed by one committee elected by them. All proceeds will go to the same and only treasury, which has to cover the expenses of all these five institutions.

It is true that each representative tries to defend the interests of the institution he represents, but in spite of this an understanding is almost always reached and we go on with our useful work.

All is concentrated on the premises of our dispensary La Mère et l'Enfant (Mother and Child).

The organization is a model one; everything works accurately and marvelously with minimal fees. Our monthly report on 12 typewritten sheets could give you a clear idea about our organization, but unfortunately we have no possibility of getting it to you.

Our dispensary is working to full capacity, but the state of the underfed children is alarming and disastrous. During the month of February, the number of medical consultations reached 1,000. The X-ray machine works without interruption every day from morning to evening, but the X-rays cannot repair the damage lack of food creates in the children. We have several hundred children whose state of health is catastrophic. It is extremely urgent to send them to the country and supply them with abundant food to help restore their almost-entirely unhealthy constitutions, otherwise we will have to, in a few months, look for beds in hospi-

tals and sanatoria for them. We find that it is necessary, I would say even urgent, to send away at least 600 children in four groups of 150 each. We hope to be able to use for this purpose our place in Berck, and arrange a stay of one month for each group. Each child will cost us 600 francs, all expenses included. We need, therefore, 360,000 francs. It is impossible to minimize the needs of our dispensary, the number of meals in our kitchens, or in any of our other services.

Nonetheless, we are ready to try and collect about a third of the necessary amount, but we must be assured that our uncle will supply the other two-thirds. We cannot engage in any expenses until we are sure that we can carry on to a successful end.

Nobody is more able and authorized to be our ambassador to our uncle than you, so we ask you to tell him the truth. The very lives of hundreds of children are at stake.

We are working very hard under very difficult conditions, and are doing, I would say, more than the maximum. So we feel we deserve to be encouraged and effectively helped to go on.

Trusting to hear from you, I am

Yours sincerely,

In 1830 when the French Army occupied Algeria, they were received with enthusiasm by the Jewish population of 38,000 as the Jews had been oppressed by the Ottoman government. Under French influence, the Jews renounced their old Eastern customs and adopted the habits and morals of the Western French.

The French, in their efforts to assimilate the population of Algeria, invited them to become French citizens and to apply for naturalization. The Jewish Community of Algeria made a collective request for naturalization which in 1869 was favorably accepted by the General Administration of Algeria without any opposition from the Moslems.

Adolphe Cremieux, member of the National Defense Committee, was in charge of organizing the administration in Algeria. He realized that the Jewish population was devoted to France and that they were active in the economy of Algeria. He initiated the decree of October 24, 1870, which reads: "The Jews of Algeria are declared French Citizens. As per French law, all rights they obtained remain in force. All local resolutions and decrees against the Jewish population will be abolished." This decree was called the "Decree Cremieux."

The Jews of Algeria paid their debt to France during the First and Second World Wars with a large number of their brave men and heroic actions, as well as in the fields of art, culture, and science. But on October 3, 1940, the government of Vichy abrogated the "Decree Cremieux" and deprived the Algerian Jews of their French nationality.

I received a copy of a three-page letter written by the Grand Rabbi of France to the Chief of the French Government, Maréchal Pétain, protesting vigorously the abolishing of the "Decree Cremieux," which he called an outrageous injustice to the Algerian Jews who gave their lives, their knowledge, and their devotion to France. Jews from France sent copies of this letter to the most important Jewish organizations in the United States. Protests were made with the State Department and Members of Congress.

A copy of a 32-page memorandum presented by the French section of the World Jewish Congress was sent to me. Under the title "An Alarming Act of Concession to Fascism and Nazism," the memorandum described in detail the important contributions of the Algerian Jews to French commerce and industry, their patriotism and devotion to France which was without precedent, and their heroic sacrifices during two world wars.

The Jews from France sent copies of this memorandum to the press and influential organizations in the United States. On March 14, 1943, General Giraud, High Commissioner of North Africa, made the following declaration: "In order to eliminate race discrimination, the laws enacted by the Vichy Government are abrogated, and the 'Decree Cremieux,' which was established in 1870 remains in full force."

Thanks to this act, 300,000 Algerian Jews were able to leave Algeria for France when Algeria became independent under Arab rule. These 300,000 Jews became active in all trades in France, were safe, in good financial condition, and an excellent asset to France and the Jewish population of France.

During 1943 the Underground Railroad continued to bring more tragic news and at the same time news about the heroic devotion of persons risking their lives and continuing their activities.

Rue Amelot, nest of all underground activities, was under the cover of the Dispensaire La Mère et l'Enfant which provided medical and social help, clothing, and shoes for children and mothers. The Germans

tolerated their activities and the staff carried cards indicating that they could not be deported.

Every day tragic scenes occurred in the Dispensary—people afraid to return to their homes and looking for places to hide; people asking for food stamps, warm clothing, or medicines for relatives or neighbors in hiding; Christian neighbors bringing children with a note from a deported mother requesting them to "bring the children to 36 Rue Amelot"; social workers looking for clothing and shoes for children in hiding; food packages, blankets, medicines, books, games for those interned in the camps awaiting deportation.

Over 1,000 Jewish children were placed with Christian families and in churches, and their lives and well-being were protected thanks to devoted people risking their own lives—Christian social workers, members of the Red Cross, and Scouts. Over 400 adults were placed in farms as laborers, in private homes as relatives or victims of a fire, in small hotels as tourists or salesmen, thanks to some municipalities where Rue Amelot got food cards without names and thanks to the "Factory" which made up identification cards with non-Jewish names in an empty apartment. These false cards helped hundreds of persons leave the Occupied Zone for the Free Zone.

In June 1943 the Gestapo invaded the Dispensaire La Mère et l'Enfant, arrested the leader, Mr. David Rapoport, and a couple of his assistants, and sealed the office. David Rapoport was deported and died in a concentration camp.

The remaining leaders of Rue Amelot expected severe repressions and deportations because the Gestapo learned about their underground activities and that La Colonie Scolaire and the Dispensaire La Mère et l'Enfant were not under the control of the UJIF. Luckily, nothing tragic happened because the Gestapo had failed to discover the underground organization which had been active for almost three years in the center of Paris, and being afraid of their supervisors, they minimized the activities of Rue Amelot and saved the lives of many people.

The Dispensaire La Mère et l'Enfant was closed for three months but the underground activities were not interrupted. The register and all documents of the 1,000 children in hiding were safe in an office of a hospital, to which the doctors of the Dispensary had access. The staff and social workers changed their addresses to avoid arrest, but met

every second day in different apartments, and the activities for the over 1,000 children and hundreds of adults in hiding continued.

In September 1943, the Dispensary was reopened under the strict control of the UJIF. Some underground work was done *sub rosa* in the Dispensary and the rest in private apartments.

The children were visited by the social workers twice monthly with special instructions that they could go with their foster parents to church, but that they should not accept religious instruction or convert. One day a mother received a letter from her 11-year-old son inviting her to the ceremony of his conversion to Catholicism. Rue Amelot sent one of the best Christian social workers, Madame Curbe, and with the help of the priest the ceremony was cancelled. Of the over 1,000 children, only two were converted.

The doctors in the Dispensary provided medicine and medical products for the children and adults in hiding, and in urgent cases placed children and adults in hospitals with fake diagnoses until hiding shelters were found.

The budget was a heavy burden. UJIF covered the expenses for the four kitchens and for the medical and social assistance of the Dispensary. All the heavy expenses for the children and adults in hiding were covered in part by the Federation of Jewish Organizations in the Free Zone by donations from French Jews not deported, and large amounts borrowed from Jews in France with guarantees by two VIPs, Mr. A. Halperin and Dr. E. Minkovski, that these amounts would be repaid in dollars after the war by the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) or Jews from France. This was done without the knowledge of the two organizations, but the guarantors, knowing the devotion and generosity of American Jews, guaranteed the monies borrowed without hesitation.

Their assessment of American Jewry was correct. Beginning with 1947 I received from AJDC many checks in amounts from $500 to $3,000 to the order of B. Wolsky from Mr. . . . or Mrs. . . ., most of them not familiar to me. I called the AJDC for information and the answer was that our delegate in Paris instructed that the checks be put in the bank and that I wait for instructions from the persons marked on the checks. The American Jews did not disappoint the Jews abroad.

The underground and its heroic activities continued until the end of the war and was made possible through the cooperation and help of the

Christian population, the French Red Cross, the Quakers, the Scouts, the staffs of municipal, social, and political organizations, police, hospitals, monasteries, Christian social workers, and individuals such as Madame Malina, who was connected with the French Administration and provided food for many Jewish families in hiding. Madame Flamand placed 60 children in different towns for two years and took care of them. Madame Chevalier, president of an official social service, traveled often from Paris to the Free Zone. In all of her trips she carried information and coded messages from Rue Amelot to their counterparts in the Free Zone, and instructions and money for Rue Amelot to Paris from the Free Zone.

Many devoted persons paid with their lives for engaging in this sacred work. It is my duty to name some of my personal friends: the leader, Mr. David Rapoport, in whose memory a book, *One of the 36,* was written (the title refers to a legend that in the whole world only 36 just men exist at one time); Dr. Banchevski; Leo Glaser; Mrs. Ida Richter; David Oks; and many others.

The president of Jews from France, Mr. Naoum Aronson, passed away after a short illness. Mr. Aronson, renowned French sculptor, was active in many social, humanitarian, and artistic organizations. At his funeral VIPs of the French, Jewish, and Russian colonies were present; also many sculptors, painters, writers, journalists, and representatives of many American, Jewish, and French organizations. Eulogies were given by Dr. Aisenstadt, vice-president of the Jews from France; Henry Torres for France Forever; Marc Chagall for the French artists; Frank Kerr for the American artists; David Pinsky for the Jewish writers; Dr. Brutzkus for a group of personal friends; Maresa Nordau for the World Jewish Congress; and myself for La Colonie Scolaire in Paris; also the painters Mane Katz and Arthur Szyk, and sculptor Jack Lifshitz.

Dr. Aisenstadt, Chief Rabbi of Leningrad, who was a refugee in Paris, was appointed president of Jews from France.

47

After the War

The war ended; Nazism had been destroyed. The gates of the concentration camps were open and the leaders of the world could see the biggest tragedy in human history: six million Jews killed, gassed, or cremated; thousands too weak and unable to leave the camps, the rest homeless; thousands of orphans without protectors. Communication with France was re-established and I started receiving from La Colonie Scolaire alarming cables for different kinds of help, which I submitted to the Jews from France for action.

On November 18, 1945, I received a cable from La Colonie Scolaire telling me that they had an opportunity to buy a couple of small houses and one large house with a park in La Varenne (a suburb of Paris), which could be used to install a receiving center and foster homes for children hidden in the villages whose parents had perished in concentration camps, and for orphans arriving in Paris from the camps. They were required to pay a deposit before the end of December and needed $10,000. I contacted the World Jewish Congress, the Jewish Labor Committee, and the National Council of Jewish Women. All of them were interested in helping, but under certain conditions. The most attractive offer was from the World Jewish Congress, which was willing to take over the financial burden, but wanted the homes to be in the name of the World Jewish Congress; the administration would be mixed and supervised by their delegate. They cabled the conditions to Mr. Jarblum, president of the Zionist Organization, who was to discuss the conditions with La Colonie Scolaire. Three weeks later La Colonie Scolaire cabled me the details of the World Jewish Congress offer and asked my opinion. It was heartbreaking to tell people who had devoted all their time and energy, and risked their lives during the war, to give up their authority and depend on instructions from persons who had less experience in caring for children and their education.

I went to my friend Mr. N. Chanin of the Jewish Labor Committee and explained that we needed $10,000 before the end of the year in order not to lose the option to purchase the houses in La Varenne, an ex-

cellent opportunity to meet the urgency of opening homes for the orphans. I begged and pleaded, and I received the money. I cabled Paris. "You will receive $10,000 from the Jewish Labor Committee without strings attached, before the end of the year. This is my answer to your cable concerning the offer of the World Jewish Congress." This was a splendid New Year's present for La Colonie Scolaire. A deposit was paid; a mortgage was easy to get, and two months later you could hear the singing voices of happy children all over the streets of La Varenne. When I was in Paris in December of 1975, I learned that La Colonie Scolaire had received an offer of $1,200,000 from a construction company for the large house and the land (all mortgages had already been paid) which was acquired with the $10,000 obtained 30 years prior from the Jewish Labor Committee. It was a delightful feeling!

48

Postwar Paris

1946

Jews from France was showered with requests from many Jewish organizations in Paris for different kinds of help, such as food packages, clothing, parentage of children, the location of relatives, and other assistance. The committee of Jews from France appointed me to meet in Paris with the leaders of these organizations and to work out plans for productive cooperation. At the same time, I was to participate at the first postwar National Congress of the Federation of the Jewish Organizations in France.

The opening of the National Congress of the Federation was on March 4. The hall was filled with representatives of Jewish organizations from all over France. On the dais were the Chief Rabbi of France, the president of the Jewish Community, and leaders of other large organizations, also Isaak Grinbaum of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, and two members of the Jewish Brigade in the British Army. I was called to the dais and Mr. Grinberg, vice-president of the Federation, opened the Congress and reported on the activities of the Federation during and after the German occupation.

The most moving speech was given by the Chief Rabbi of France, Mr. Kaplan. He talked about the persecution of the six million Jews, the biggest tragedy in the history of the Jews, and the obligation of the Jews in France, and everywhere, to help the survivors of the Nazi death camps financially, morally, and spiritually. A special effort had to be made to remove the Jewish children immediately from their hide-outs in villages and churches, to give them homes, and bring them back to Judaism. As soon as the applause died down, I was called to the pulpit. I became nervous because I hadn't expected to be called upon to speak after one of the most venerable persons in France, and an excellent orator. I never read a speech from a paper, but usually prepare notes on the subject, and I was afraid that my nervousness would interfere with my talk. I was later pleased to read in the French monthly *Quand-Même* the report about the Congress in which a summary of my speech was quoted.

> Mr. Wolsky saluted the Congress in the name of the Jews from France in New York, and congratulated the Federation on their activities. He said, "In the United States we admire your clandestine work during the German occupation and your devotion to the survivors of the concentration camps after the liberation. However, we cannot understand why so many organizations are overlapping their activities which sometimes is harmful to Jewish interests.
>
> "In the United States we wish to see the activities of the different organizations united, which is so important for the Jewish cause."
>
> Then the speaker told the audience about the tremendous action by the Jews in the United States in favor of their disinherited brothers in Europe.
>
> He finished with his wishes for a fruitful and successful congress. Mr. Wolsky was interrupted many times by acclamations and received long applause when he finished.

My arrival in Paris had been announced in the *Jewish Press,* but the name of my hotel had been purposely withheld. Hundreds of people came to La Colonie Scolaire to see me to beg that I intervene for their relatives, to ask for help in the United States, and most of them asked me to help locate their parents, relatives, or friends. Many organizations called for a meeting with me. A day later a special desk and a secretary was assigned at La Colonie Scolaire, and the people were informed that I, as an individual, could not help them but that all their requests would be sent to the Jews from France in New York, who would do their utmost to help them.

I did meet with many organizations. All of them were looking for help from the United States for their activities. Some of them were interesting and constructive, such as fraternal organizations of a country or city, for instance, originating from Poland, Russia, Vilno, Bialystock, to contact their counterparts in the United States to find sponsors for orphans or children from broken homes.

On March 14, La Colonie Scolaire gave a reception for me in the Hotel Lutecia at which representatives from the most important Jewish organizations participated. From their speeches I learned of the importance of my activities in New York during the war, and that much more had to be done for the people with tattoo numbers on their arms—those who had returned from the camps—and the disinherited and unfortunate children.

On March 21, La Colonie Scolaire arranged a lecture to be given by me on the topic of the new educational methods applied in different collective centers for children in the United States. (Before my departure from New York I had visited some child-care centers and collected printed material on this subject.) After the lecture there was a discussion about the applicability of this new method in France. I learned even more of the importance of a "Healthy Soul in a Healthy Body" for our new generation.

During my stay in Paris I had many sad and depressing moments, but when I visited the different activities of La Colonie Scolaire and other organizations, and saw how people devoted their time and energy for the unfortunates, and especially for the children, I was proud to be part of them.

Before my departure from Paris I spent a couple of days with the leaders of La Colonie Scolaire to work out a program for the most urgent categories of help required from the United States.

To give you a real picture of postwar France, I have to ignore the level of living by some fortunate individuals. The lives of the majority were miserable. Food was rationed, and the housewife had to divide portions among the members of the family, taking into consideration their age, health, and occupation. Otherwise, some would go hungry; children got double portions. It was almost impossible to live without the black market, and to be able, financially, to buy from the black market, one had to practice in the black market oneself. It was a vicious cycle, and the subject of conversation at social gatherings. A meal in a restaurant cost about 5 percent of one's monthly wages (one and one-half days' pay). Anti-Semitism had spread all over France for many reasons. Stores, factories, business and commercial enterprises, even apartments, had been, per order of the Germans, taken over by Christians. After the liberation law, everything had to be returned to the prewar owners or their heirs. Extensive Nazi propaganda that the war and all other misfortunes had been the fault of the Jews also contributed to anti-Semitism. In conversations with Frenchmen you would often hear the expression *les vôtres* (your people), a refined expression of "your Jews." But, we could not forget that thousands of Jews, adults and children, were saved from deportation by Christians, some at the risk of their own lives.

49

The Appeal of the Jews from France

The Jews from France launched an appeal in the Jewish and French press. They asked readers to become guardians by sending children clothing, games, and letters to give children from broken homes or orphans the feeling they had friends in America. Packages of food and clothing, in perfect condition and cleaned, were to be delivered to the warehouse of the Jews from France, who would send them to France. The appeal was also to locate friends and relatives of French refugees in the United States, and vice-versa.

The appeal was received with interest, but because of the summer months and vacations, the results were not as good as had been expected.

In September 1946 the Jews from France held a meeting in the Hotel Riverside Plaza. The hall was crowded and the appeal for patronage of children and supplying food and clothing packages was warmly received, and $12,000 was collected immediately. This was very encouraging and a sign that the activities of the Jews from France would be successful.

My cousin, Ceil Wolsk, introduced me to the National Council of Jewish Women, and after a two-hour interview with Mrs. Goldstone, head of the Overseas Service, the Committee assigned the Newark Section to serve as patrons to all children of the large building in La Varenne. La Colonie Scolaire was to forward the names of the children, their ages and sex, and find out what the Council could do to be most helpful to the children.

The activities of Jews from France were very successful but the cry for help from France did not stop. We received from the Federation of Jewish Organizations in France a cable listing 67 orphans and asking that we find patrons for them in the United States. An appeal from the Coordination Committee of Relief Work for the Jews in France read,

"Thousands of men, women and children are naked and barefoot. Clothes, shoes and underwear are urgently needed." We also received similar appeals from different societies and organizations in France.

Jews from France reprinted thousands of copies of the cables and appeals, and organized a campaign stressing the physical and moral support an unfortunate person would feel on receiving a food or clothing package from the United States. It would be a happy occasion bringing a ray of hope that with the help of the Jews in the United States they would overcome those miserable years.

The campaign was successful, and at the General Meeting in October, it was reported that 2,847 packages had been sent to France. They were not standard packages, but carefully composed to meet the needs of the receivers. The clothing was new or almost new. The number of patrons for the orphans had increased to 745 and letters from the children were full of excitement for the packages received and dreams about their protectors in the imaginary America.

Fifty thousand persons from concentration camps in different countries migrated to France, and were intensely interested in locating their relatives in the United States. In the nine months of 1947 we received 21,188 requests, but we succeeded in locating only 627. But reuniting even 627 families was a great credit to the activities of Jews from France.

Special attention was granted to packages sent to 26 Christian women who had helped hide Jewish children during the German occupation. These noble women told in their letters to the Jews from France that they showed these priceless packages to their friends and neighbors, telling them, "See the gifts we are getting from the Jews in America." This was the best means we had to fight anti-Semitism.

The activities of Jews from France in 1948 surpassed those of 1947, above all in the location of relatives. Requests arrived not only from France but also from other countries in Europe. HIAS sent a letter from a woman in the Soviet Union looking for her sister who had lived in France before the war. Jews from France located her sister in France and advised the woman in Russia that her sister had returned alive from deportation, and gave her her address.

The Jews from France were against adoption or foster parents for orphans. Their services were only to find families willing to aid one or more children in France by sending them toys, games, sweets, clothing,

and above all to write to the children. In contact with both the families and the children, Jews from France supervised the continuity.

The food and clothing package service became so important that it was impossible to be handled by volunteers, and the Jewish Labor Committee took it over while Jews from France spread their activities to other fields. For example, an American soldier had been killed near Nancy in France and his parents wanted to know where his grave was. Jews from France went to the Jewish Community in Nancy and received a full report about his death and a picture of his grave.

La Colonie Scolaire in Paris organized a bazaar. Jews from France sent 2,000 pounds of different items which were sold in one hour, and the buyers felt that they had received a gift from their friends in the United States.

Jews from France sold hundreds of books in the United States, in French and Yiddish, edited in France, and found subscribers for the monthly *Kium* published by the Federation of Jewish Organizations in France in order to give the Yiddish writers and poets a magazine in which they could express themselves. It also gave them moral and financial help.

Medical and orthopedic appliances were sent by Jews from France to the Mother and Child Dispensary, and material for artists, painters, and sculptors to the Union of Jewish Artists in France. Special packages were sent for a small group of VIPs in Nice. The Union of Polish Jews in the United States volunteered to begin patronage of children from two Jewish Polish organizations in France.

In 1949, on my way back from Israel, I stopped in Paris, where La Colonie Scolaire gave a reception for me. Representatives from the Federation of the Jewish Organizations in France and other large organizations were present and I told them about the activities and system of work of the Jewish organizations in the United States. I submitted to them a message from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), where I had been received prior to my departure from New York. After January 1950, the JDC's financial assistance to the organizations in France would be reduced, and each organization would have to look for more help locally.

I was praised for my activities in the Jews from France, whose help in different fields was greatly appreciated.

The situation in France improved slowly and the activities of the

Jews from France were reduced accordingly. I was relieved because I had to devote all my time and energy to my business. I still attended the meetings of Jews from France and from time to time was active in fields dear to me.

50

The 25th Anniversary of La Colonie Scolaire

1951

All Jewish organizations of Paris—cultural and social—and professionals—lawyers, businessmen, artists, writers, doctors—participated in celebration of this anniversary. Telegrams, letters of congratulation, and checks arrived from all parts of France. This was the best demonstration of how the people appreciated the health and educational activities of La Colonie Scolaire in behalf of the Jewish children and orphans. The special anniversary issue of the monthly bulletin, *The New Generation,* was filled with facts and figures about the children's center, Our Hope, in La Varenne, the Mother and Child Dispensary, the hundreds of children in the sea resort, Berck-Plage, and the Social Workers Service.

One of the most satisfying recognitions of our work was an invitation received by La Colonie Scolaire for the opening of an art exhibit of

the paintings of seven artists. On the invitation was a handwritten note, "One of the artists is my son, who is alive thanks to your help during and after the Nazi occupation." It was signed by the artist's mother.

51

Helene Gindins

1954

Under the patronage program organized by Jews from France, some of the families in the States invited children without parents for a couple of months with the intention of adoption. This was the case with Helene Gindins, 10 years old, who was invited by Mr. and Mrs. Symchovitz in New York. She was very happy there and after one year the Symchovitzes decided to adopt her and asked their lawyer to proceed with the formalities.

To make certain that Helene's parents had not returned from deportation, La Colonie Scolaire tried to locate them by advertising in the papers. A short time later a man came to La Colonie Scolaire and announced that he was the father of Helene, that his wife had died in a concentration camp, that he had remarried and lived in a small apartment, that he couldn't take care of Helene, and was not against the adoption. When Helene learned that her father was alive she insisted on going back to France and staying with him. The Symchovitzes opposed her departure, but Helene refused to go to school and behaved so badly that the Symchovitzes gave in and she left for Paris.

A month later, the father came to La Colonie Scolaire with Helene asking the organization to place his daughter in one of their homes because his apartment was too small and Helene quarreled with her stepmother, who was not Jewish. Helene cried that she was miserable and homesick and longed for the Symchovitzes, her daddy and mommy, and begged to be sent back to New York. La Colonie Scolaire placed her in Ose Colonie with children of her own age, and asked the social worker to keep a record of how she adapted herself to the new atmosphere. Three months later Ose reported that in the beginning Helene was very difficult but had become calm, more cheerful, and was loved by the other children. She still dreamed about the Symchovitzes, called them her other father and mother and was often sad and talked with nostalgia about her other home in New York. She was not attached to her natural father, who was a poor man and couldn't take care of her. It was suggested that the Symchovitzes be asked to take her back.

I received the report from Ose and went to the Symchovitzes. Mrs. Symchovitz was ready to take her back but her husband told me that his wife had been too much attached to Helene and after she left had been sick a couple of months, and he couldn't risk his wife's health. Helene remained in Paris.

52

Memorials to the Past

The director of a publishing company in Jerusalem, my friend Chaim Barlas, suggested that a special volume of the Encylopedia of the Jewish Diaspora, *Brest-Litovsk,* be issued in Yiddish. It would cost a $10,000 subsidy.

I organized a book committee by the United Brisker Relief, that signed an agreement to receive 600 books they would sell in the United States only to individuals and not to libraries or organizations, and to pay $10,000 in ten payments. The book would contain 726 columns, 204 pictures, and 9 maps and would describe the history of Brest, the different types of its residents—personalities, writers, scholars, rabbis, humanitarians, doctors, lawyers—political and social organizations and institutions—Jewish schools, fraternal organizations of Brisker in various countries.

My friend Isaak Schneersohn, president of the Center of Documentation for Contemporary Historical Records in Paris, took the initiative to build a memorial for the Jewish Martyrs under the Nazi regime, and issued an appeal under the slogan "Six Million Dead and Not a Single Grave."

The World Committee was sponsored by Vincent Auriol, President of France; Chaim Weitzman, President of Israel; Queen Elizabeth of Belgium; Queen Wilhelmina of Holland; Prince Jean of Luxembourg; Eleanor Roosevelt; Winston Churchill; David Ben-Gurion; Erik Eriksen, Prime Minister of Denmark; and Tage Erlander, Prime Minister of Sweden. Mr. Schneersohn came to New York to establish an office and form an American committee for the Memorial, and I helped him in his noble task.

The four-story Memorial was built in the center of Paris near the City Hall, and is a "must" for any tourist to visit when in Paris.

53

Keeping in Touch with La Colonie Scolaire

I was in contact with La Colonie Scolaire organization throughout the years, and on my business stops in Paris I always visited their offices at Rue Amelot to have a full report of their activities, budget, and financial situation.

In 1965, when Luba and I were in Paris, we were invited to spend a weekend with the children at the summer colony in Berck-Plage (at the English Channel, 150 miles from Paris). We gladly accepted and left for Berck-Plage. Friday night *Oneg Shabat* was celebrated with lighted candles, a delicious dinner, and songs. On Saturday there were gym exercises and beach games, and on Sunday a special entertainment program for the guests—Israeli and Yiddish songs, dances, and a show, all executed by the children. It was one of the most enjoyable weekends.

The director told me that in the previous group, among the 125 children in the colony, there had been an 11-year-old Arab child, Yassar, a friend of a boy named David. When David had come to register for the colony, he brought Yassar with him, and asked that they also accept his friend. The head office, from time to time, accepted a few gentile children, but for the first time, an Arab.

The director observed Yassar but couldn't see any difference in his behavior and relations with the other children. He participated in the Israeli and Yiddish songs with the same enthusiasm as the other children.

I asked why cannot the grown-up Yassars live in harmony with the grown-up Davids as their children do?

On our return to Paris by train we shared the compartment with the director of the head office in Paris, Mr. Byl and his wife, and a Dominican friar dressed in the traditional outfit, a long, dark brown gown and sandals. During the trip we talked about the improvements made

in the summer colony in the administration, personnel, food, health, hygiene, and what still had to be done. Suddenly, the friar stopped reading and asked if we were talking about La Colonie Scolaire, with which he had cooperated during the war by hiding their children in his church. He mentioned some names which were familiar to Mr. Byl, and with pride told us that one of these children was in Haifa, Israel, happily married. She had sent him a ticket to be her guest for two weeks. He would leave soon, and a life's dream to go to the Holy Land would be realized. He added an excerpt from the Bible. "Cast your bread upon the waters for thou shall find it after many years." He told us many stories about his clandestine activities during the Nazi occupation, and promised to visit Mr. Byl upon his return from Israel.

In 1970, when Luba and I were in Paris, we were invited by La Colonie Scolaire to visit their homes for children in La Varenne (20 miles from Paris). There were four small houses: one for children aged 7 to 10, one 10 to 13, one 13 to 16, and the fourth one was reserved for delinquent boys from 14 to 18 selected by the Children's Court and supervised by a therapeutist. There were eight boys; five of them working. Out of their wages they got lunch and pocket money; the rest went to a bank account set up in their names. The other three boys were in a vocational school to learn a trade.

When we arrived at the big building where the small children were, as well as the dining, recreation rooms, and office, all members of the committee were there to greet us, and the children of all houses assembled and sang a welcome song. While the children dined we assisted at a committee meeting. When the children left the dining room, dinner was served in our honor, and each committee member made a donation for being invited to the dinner. After dinner and toasts, at the request of the director, we remained and spent an hour with the eight delinquent boys. We didn't ask them any questions, but succeeded in answering their questions about the United States. Concerning sports and cars in the United States, we could learn a lot from them. We were advised that the therapeutist would have a session with them about our meeting. All the events were orchestrated by the office in Paris. What a delightful surprise!

54

The 50th Anniversary of La Colonie Scolaire

In September 1975, when I was in Paris and visited the office of La Colonie Scolaire, I was asked to come to Paris with Luba for the Gala Night, the 29th of November, to celebrate the beginning of the 50th Anniversary year of La Colonie Scolaire; to write an introduction for the illustrated brochure which would be issued for the celebration; and to write a resumé of my humanitarian and social activities because the Committee had decided to solicit for me the decoration of the *Légion d'honneur.*

I promised to fulfill their requests, and I did. Luba refused to travel 6,000 miles in order to attend a ball, so I went by myself to Paris for three days. Upon my arrival in the hotel I found a message that the director of La Colonie Scolaire, Mr. Liché, had important news for me and would be in the hotel at 1:00 P.M.

Mr. Liché arrived on time and told me that the request for the *Légion d'honneur* for me had to be made to the Foreign Ministry because I was not a French citizen, and this would take two years, but I would be decorated the next day by the City of Paris with the Medal of Vermeil. There would be no speeches but I would have to accept the decoration with a short statement.

The next day, November 29, at 8:00 P.M., I arrived at the Hotel Saint-Jacques. Over a special entrance there was a large sign "Gala de la Colonie Scolaire." The escalator took me to the checkroom and control, where at the desk with the initial "W" I received my table card. At the reception line I was greeted cordially by the committee members, and in the cocktail room by hundreds of people, some old friends and others introduced to me. When I was introduced to Mrs. Kowarski, wife of the vice-president and treasurer, I told her that I was aware of the work and devotion of herself and her husband to the children, and she answered me, "Not enough, because I was a child in your colonie." I was very much touched by the modesty of this *Grande*

My father,
Chaim Zalman Wolsky, 1930

Luba's father,
Israel Soloveichik, 1940

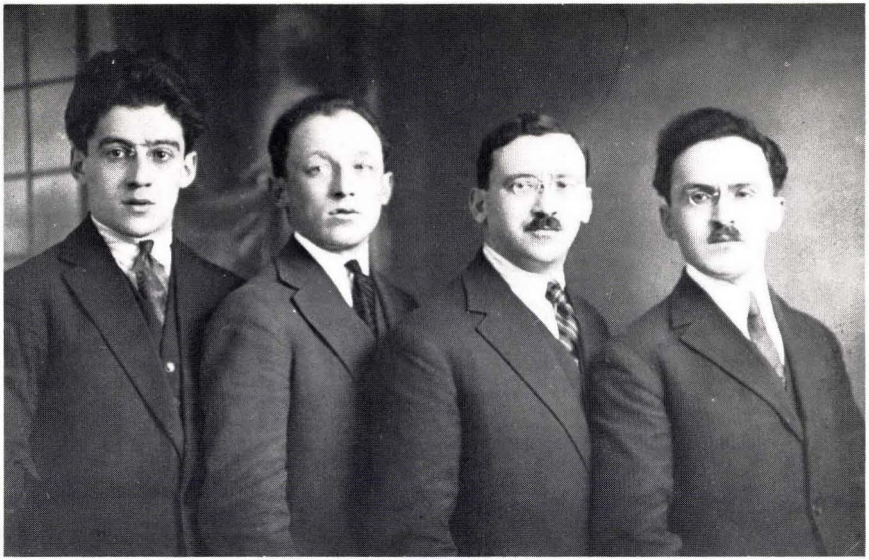
My mother, Libe Wolsky, 1922

My grandmother, Rochel Bash
Wolsky at age 90, 1932

Myself as a student, 1923

My future wife,
Luba Soloveichik, 1927

Left to right, top row: My friends Mr. and Mrs. Gelerstein, and myself; *middle row*: My friends Miss Green and Joseph Lew, my future brother-in-law Fishel Lew, my sister Feigel, and a friend Mr. Miller; *bottom row*: My sister Gitel, and Mrs. Miller, Kobryn 1918



Left to right: The four brothers—Alexander, Boris, Miron, and Lucien, Paris 1925

Left to right: Myself, Isaak Vidomlianski, my sister Sara, Mr. Lew, and Mr. S. Saks, Paris 1927

Left to right, top row: Myself, my aunt Esther Wolsk, my sister-in-law Sonia, my brother Lucien; *bottom row*: Sonia's uncle, Sonia's mother and father Mr. and Mrs. Kroupitzki, Paris 1922

Left to right, top row: My brother Alexander, myself, my cousin Bessie, and her brother Sam; *middle row*: My sister-in-law Sonia, my brother Lucien, Isidore's wife Paula, and my cousin Isidore; *bottom row*: My niece Janine, my uncle Morris, and my aunt Esther, Paris 1926

My son Albert, Luba, and myself, Paris 1931

My son Gilbert, myself, and Luba, Marseilles 1940

Left to right, bottom row: Isaac Vidom, and myself; *middle row*: Mr. and Mrs. Byl, Luba, Esther Vidom, Mrs. M. Lew and son; *top row*: The elder brother of Isaac Vidom, Albert, Sonia Volski, Lucien, Janine

Myself, Luba, and Esther Vidom, Arcashan (France) 1930

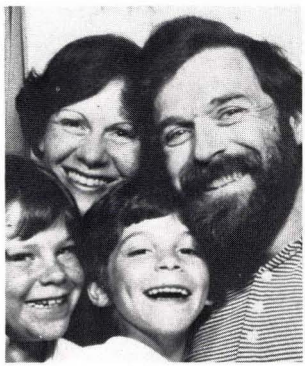
Myself, Luba, Gilbert, and Albert on board the S.S. *Guine* before docking in New York, 1941

Albert, *left*, peeling potatoes on board the *Mont Viso*, 1941

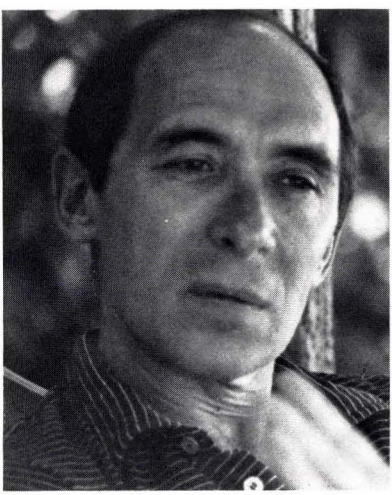
Left to right: Luba, Gilbert, and Albert in camp of Sidi-El-Alisha outside of Casablanca, 1941

Departure of the S.S. *Guine* from Casablanca, 1941

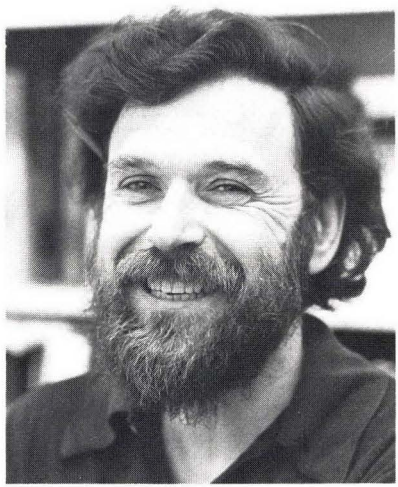
My son Gilbert's wedding, *left to right*: Albert, my sister-in-law Michelle Soloveichik, my daughter-in-law Betty, Gilbert, Luba, and myself, New York, 1964



My son Gilbert, my daughter-in-law Betty, Marissa, and Emile, Boston, 1977



My son Albert, 1977



My son Gilbert, 1979

Luba and I aboard RMS *Queen Mary*, 1963

Luba, 1975

Myself, 1975

Dame. Later I was introduced to Dr. Bebe, who was responsible for the medical services in the Mother and Child Dispensary. He told me with pride, "Mon President: I was a child in your colonie." The hall was crowded. There were over 550 persons gathered there, men in black ties, women elegantly dressed, a real fashion show. I was told that this was the Jewish "Lit-Blanc Balle" (a yearly ball in Paris where the women show their attire for the new season).

In the dining room were three different orchestras, professional entertainers, and an animated atmosphere. At my table were the General Consul of Israel, the vice-president of La Colonie Scolaire, a film actress, and three empty chairs provided for renowned artists or VIPs coming and going during the evening to show their solidarity with the activities of the organization. The seven-course dinner was often interrupted with dancing and entertainment, and lasted until 1:00 A.M. Before the dessert was served, the president of La Colonie Scolaire announced that the City of Paris had awarded the Medal of Vermeil to me, and I would be decorated by Mr. Finel, the vice-president of the City Council. He conducted me to the microphone where Mr. Finel reported about my activities in different fields, social, humanitarian, and child protection. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of La Colonie Scolaire, the Council of Paris, at their meeting of November 17, 1975, had awarded to me the Vermeil Medal which is one of the highest decorations of the City of Paris. He handed over to me the official certificate and the medal. In my speech of acceptance of the award, I mentioned the personalities present, and told the audience in French,

> I am profoundly touched to see the elite of Paris assembled tonight to celebrate the 50th anniversary of La Colonie Scolaire. Your numerous attendance is a guarantee for the existence of this organization in the future. But the route to success was full of obstacles. Fifty years ago most of the Jewish organizations were active in the field of mutuality or brotherhood and the founders of La Colonie Scolaire had a difficult task to awaken the conscience of the leaders of the Jewish organizations to the health and education of the Jewish children, the future of our people, and that to help this noble work is a sacred duty of the community, the different organizations, and of each individual. I crossed the ocean to celebrate the 50th anniversary with you, and I am sorry that Mrs. Wolsky, who helped me carry out my duties as founder and during 15 years as president, was not able to join me and to enjoy this splendid manifestation. I am very happy and honored to be decorated by the City

of Paris, the world center of art, culture, and science, and the most attractive city in the world. With my whole heart I say thank you.

Many people came to congratulate me, and some asked me to sign their menus.

Dancing and entertainment went on all night; champagne and fruit were available all night, and at 5:00 A.M., breakfast was served. We left the hotel at sunrise.

55

Recognition from WJC

In July 1977 I received a large envelope from the World Jewish Congress stamped "Don't Bend." Inside was a certificate on parchment:

1936-1976

On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary
of the World Jewish Congress this certificate
is presented to

Boris Wolsky

in recognition of his role as a participant in
the founding assembly of the WJC or its
preparatory conferences and in appreciation

of his contribution thereby to the furthering
of the unity of the Jewish people.

Geneva, November 1976 The Executive of the World Jewish Congress

Book IV

CIRCLING THE GLOBE

Introduction

I always had a passion for travel. When I was a student in Paris and went to Poland to spend my summer vacations, I traveled by train. Each year I went through different countries, visiting Germany, Austria, Belgium, Holland, and Switzerland. When I became a travel agent, I traveled abroad to visit the hotels, to partake in the sightseeing, to talk to the guides, and to appoint local agents to represent my company. This was a must for my business. To help me in this task, Luba joined in all my trips. As my business was growing I had to extend my activities to more countries, and every year we spent July and August overseas visiting six to eight countries. Many times I made additional short trips during the winter. In the last 26 years, we crossed the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans 68 times; 51 crossings by air and 17 by ship—on the S.S. *United States,* S.S. *France,* and *Queen Elizabeth.* We also took 19 cruises to the Caribbean.

I leave it to the professionals to describe the attractions of each country. I will only concentrate upon special facts, reflections, or our involvement in interesting events.

56

Austria

1951

Austria was still dominated by the United States, France, England, and the Soviet Union, each of which controlled one of the four zones into which the country was divided. We traveled by train from Vienna to Salzburg. The train crossing the Russian Zone stopped so that the "gray cards" (Occupational Force Travel Permits) could be checked. We showed our cards to the Russian soldiers. Luba's card was in order but I had neglected to sign my card. I tried to do it on the spot, but the Russians took me from the train to see the officer. The officer was not there and the soldiers told me that I would have to stay with them overnight. Luba and our luggage were on the train, our passports and money were with me, the train was ready to leave and the Russians didn't let me go back for Luba and the luggage. A miracle happened. When the train started to move, the officer arrived. The train stopped to pick me up, I signed my card before the officer, and I joined Luba and stopped her from fainting.

57

The Soviet Union

1956, 1957

In 1956 we made our first trip to Russia. We visited the Kremlin and while observing the "King of Bells" and the "Czar Cannon," met a group of eight men and three women who were speaking Hebrew. Our encounter was a pleasant surprise to both us and the group, and we spent some time together. We learned that they were the Israel Team in the Third World Parachute Jumping Championship in Moscow and members of the Aero Club of Israel, a young organization in constant development and progress. It first began with the heroic feat of parachute jumping behind the lines of the Nazi enemy during World War II. This was before the Soviet Union broke off diplomatic relations with Israel.

Except in Moscow, it was rare in 1957 to see an American in the other cities which we visited such as Yalta, Sochi, Sukhumi, Tbilisi, and Yerevan, and we were stopped in the streets by Russians asking "Americanzi?" They recognized us by our clothes and shoes, and as we answered in Russian, there was no limit to their questions. In minutes we were encircled by a crowd who moved us to a nearby park or quiet street, eager to learn about life in America.

We did our utmost to answer correctly and not to exaggerate, and even told them that rent, higher education, and taxes were a heavier burden on the population in the States than in the Soviet Union. We had the impression that they trusted us. But we failed in one thing. All, without exception, asked "Is it true that everybody in the States has a car and some families two cars?" When our answer was "yes", the confidence was gone and one in our audience said quietly "American bluff." The idea that a private person could own a car was so remote in the USSR twenty years ago, that my "yes" demolished the good will we had tried to instill.

I was very upset and all my thoughts were on how to improve this situation. The next day when we were encircled by a crowd in another part of the city, and when we were asked if everybody in the States has a car, I answered "Not everybody can afford to buy a car, but everybody has a car" and I explained that each year, in the autumn, new cars dated for the next calendar year came out of the factories. The price of the unsold new cars of the year we were still in were reduced by 25 percent and if used one year, by 50 percent, making it possible to buy a used car for $1,000 or even $700 or $500. Someone could pay a deposit and take a loan in the bank for the rest. This was how everybody had a car though not everybody could afford to buy a new one.

The Russians all smiled; many repeated "Not everybody can afford to buy a car in the States but everybody has a car." One of the men in the crowd exclaimed: "Tomorrow, all the comrades in my plant will learn that even in the United States not everybody can afford to buy a new car but used cars are cheap and the banks are lending money. This is how everybody has a car in the United States." I was happy to succeed and I used this formula all over the Soviet Union with success.

In Tbilisi (capital of the Georgian Republic) we were invited for dinner, Georgian style, at the home of the manager of the Georgian Tourist Department. We arrived at 5 P.M. and were introduced to four invited guests from the Tourist Department, and the father of the host (a very old man). The large table was full of various hors d'oeuvres, and on a corner table were a dozen bottles of wine, two bottles of vodka, and two bottles of cognac. We were seven men at the table, and Luba the only woman. The hostess and several women were at a table in the next room, and every so often one of the women would glance through the open door at the American couple. Women in the USSR had equal rights with men, but this was the custom in Georgia.

The dinner started with vodka and toasts of welcome to the guests, and was stretched out over four hours with tasty and spicy courses, accompanied by a multitude of toasts to the health of everyone's father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, and up, if still alive. A separate toast was made for sons, daughters, grandsons, granddaughters, in-laws, and so on. When all members of the family were toasted, new series of toasts started: for luck, nice trips, nice business, nice weather, good news from home, safe return home, and so forth. With the grow-

ing number of toasts, the number of the empty wine bottles grew in the same proportion. It was a pleasant way of gathering in Georgia and a delightful and interesting evening.

58

Reminders of the Holocaust

1958

One hundred twenty million Americans watched the NBC-TV series based on Gerald Green's fictional *Holocaust,* and the effect this series produced on the viewers, as well as the importance of reminding people that it happened, was discussed in the media, in the universities, congregations, and churches. There are people, even a university professor who has written a book on it, who think it was a hoax, that the Holocaust never happened. We watched the entire series of NBC-TV, we read the books *Night* by Elie Wiesel, *QB VII* by Leon Uris, *Six Million Died* by Arthur Morse, but forever in our memory remains what we saw in Auschwitz twenty years ago during our visit there: the gas chambers, which used deadly Zyklon B gas to kill over a million people; the crematories that burned the bodies; and the museum complex with storerooms containing piles of shoes, human hair, children's toys, eyeglasses, artifacts made from human skin, pieces of soap made from human fat, etc.

When we were in Vilno (USSR) we visited Paheray, where over 100,000 Jews perished. The Nazis used the same methods as in Auschwitz, Maidanek, Buchenwald, and Dachau, but no gas chambers. The museum displayed a day-by-day report about the Nazis' atrocities and letters from the inmates before being shot or burned.

Mankind should not hate, but must not forget!

59

Van Cliburn in Moscow

1960

In 1958, the 23-year-old concert pianist, Van Cliburn, won the First International Tchaikovsky Competition at Moscow and became famous overnight. He was hugged by Nikita Khrushchev, and got a ticker-tape parade on Broadway.

In 1960 when we arrived in Moscow, we were met at the airport by an Intourist clerk who gave us tickets for a Van Cliburn concert that same evening at 7 P.M. at the New Concert Palace in the Kremlin. We had time only to go to our hotel and change. When we arrived at the Concert Palace, a crowd was waiting for a chance to buy tickets from people who were not able to use them and from the black market, or to squeeze inside through the back door, or at least to grab a look at the artist. Inside the Palace all 6,000 seats were taken, and the atmosphere was tense, waiting for something unusual.

Van Cliburn was received with a ten-minute standing ovation, and during the whole concert there was not one sound (not one of the 6,000, or more coughed during two hours). At the end, the audience rushed to the stage, applauding and throwing flowers. The crowd was so large and pressed together that hundreds of bouquets couldn't reach the stage and dozens of service people collected them and brought them to the stage through the side doors.

We got another surprise; Mr. Cliburn was staying at the same hotel as we, the Hotel National, and when we returned from the concert the square between the Kremlin and the Hotel was full of people waiting for Mr. Cliburn. Since we couldn't get through, we raised our hands with our passports and spoke English. People said *"Americanzi"* (American), and the way to the hotel opened.

Police encircled the hotel. There our passports were not enough but, by chance, we had forgotten to leave the keys with the attendant, and these keys opened the police gate. We went to our room and through our open windows observed the return of Mr. Cliburn.

It is impossible to describe the enthusiasm of thousands of people expressing their admiration, praise, and appreciation for a young foreign artist. Mr. Cliburn went to the balcony many times to receive the acclamation of the thousands of fans. At midnight there were still small groups on the square discussing Mr. Cliburn, his concert, and music in general. We became so involved in this event that we forgot to have a meal though we hadn't eaten since lunch on the plane. We went to bed with empty stomachs but convinced that music, art, and culture have no country, no borders, and that exchange of art, culture, science, and even tourism between nations creates understanding, friendship, and peace.

60

India

1962

The first city we visited was Calcutta, and our first impression was that the people and cows slept on the sidewalks. We changed our opinion about the people, but not about the cows. In the center where the sidewalks were crowded, the cows got "Ladies First" treatment. We passed a temple where services, singing, and hand-clapping were performed, and tried to walk in, but the sexton stopped us because people of religion other than Hindu could not assist. At the same time, a white cow majestically walked in. Our escort explained that the cows are sacred in India.

Benares, which we visited, is the holiest city of the Hindus. Pilgrims from all parts of India came to bathe in the holy Ganges River, some of them on foot, walking for many days. A platform near the river was for cremating the dead with a fire-stand built of wood. The eldest son or next of kin had the honor of kindling the fire, and the ashes and bones that were left were thrown into the Ganges River. This 3,000-year-old city maintained the old ways of life, using camels and bulls for transporting heavy loads, and tricycles, pony carts, and rickshaws for human transportation.

We found Bombay to be a modern commercial city, cosmopolitan in appearance and habits.

In line with my aim to study Jewish life in the countries we visited, we went to see the Jewish children's school in Bombay. The large, modern building, which had open space for sports, enrolled over two hundred students from different parts of India and some of the neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan. The tuition and lunch were free, and the rich or middle-class parents contributed to the Jewish community.

We asked the principal of the school where we could get a book in English about the history and life of the Jews in India. He called one of

the students who he said would accompany us to his uncle, who sold Jewish books, prayer scarves, and skull caps. His uncle was not at home, but we found in his one-room apartment two women, three children, and a two-month-old baby. The student explained to us in broken English that his uncle had two wives (bigamy is allowed in India and many Jews in the Orient and Asia are bigamists). The first wife was the older woman in the room. She was cooking a meal over a kerosene stove, while the second, the young wife, worked on a sewing machine making skull caps. Three children were playing on the floor and a baby was in the crib. This single room was also the bookstore, where I found a copy of *The Jews in India.* It seemed a miserable life. We wondered: Why have a second wife and an additional four children? But that is the way in Asia.

61

Reception for Prime Minister Levi Eshkol

1964

On our way to Israel we stopped for a couple of days in Paris where we were told that the Jewish community was planning a reception for Prime Minister and Mrs. Eshkol at Baron Rothschild's estate in two days. We asked that we be invited, and the next day we received an invitation by messenger.

The security for the reception was strict; our invitation was checked and rechecked. In the reception room Baron Guy de Rothschild and his mother greeted the guests. Refreshments were served by uniformed waiters. There were speeches by the host and community leaders, and an interesting report given on Israel by the Prime Minister. We had an opportunity to visit the private museum of the estate which contained pictures, sculptures, antiques, and jewelry. Mrs. Eshkol was escorted by Mrs. Rothschild.

We learned that the Eshkols would leave for Israel two days later. The manager of El Al was a friend of mine, so I asked him to take us to Israel on the same plane. He agreed on condition that it be kept secret, and the flight number was stamped on our tickets. At five o'clock in the morning we were awakened and told that the departure of the plane was being advanced by two hours. It was a regular flight and as soon as we checked in with our baggage, the airline officials retained our passports and took us to another room. There, an Israeli security man told us that the plane would leave as scheduled but that the Prime Minister and his wife would be on the plane and they needed the time for checking the baggage and the passengers. They asked us why we were going to Israel, how long we had been out of our room the day before,if our suitcases had been closed all the time, and so on. Our persons were checked, our baggage dismantled and checked. On the plane the first 50 seats were blocked off and when all the passengers had boarded, the plane went to another part of the airport where the red carpet was spread and orchestra and honor guard were waiting. The Eshkols received a majestic sendoff. On our way to Tel Aviv the captain, as usual, made many announcements. Each time, he started with "His Excellency, the Prime Minister and Mrs. Eshkol." At the airport in Tel Aviv the red carpet, honor guard, cabinet members, television, and press were present. It was an interesting and exciting experience!

62

Mongolia

1965

Mongolia, a remote nation between the Soviet Union and China, was not spoiled by civilization but a dramatic contrast between the old and the new. In 1965, the population was one million, the religion 80 percent Buddhist, the language Khalkha with some Russian, using the Cyrillic alphabet. The *del,* or coat of wool, silk, or padded fabric, was commonly worn by both men and women. Most of the people lived in *yurts,* collapsible tents easily assembled without nails or bolts, covered with sheets of felt. Wooden lathes held up the dome-shaped roofs like the ribs of an umbrella. In a hole at the top a tin chimney was inserted to eliminate the smoke created when the sheet iron cooking stove was used. Meat and *kumyss* (milk of a mare) were served at all meals, including breakfast. Raising of cattle, horses, yaks, sheep, goats, and camels—23 million animals in all—provided the principal industry, but there were also shoes and textile manufacturing and flour mills. Education was free and compulsory, the people friendly and extremely hospitable. The regime, whose seat was in Ulanbator (population 250,000) was communist, Russian style.

Interesting spots included Kara-Korin, the thirteenth-century capital of Ghengis Khan, and the Gobi desert, where the two-humped camels can be seen in large herds.

During our stay in Mongolia the manager of Julchin, the Government Tourist Office, accompanied us on a country tour and for two nights we slept in a yurt, which was an interesting experience for us, and a surprise concerning comfort. The doors were decorated in bright colors and in gay design. Inside were polished brass bedsteads and soft mattresses covered with colorful yak-hair blankets. The cleanliness of these *yurts* was striking and they were decorated from wall to floor

with carpets of native design. There was a wardrobe for our clothes and a flat box-shaped piece serving as a table.

In the evening the manager drove us to a youth camp where we expected to enjoy native music, songs, and dances. But when we arrived, the youth greeted us with American music. We spent a pleasant day visiting a horse-breeding farm where we watched the riding of wild horses and the milking of a mare; we also saw the National Museum, Buddhist Temples, the university, and a first grade school. The day before our departure the manager drove us to a surprise party in a cooperative state farm where a small group of American tourists were to join us. Upon our arrival, the leader of the farm, a tall woman, her shirt covered with medals, led a delegation and a group of small children to greet us, and the children presented flowers to the women in our small group and sang children's songs. We visited and got information at the different sections of the farm, which was similar to the *kolchos* in the Soviet Union. We were invited to a large hall, in the center of which was a large table covered with bottles of vodka, carafes of *kumyss,* canapes, and cheeses from *kumyss,* and around the walls were small, low benches. The party started with vodka, canapes, and cheeses (not palatable to Americans), and toasts to the guests. Then came the surprise. Two men brought in a freshly roasted goat and placed it before the manager of Julchin, honoring him with carving it. The meat was served with hot, savory seasoned juices. This roasted goat was considered a delicacy and a rare treat, and the best compliment our Mongolian hosts could pay us.

63

Thailand

1966

In Bangkok, the capital, we were awakened at sunrise to board a motor launch for an enjoyable tour along the Chao-Phraya River and its canals to observe the fabulous "floating markets." Farmers, fishermen, and merchants on barges and small boats hawked, offering their various goods to Bangkok's housewives, who moved through the colorful maze in their own little boats or came over to the shore from their wooden houses, rising out from the water on stilts. They created unique, picturesque scenes of native canal life.

We were invited for dinner at the Thai restaurant Sala Norasingh, where we sampled Hoisawan, Peng-Tom-Yam, and Pai-Yang, which was too spicy for our palates, followed by Thai classical dancing, which originated hundreds of years ago and was performed to an accompaniment of traditional music.

I will not attempt to describe the Royal Palace or the solid gold Buddha in Wat Trimitr Temple that weighs 5½ tons, equaling 176,000 ounces, I will tell you a story instead.

I studied Jewish life in all the countries we visited and knew there was an Israeli Consul in Bangkok. We took a taxi and told the driver to take us to the Israeli Consulate. He asked, by signs, to write it on paper which we did. He took off and stopped many times to visit a couple of stores and when he returned he said "O.K.," the only English word he could say. After almost one hour of wandering, he came out of a store and made a sign for us to follow him into an export-import office. The secretary told us in English that the Israeli Consul was in the white building across the street, where we should ask for Dr. Jacobson.

Men, women, and children were waiting outside the white building on benches, and Luba remarked "These people would like to go to Israel and are waiting for visas." Inside, a girl in white met us and when

we asked for Dr. Jacobson she made a sign for us to wait, and left. A couple of minutes later a tall, nice-looking man came over and introduced himself as Dr. Jacobson. When we told him the reason for our visit he invited us to his private office and told us, "This is a hospital but I am the Israeli Consul. There is no embassy or consulate in Bangkok. I am an honorary Consul to certify legal or commercial documents." There were fewer than 100 Jews in Bangkok, most of them from European countries; only a few were born there. There was a communal center and a synagogue. Passover food was imported from the United States. Dr. Jacobson had emigrated from Germany.

The taxi driver took us back to our hotel without difficulty. He didn't know one word of English but he knew how to handle an American.

64

Malaysia

1967

When we were in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, we were invited to a Malaysian traditional wedding. We bought a gift and on the wedding day we went to the bride's house to present the gift to her mother. The mother introduced us to the bride, who was sitting on a large chair, her eyes closed, and dressed in a colorful garb, wearing

many strings of ivory and multi-colored stones. The marriage was arranged by the parents, so she had never met the groom and would see him for the first time at the wedding. Until then, she would keep her eyes closed.

The bridal room was full of gifts and on the bed a dozen embroidered pillows. Our escort told us that after the wedding, when the newlyweds entered the room, the oldest woman of the groom's family would spend all night outside the door and the next morning, when the couple left the room, she would check the sheets to make sure the bride had been a maiden.

We were invited for 6 P.M., and when we arrived the tables were covered in the garden. Many people were there and there was music and dancing and soft drinks were served (no liquor). At 7 P.M., the groom arrived. He had to walk up 15 steps and as soon as he started walking rice was thrown on him from all sides as a sign of luck. When he had walked up five steps, two men, masked and disguised as devils, stopped him and asked him for ransom; they bargained and agreed on a certain amount. When the groom reached ten steps, the devils returned and stopped him again. A new agreement was made and they let him go.

The wedding ceremony was exotic; the songs and music loud, the food spicy. After dinner when we were leaving, the hostess gave us cake in very small handmade baskets. Our escort explained that these baskets were prepared for the next day when both families would assemble for a festive dinner. The dessert was served in the small baskets; when cake was inside, it meant the bride had been a maiden and the newlyweds to be congratulated, caressed, and kissed. When an apple was in the basket, it meant she wasn't, and the groom had the right to void the marriage and to be repaid all his expenses.

65

Indonesia

1967

The most popular of Indonesia's 3,000 islands, Bali, was an enchanting isle of temples, gods, festivals, and an endless pageantry of dances. Dancing, an integral part of Balinese life, served as a way of telling folk stories by pantomime, motions of the head, and upraised arms, as Luba and I observed at the ceremonial Barong dances.

We realized the effect of a story by pantomime when we attended a Monkey Dance. This dance was performed by men only and told the legend of how King Rama recovered his lost queen with the help of the monkeys. Performed by torchlight, the dance began as the men sat in a circle on the ground, telling their story by movements of hands and body, gradually chanting louder and louder as the tale progressed, and finally dancing in triumph as the queen was recovered and returned to King Rama.

In Bali very ancient customs and traditions were still alive; the people worshipped many gods with religious ceremonies and offerings. The processions carrying offerings to the temples were very impressive. In front there was music on locally-made instruments; dignitaries under large parasols or canopies; girls dressed in colorful garments and carrying on their heads towering, decorated baskets with rice cakes, fruits, candies, and flowers. They were followed by singing men and women. On large carved stones in the temples offerings were placed, and the people worshipped with songs and dances.

Before our departure from Denpasar, the capital city of Bali, our business representative there asked us to extend our stay for a day because there would be a ceremonial cremation of a priest's wife in a town nearby, and he would take us there. The next day when we arrived, we stopped near a house where a large lighted lantern hung outside. This was a sign that the dead was in this house. In Bali, only a

rich person or a clergyman could afford cremation. Their close family members, if they had died previously, could be cremated at the same time.

A specially built large wooden structure, colorfully decorated, was near the house and hundreds of people were waiting for the funeral. First, the body of the priest's wife, with a live white pigeon attached to it, was placed on top of the wooden structure. Then the bones of the family members previously deceased were placed on the lower part of the structure, and the priest stayed on a raised flat place on the structure. Four men, carrying the daughter of the deceased on a throne, started the procession, followed by musicians playing on metal and wooden bell-like instruments. The structure was carried by 40 people, dignitaries and clergy, accompanied by hundreds of others. Outside the town a fireplace was built of wood and old rubber tires. Before the funeral procession arrived there, a riot broke out. A mob stopped the funeral, asking for the honor of carrying the dead to the fireplace. After a long argument, it was decided to carry the dead back 100 meters a couple of times until everybody had the opportunity to carry the dead 100 meters. The priest kindled the fire and the smoke was so thick and the smell so strong that we couldn't stand it and left. Bali was magic!

66

The Soviet Union

1968

Many books have been written about the Volga River, pride of Russia and called "Mother Volga." Many poems and songs have been devoted to it, the most popular of which is "Volga, Volga Mate Rodnaya" (native mother). Luba and I were eager to cruise on the Volga.

We arrived in Moscow for a couple of days and, as usual, were transferred to the Hotel National, our favorite, because the rooms were large and many of them furnished with ancient furniture and paintings. We always got the best suites available in the hotel, but this time we got the corner suite with five windows, three of them facing the Kremlin and Red Square, and two to Gorki Street. A balcony surrounded the room, which contained epoch furniture, paintings, oriental rugs, an antique clock, and small statues. When my brother Alexander walked in to see me, he stopped and said, "Chaim Zalman, Chaim Zalman [my father's name], if you could see how your Berele [my name] is received in Moscow!"

We flew to Kazan to board the ship for an eleven-day cruise on the Volga. We had time to visit this historic city and its interesting architectural monuments of the past, including the Kremlin of the 16th century, the Syumbek Tower of the 17th century, and the university where Lenin was a student.

On the ship the Captain told me that a reporter from the local daily paper would like to have an interview with me. I told the reporter my impressions of Kazan and answered his questions. Then the following conversation took place:

He: How long have you been working in the tourist business?
I: Over 40 years.
He: Why aren't you on pension (retired)?
I: I can retire but I don't want to.

He: What does this mean?
I: I have saved money and can live on it, but I prefer to work.
He: In this case are you a capitalist?
I: If you want to call it capitalism, I am.
He (very excitedly): The first time in my life I see a live capitalist!

The sailing was scheduled for midnight and after dinner all the passengers went to a friendship reception given by the Youth Amateur Variety Group—an evening of folklore, songs, and dances. Two girls presented Luba with flowers, and many students tried to practice their English with me.

We stopped at Ulianovsk, the birthplace of Lenin and visited his home, now a museum, his school, and other spots associated with Lenin's name. Togliatti, "Detroit on the Volga" was the site of the Fiat automotive factory and the Lenin hydroelectric station, one of the most powerful in the world. At Jigulli we stopped at a beach and walked for a mile to visit a youth camp, fishing and beach activities. In the evening there was a vast bonfire at the beach with music, dancing, sporting games, and amusements. The hostess of the ship announced, "Today is July 4th, the Independence Day of the United States. We have two Americans here, let us congratulate them Russian style." The crowd made a large circle and the hostess and the musicians came over to us and led us around the circle, the musicians playing and the crowd clapping their hands. We also received some souvenirs.

The greatest battle of World War II was fought in Volgograd (Stalingrad), claiming a million lives. We saw many war monuments in the city: the statue of a mourning mother; the eternal flame (brides place their wedding bouquets there); the heroic sculptures "Stand to the Death" and "Motherland;" and the impressive Hall of Military Glory.

When we left Volgograd the ship turned off into the 63-mile-long Volga-Don-Canal, passing through 13 locks, first climbing up the water divide, and then descending to the Don River, sailing on the Don until we reached Rostov, a typical large city of the country containing a university, museums, theatres, places of culture, and the like.

During the eleven-day cruise the entertainment consisted of music, Russian songs, films, and a show by the passengers, and although the

ship did not cross the equator, a merry, fascinating Neptune festival was organized.

This cruise was of special interest to Luba and myself. The passengers were Russians and a small group of French tourists. Both of us were able to speak Russian and French, so we had interesting conversations and learned in depth about life in these countries. The first few days, the Russians avoided private conversations with us, but after a couple of days we gained their confidence and they were eager to talk.

Some of them were very much interested in the Six-Day War in Israel. They admired the Israeli army. One of them told us the following story. "Zyd" is a slanderous expression for Jew in Russia, and had been for centuries. Two workers in a factory quarreled and one shouted, "Stop it or I will hit you Pozydovsky!" (as a Jew hits). The Russians considered the Jews to be good businessmen but cowards. However, after the Six-Day War, they saw them as courageous and brave.

67

Hong Kong

1968

We were in Hong Kong three times, and I will not try to describe the mixture of ancient eastern and modern western architecture or why it is called "The Pearl of the Orient" or the "Riviera of the East" or "The Shopping Paradise" or "The best excuse in the world for spending

money," but I will tell you how ten thousand men, women, and children live out their lives aboard Chinese junks and other kinds of boats. There are two separate groups—the Floating Village and the Fishermen's Village, but their way of life is almost the same.

The boats are their homes for cooking their food, washing their laundry, building their families, and performing the family functions, including wedding boat, school boat, assembly hall boat, etc. At night, a floating market with lighted lanterns covers the water offering cheap underwear, clothing, and pastries, also chocolate, ice cream, candy, drinks, music, singers, and girls. For relaxation the villagers hire a small boat and cruise through the floating market sampling delicacies and enjoying music, songs, and other pleasures. Hong Kong is a most colorful island.

68

Nepal

1968

Nepal, a primitive country between India and China, had a population of nine million worshipping five different religions and idols of stone figures and animals. There was a living Goddess, between four and fourteen years old. How the Goddess is selected is too complicated to describe, but when we were in Katmandu, the capital, the Goddess was a girl eight years old living in a temple-like wooden house of two floors, with sculptured balconies and surrounded with a metal grille. In the

yard was a gilded coach in which, once a year, the Goddess participated in a pompous parade followed by the King, who had been educated in London, and the country's dignitaries. Every day at 4 P.M., people gathered in front of the house to see the Goddess, who came to the window or stepped out on the balcony, and the crowd applauded, smiled, and admired their Goddess. Luba and I were in the crowd looking at an eight-year-old innocent child who did not understand why the people smiled at her and was anxious to go down and play with the children in the crowd. But that was the power of tradition.

We were standing with our guide near an outside display of curios in Katmandu, while across the street a group of women were pointing at Luba's legs. The guide asked them why. They said they were arguing whether the line on her legs—made by the seams in her stockings—was a tattoo, or if she had been born like that. I raised the stockings to show them that they weren't part of her legs and they screamed, "She was born with two skins!" This sounds unbelievable, but it happened.

Most marriages were arranged. Only recently has the government prohibited "child brides," and now requires less than ten years difference in age. Polygamy had also been abolished (except if there was no child after 10 years of marriage, or the wife became mentally ill). It was customary for the families to exchange photographs, after which there was a meeting in a public place such as a movie theatre, library, or temple, with a proper introduction by a relative. If the boy didn't like the girl, he would say, "The stars don't go well." If he liked her, they got married. A smart boy found out where the girl went and he saw her before being introduced.

Katmandu was a magic city surrounded by high mountains, including Everest, and enveloped in legends, myths, and mysteries. The Nepal people were delightful, and since the dictatorship of the despot Rana was abolished in 1951, all efforts were being made for the education and civilization of the people.

69

Ceylon (Sri Lanka)

1969

On our way from the airport to the hotel in Sri Lanka, the capital of the Indian Ocean island, we encountered an anti-Israel demonstration with banners reading, "We condemn Israel, the running dog of the Imperialists." This was in August 1969 and the rally was organized by the Moslems to protest against the burning of El Agsa Mosque in Jerusalem, an act of arson by a crazy foreigner.

We had scheduled our arrival in August to assist at the Perahera carnival, one of the greatest and most fascinating pageants in Asia. The carnival started at sunset in Kandy, the old capital of Ceylon, and it brought together vast throngs of worshippers, scores of caparisoned elephants, and hundreds of dancers and drummers. Our hotel had a balcony on the main street and we were able to observe the spectacular show in all details. From early morning thousands arrived from all parts of the country and tried to grab a place where they would be able to see the carnival. The procession was composed of tribes from different parts of the country, each with an orchestra of their specific instruments, folk dancers in their tribal costumes, elephants in garments decorated with gold and silver embroidery, semi-precious stones and pearls, followed by the dignitaries and officials of the tribe. The three-mile long procession was encircled by hundreds of torch carriers. The music, dancing, and costumes were so different and colorful we had the impression of a live motion picture documentary about folklore.

The Parahera carnival had a religious background, and a tooth of Buddha, usually kept in the sanctuary of a temple in Kandy, was enclosed in a golden chest carried on one of the most adorned elephants accompanied by the clergy and authorities of the temple. There were 93 decorated elephants in the cortege, and the outfit of one elephant cost from $3,000 to $5,000.

Elephants, popular in Ceylon, were generally used for transferring heavy material, such as metal pieces in the factories or timber in the lumber yards, from place to place. When the elephants returned from work they carried one or two coconut trees for dinner. We followed them to their place of rest and observed how skillfully the elephants used their trunks to cut the trees into pieces and swallow their dinner.

70

South Africa

1969

Johannesburg, the commercial capital of the country called "The City of Gold and Diamonds" was an exciting city and had a special interest for us. Luba's late father had been a rabbi in a congregation in Johannesburg. Rabbi Aloy, who succeeded him when he left to join us in New York, and his family, received us warmly. Friday evening we were invited to dinner at their home in the suburb of Johannesburg. When we were ready to leave, Rabbi Aloy's son-in-law offered to accompany us. After 15 to 20 minutes we thanked him, told him we knew our way, and that he should return to his home, but he paid no attention and continued going with us. We repeated our request that he return home many times, but to no avail. We understood that he was afraid we would take a taxi, which was not permitted on Shabbat, and we stopped bothering him. When we were on the main street about 15

minutes from our hotel, he left us. We checked the time. It was 12:30, one hour and a half from his home. He would get home at 2 A.M. after a three-hour walk. He had earned a *mitzva* (act of faith).

Pretoria, The Union's beautiful capital, had avenues of flowering jacaranda trees and attractive modern buildings. There are many buildings dating back to the early pioneer days. Capetown, the most famous seaport, was the "Tavern of the Seven Seas," a majestic city with gardens, flowers, vineyards, historic buildings, art galleries, and museums. The most famous was the South African Museum because of its plaster casts of the Bushman and Hottentot aboriginal tribes.

We took a three-day drive from Capetown to Port Elizabeth via the scenic garden route with its mountain passes, valleys, forests, lakes, and flower-covered countryside. En route we visited the Ostrich farm at Oudtshoorn, the fabulous Cango Caves, and the admirable resort at Wilderness. In Port Elizabeth there was nothing of special interest except the Snake Park.

The Union's "Riviera," Durban, was a modern resort with imposing buildings and wide tree-lined avenues. A national playground, it offered activity at fine race courses, tennis courts, golf courses, and bowling greens; also a variety of sports—riding, climbing, fishing, and swimming. Near Durban we saw a monument of a horse, with an inscription saying how useful and important a horse is in peacetime, and especially in wartime.

The Kruger National Park had the greatest variety of animals of any of the game parks in Africa, including lions, leopards, cheetahs, elephants, giraffes, and a variety of antelopes. Accommodation was provided in comfortable rest camps of thatched huts and bungalows.

People in South Africa were as varied and as colorful as their land: blacks, whites, Xhosas, Zulus, Sothos, Tswana, Ndebele, Venda, Asian, and Indian of diverse historical and cultural backgrounds and traditions. The most attractive were the native tribes, with their colorful dress, ornate finery, and amazing dances.

We knew from the press how the blacks were being treated in South Africa, but we found the situation even worse than we had expected. There was no black person in a substantial job, and blacks had no connections with white people. In a small coffee shop we paid the black for coffee, but he refused to take the money; we had to put it on the table,

then he took it. He was not permitted to touch the hand of a white person. We went to a performance of tribal dances of the native mine workers in the mine compounds, one part of which was covered and shady, and reserved for the whites. The blacks had to sit or stand under the burning sun. There were many empty seats in the shady section, and a couple of women came over to the end of the covered part, still far from the whites, but the police forced them to leave. Was this justice?

71

Rhodesia

1969

In 1969 Rhodesia was in the headlines. Only a few years after the nation became independent of Great Britain, the whites, who represented only 5 percent of the population, governed the country. We just crossed the border from South Africa, and we were pleased to see that the escort who met us at the airport was black and shook hands with us; our driver was black, and the hotel manager was black. We saw black clerical workers and secretaries in all official institutions. Later we realized that this was a continuation of the British administration.

Salisbury was an attractive, bustling city, a commercial and industrial center. During our visit, the Rhodesia University expelled 12 black students to make place for 12 white students. The justification was that

the white ones were learning and would become scientists, technicians, doctors, etc., while the blacks were lazy and only copied the work of others.

Victoria Falls, the world's greatest waterfall, twice as high and twice as wide as Niagara, was very impressive.

72

East Africa

1969

Kenya, at the Indian Ocean surrounded by Tanzania, Uganda, Somalia, and Ethiopia, had a population of 11 million, speaking English, Swahili, and Bantu dialects and practicing the Animist, Christian, and Moslem religions. Kenya was governed by the natives in order, peace, and prosperity. Blacks and whites lived in harmony, but another kind of racism existed against the Indians. Most of the Indians were storekeepers, and during our visit, 3,000 Indians received an order to liquidate their businesses in two months, and they had no choice but to sell them to the natives.

The prosperous natives imitated the westerners and dressed fashionably. The women in Kenya, to be fashionable, wore mini-skirts. Even the poor ones shortened their skirts (sometimes exaggeratedly). The neighboring country, Tanzania, was against Westernization and the Youth Organization "Green Guards" (their uniforms were green

shirts), ridiculed the mini-skirts of the Kenyan women in their press, and called them "bathing skirts." The Kenya press answered: "Our ancestor-mothers wore almost nothing and their morals were much higher than the morals of your girl friends."

The capital, Nairobi, served as a commercial center for all East Africa and an important outfitting center for African big game safaris.

Built on top of trees, Treetops hotel was in the National Park near a lake where, at sunset, the animals came to quench their thirst. When we arrived at the gates of the enclosed section, we had to leave the car and proceed to the hotel, a 10-minute walk, with an armed guard carrying a revolver and a rifle. There was a large terrace overlooking the lake, from which we observed the game, including lions, hippos, giraffes, cheetahs, and elephants. They came in groups, the whole family with the children, licking the salt (prepared by the guards), and drinking the water as they wished.

We also particpated in *Safaritrail,* a two-day tour of Teavo National Park, Kenya's largest game reserve. It contained up to thirty species of game including lions, rhinos, giraffes, and herds of elephants. The tour ended in Monbara Island.

73

Taiwan (Formosa)

1969

Taipei, the capital, was a blend of old and new. The shopping area for local Chinese had small streets with old houses. Elaborate Chinese art decorated the Grand Hotel; the National Palace Museum, held the greatest collection of oriental art in the world. European and American businessmen and technicians crowded the streets lined with highrise buildings, department stores, and factories.

We were more impressed with our visit to Taroko Gorge than with Taipei. Driving to Taroko Gorge we saw the beauty of Taiwan; its cloud-high cliffs, hot springs, waterfalls, a cascading river, and 38 tunnels carved through marble mountains. We stopped at an Aboriginal village where attractive girls presented a colorful performance of tribal songs and dances. American investments had formed Taiwan's prosperity.

74

Japan

1970

We were in Japan three times and saw the great progress the Japanese made in many fields during the three decades following World War II. From a defeated nation it rose to an important industrious country able to compete with the most important industrial countries. There was progress in the economy, education, social structure, and even in their traditional manner of life. Previously, a woman was under the domination of her father, later her mother-in-law, and after that her husband. By 1970, the women had all the rights: they worked in offices, in the administration of factories, and prepared cocktails for themselves and their husbands—not just green tea. Progress was fast, and on our next trip we expected to see the men sitting and the women standing in the subways and buses.

The Japanese were proud of their exotic plants, flowers, trees which are very colorful, and of their gardens, the most beautiful in the world. All official receptions, banquets, and entertainment took place in the gardens, or in the geisha houses. The Japanese were offended when people compared the geishas to vice girls because a geisha was a professional who had to have ten years' training in music, dancing, singing, art, and culture. The geisha houses purchased the girls at the age of seven years from poor families and paid for their training and education. At the age of 17, a girl started to practice as a geisha. Twenty percent of her income went to the house and from the 80 percent she received she had to pay part of the expenses the house had advanced for her training and education. As soon as all expenses were paid, she was free to work in any place of her choice. If she found a fiancé or boyfriend willing to pay the balance she still owed to the house, she would be free to leave.

Our escort, a college graduate, explained that in the United States or

in the Western countries, executives or artists used a psychiatrist to release them from intense strains of the mind. He or she rises from the couch, goes to the secretary of the doctor, pays a fee, and asks for the next appointment. In Japan, a troubled man would go to a geisha house for a two-hour lunch served by a nice girl in a colorful kimono, accompanied with songs, soft music, or a conversation about books, a show, or movie. He left relaxed and ready for action.

We visited Japan from the north to the deep south but I will only mention places of special interest.

At Shiraci Ainu Village, a reservation, the inhabitants looked and dressed like Indians. They raised bears, and most of them carved animals of wood, especially bears of all sizes and forms.

We were taken to an inn at Noboribetsu, a hot spring spa. At the entrance we had to take off our shoes and wear wooden sandals. There were no beds or chairs in our room, only small tables, kimonos, and straw mattresses for overnight. A group of Japanese arrived. Green tea was served and the whole group, men and women, went to the same grand bathroom. There were groups of Japanese in the street, dressed in kimonos. By the pattern of the kimono, you learned in which hotel or inn the person lived.

Kyoto was a city of fascinating festivals and colorful fetes; some gay and others solemn and mystical, displaying thousands of years of Japanese tradition. Kyoto is also a bastion of Japanese art.

Nara was the first Japanese capital and cradle of Japanese culture, literature, arts, crafts, and civilization.

We traveled to Toha and by ferry to the Mikimoto Pearl Island to observe how women pearl divers collect mother oysters and to see how cultured pearls are selected and classified by size, color, and quality. We returned to Kyoto by the Bullet train; at 125 miles per hour it was the fastest train in the world.

From Kyoto we went by Kisem Lines steamer to Beppu, a well-known hot springs resort having medical properties and therefore one of the greatest spas of Japan. By car we traveled to Mount Aso, which boasts the world's largest volcanic crater, still active from time to time. We saw smoke, gas, and mud eruptions and many underground shelters around the volcano, and a siren warning station. Japan was fascinating in endless ways.

75

Ethiopia

1971

Addis Ababa, the capital of the nation on the Red Sea between Somalia and Sudan, was cosmopolitan, with high buildings, large stores, offices, and factories, and served as the seat of the United African Nations. Most of the rural population was poor and lived in primitive conditions.

Ethiopia is called the land of Solomon and Sheba, also "The legendary land of the Falashas" (Black Jews). For ages the Falashas had been a myth until at the beginning of the nineteenth century, historians and scholars of many nations tried hard to unravel this myth and drew controversial conclusions which were based on speculation.

According to one, the Queen of Sheba was invited to visit King Solomon. She fell in love with the King and a son, Menelik I, was born. He grew up in Israel, and when he returned to his mother in Ethiopia, he brought with him hundreds of skilled workers. They are the origin of the Falashas. Another theory identifies their ancestors as Jews who came to Ethiopia after the second destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem. A third conjecture is that the situation of the Jews in Egypt and Yemen became intolerable, so they left for Ethiopia. The Falashas themselves claim that they are Ethiopians, but they belong to *Bet Israel,* a Jewish religious community.

The most logical explanation goes back to the fourth century. When the major part of Ethiopia converted to Christianity, the Falashas remained staunch in their faith. They withdrew to Gondar and to the surrounding villages for the double purpose of escaping contamination and execution by the Christians. By this seclusion, by intermarrying, and by holding to the habits and thoughts fixed by their rituals, they preserved their religion and their customs throughout the centuries.

The Falashas had so long been severed from the Jews in other parts of the world that their religion was based on the Five Books of Moses only. They knew very little about the Talmud, but their spiritual leader, Cahen, had a knowledge of Hebrew. The Falashas did not eat meat from unclean animals or animals not slaughtered by a priest (Cahen). They washed their hands before meals and recited blessings before and after. The Falasha family was monogamous, the husband and wife enjoying equal rights.

The age at marriage ranged from 20 to 30 for men, and 15 to 20 for women. After the wedding the bride was led to the house of the bridegroom in a festive procession. The wedding lasted a whole week. Divorce was rare, with adultery the only justification for it. Circumcision of sons took place on the eighth day after birth.

The parents showed much concern for the education of their children: in almost every village there was a school where the assistant to the priest taught the children the prayers, the Torah, and the Book of Psalms, as well as the reading and writing of Amharic. The village school was a square mud building with a tin roof. The benches were of wooden planks placed against the walls. Boys and girls between the ages of 7 and 12 attended school, and were eager to please visitors and sing Hebrew songs and clap their hands while some of them performed a few dances.

A Falasha village could be distinguished by three typical buildings. The synagogue was simply furnished.

The Torah was placed on top of the center table so that passages could be read during the services. The members of the congregation wore skull caps and faced the East (Jerusalem) for praying.

The synagogue (mesgid) was usually divided into two halls. In one, known as "the holy of holies," the Torah (written by hand on parchment, not in the form of a scroll but as a book) was kept, and only the Cahen or his assistant could enter this spot. In the courtyard of the synagogue was a stone altar for the offering of the paschal sacrifice.

The other two thatch-roofed huts were known as "House of Curse" and "House of Childbirth." When a woman started her menstrual period or was about to give birth, she was confined to the "House of Curse." After the birth of a child, the women of the village uttered

twelve shouts of joy if the child was a boy, nine if it was a girl, and the parents received congratulations from the neighbors. The woman stayed there until a boy child was circumcised, then she washed her body, entered the "House of Childbirth" and stayed there for 32 days. If a girl was born, the woman had to remain in the "House of Curse" for 14 days and in the "House of Childbirth" 66 days. While isolated, her housework was done by her daughter or the neighbors. On the last day of her confinement she would wash her body and her clothes, shave her head, and return to her family. The hut that she had occupied was burned and another built.

The Falashas had their own separate cemetery. The dead were buried on the day of death or one day later. The family observed seven days of mourning. On the seventh day a remembrance meal was served, like that served at the end of the year (Yorzait).

Most of the Falashas spoke Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia. Their prayers and literature were written in Ge-ez, which is the holy language of the Ethiopian Church. Only the Cahen and his assistants knew some Hebrew. The State of Israel sent Hebrew teachers to Ethiopia.

The Falashas were mainly engaged in agriculture. They did not own their land, but worked as lessees who handed over a major part of their produce to the landowners. In addition to this, the men and women engaged in various crafts such as pottery, spinning, weaving, and basketry. Some of the men were skilled craftsmen—blacksmiths, gold and silversmiths, carpenters, masons. They were noted for their skill and unquestionable honesty. No Falasha would ask one cent more than the actual price of an article. The Falasha women and even children are adept at making small clay statuettes and artistically fashioned figures of bearded priests with the Star of David; also birds, crocodiles, snakes, and the like. They displayed their latest output to visiting tourists. The guides told the tourists, "Don't bargain; a Falasha will never ask you for one penny more than the article should cost."

Since Falasha men and women look like any other Ethiopian, wearing the same clothing, there is nothing to distinguish a Falasha from any other Ethiopian as to looks, speech, dress, or manners. What makes the Falashas so unique, so enigmatic, is their religion—the observance of the ancient Biblical laws and their cultural heritage.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the Jewish missionaries, Joseph Halevy and Jacques Faitlovich, made many trips to Ethiopia to bring the Falashas into contact with European Jewry and to persuade them to abandon customs which were foreign to Jews. This activity was renewed in the '50s by the emissaries of the Jewish Agency and the Falashas showed interest and readiness to make some changes.

Each Falasha family paid 10 percent of its income to the community to cover the expenses for the synagogue, Cahen, school, and so on. They called it Asrat; in Hebrew Hasara (ten). Their number was estimated at 500,000; they had lost many in wars between the tribes during the centuries. In the nineteenth century they were told that the Emperor Theodore would force them to convert to Christianity, and they began to emigrate en masse to Jerusalem. They left, unprepared for long travel, and most of them perished on the journey. Some settled in areas remote from their original homes. It is assumed that in 1969 their number was between 25,000 and 30,000.

The establishment of the State of Israel caused a grand awakening among the Falashas. A group of boys and girls was brought by the Jewish Agency to Israel to study Hebrew and receive a Jewish education. A teachers' seminary was opened in Asmara as well as schools for children in several villages. The project of bringing the Falashas to Israel was not favorably viewed by the religious group and by the authorities. They didn't consider the Falashas as Jews, admitted them to Israel as tourists, and requested a deposit of $600 as a guarantee that they would leave the country when their visas expired. A Committee for the Falashas, headed by Dr. Tartakover, with the help of Mrs. Golda Meir and the Safardi Chief Rabbi, succeeded in changing the law, and the Falashas were officially considered to be Jews. Over 500 persons emigrated to Israel, where villages were built for them and where they were able to exercise their form of religion, culture, and customs.

76

South America

1971

The vast continent of South America held many contrasts—from ancient civilizations to ultra-modern cities; from colorful folk dances to sizzling night spots; from rugged jungles to sophisticated capitals. It was an exciting world of many different cultures, which we saw during our 30-day comprehensive tour of the South American countries, including an Amazon River expedition.

When we arrived in Brazilia, the ultra-modern new capital, our agent met us at the airport and drove us to the hotel. I was at the registration desk when our agent rushed over to me, all excited, and said the owner of the hotel, Mr. Tjurs, was in the lobby and wanted to meet me. He introduced us and we exchanged the usual courteous phrases. The next day, after dinner, Luba and I went for a walk and we saw Mr. Tjurs walking ahead of us. At the corner he turned around and when he faced us he stopped and asked, "Are you Mr. Wolsky?" and in Russian, "Do you speak Russian?" and again in Yiddish, "Do you speak Yiddish?" When our answer was "yes" for both languages, he smiled and asked us to spend the evening with him. He told us his story.

He had been born in Russia, and at the age of five his parents had moved to Argentina. They were poor, and before entering high school Mr. Tjurs became a helper to a truck driver. There was no future in Argentina so he left for Brazil and started to work in construction and building. When he had saved some money, he formed a company to build a hotel, issued shares at one dollar apiece, and advertised that each worker who helped build this hotel and his friends, could be partners at that price. He collected enough money to build the hotel and the workers felt that they were working for themselves, so the productivity was high. This was the foundation of a hotel empire of over one hundred million dollars, covering most of the luxury hotels in Brazil's major cities. The "King of Hotels" didn't change the system. When his

shares on the stock market went up, he split them in order that they would remain within reach of the low-income people.

He was then at the age of retirement and worried about succession. He said his son thought that "money grows on trees" and he could not take over. He had been keeping his eyes on the managers of his hotels before making a decision. The next day he introduced us to his wife and family. I was interested in his story because it contained ingredients of my own life.

77

Australia

1972

The purpose of our trip to Australia was to attend the World Travel Congress of American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) in Sydney, and thereby to include visits to Tahiti, New Zealand, and the Fiji Islands, on the way to and from the convention. Our agents in these countries did their utmost to show us the most interesting places in each country, and to make our five-week tour exciting and enjoyable. In Australia the Congress Committee showed us the attractions of their country, and even how they cut the wool from the sheep—of which they had 175 million—and how they raised kangaroos. In Sydney and Melbourne, we felt at home. There was the same language, vigor, and vitality, tempo of living, fashionable stores, good theatres, and movies as at home.

Leo Lew, the brother of my brother-in-law was living in a suburb of Melbourne, and as soon as we arrived in Melbourne, he took over from the Congress Committee. He showed us everything that was remarkable in the city. We spent time with his family at his home and exchanged memories, pleasant and sad. It was very enjoyable to spend time in a family atmosphere when you were so far away from home.

78

New Zealand

1972

New Zealand was a pleasant surprise to us. It was a fascinating land: orderly, clean, and uncrowded, and offered a quiet life. The weekends were for pleasure and on Friday afternoons business came to a standstill. One could not even get a haircut. The New Zealanders derived great pleasure from boating and sailing, fishing, camping, golf, cricket, and horse racing. We spent two weeks there and visited Auckland, the largest city in New Zealand, and the center of commerce and industry.

We also saw Otorohanya, the world-famed grotto in the Waitomo Caves; Rotorua, a mass of natural hot springs and dozens of geysers; Whakarewarewa, a model village of the Maoris, who came to this island in the twelfth century; Mount Cook, which rainy weather prevented us from viewing on a flight excursion over the Southern Alps,

the glaciers, and snow-capped rocks—although some stubborn tourist resisted the rain and took pictures with an umbrella covering the camera.

We left Mount Cook in a very small plane carrying only the pilot and the two of us on a flight considered the most magnificent in the world. We saw only the sky, water, and mountains from both sides. The plane was weaving and when it bent on the right side I saw the mountains rising to the sky. Seconds later the mountains rushed down to the water; the same happened on the left side, then an inside voice reminded me that Luba and I were no swimmers. To push away these thoughts I talked to Luba about the breathtaking panorama of the majestic mountains, the crystal-clear blue skies, the spectacular waterfalls, and the beautiful lakes. I don't know if Luba listened to my enthusiastic remarks, but I realized that she was more attentive to the pilot when he announced we would arrive in seven minutes, and that she enjoyed the concrete of the airport more than the beautiful lakes. (It wasn't the first time we had traveled on a small plane. When we were in Bucharest, the Romanian Tourist Office invited us to visit the new tourist facilities in Mamaii at the Black Sea. At the airport we walked, without a ladder, into a one-engine plane for a pilot and two passengers, but we flew only high enough to avoid the crosses of the churches, and beneath was no river, no lake, only green grass.)

We went on to Mildord Sound, whose majestic fjords have no counterpart anywhere in the world and Christchurch, the most English town outside England with Victorian buildings, fine houses, beautiful gardens, and tropical plants.

New Zealand was for us a nation of charm and friendliness, rivaling Switzerland in beauty.

79

Caribbean

1973

Cruising is the best way to relax, so twice a year we took advantage of the special rates or invitations from the shipping companies to travel agents, and covered all the islands in the Caribbean.

In 1973 we were on a cruise on the S.S. *Rotterdam.* When we stopped in Barbados for shore excursions we went to the Hilton Hotel where a woman came over to me and said, "You are Mr. Wolsky. I know you because I am a secretary in the El Al main office in New York. My husband was in the hijacked plane last month; I will call him and he will tell you the story."

She came back with her husband, who was six feet tall and over 200 pounds in weight. He introduced himself as David Cohen and told us, "I was on the El Al plane from Amsterdam to New York, sitting in first class, first row, and I saw two armed men and a woman come over to the steward and ask him to open the door to the cockpit. When he refused the hijacker opened fire. At the same moment the El Al security man fired at the two hijackers, and I grabbed the girl and with these two hands around her neck (showing me his strong hands), I started to strangle her, but our security man yelled, 'Stop! We need her!' I took off my hands and she fell to the floor. We looked at the floor—one hijacker was dead, the other one and the steward were injured, and the girl was still breathing. The captain tried to fly to Israel with the hijackers, but the steward had lost too much blood and so he flew to London, and the steward, hijacker, and the girl were rushed to a hospital." When Mr. Cohen finished he added, "Ten seconds more and the girl would have joined her dead comrade."

80

China

1978

To write the stories of my trips around the globe, I used a world map and each time I opened it, a large spot on the eastern part of Asia on the west coast of the Pacific Ocean attracted my attention, teasing me: "You haven't been there." For years, I dreamed of visiting the new China, but without results.

On June 15, 1978, when I returned to New York from Florida, I learned that there were tours of China lasting 9, 10, and 12 days for regular tourists, but I was interested in a longer stay. It was not until June 20 that I was told that Lindblad Travel was operating an 18-day tour of China, departing June 29. Since this fell on the weekend of July 4, the airlines were booked to capacity. Only three airlines could use the special reduced rate to China, and I wanted to pay, as a travel agent, 25 percent of this reduced rate, which meant only $316 for an air ticket New York-London-Rome-Cairo-Addis Ababa-Bombay-Peking and return to New York. This seemed like an impossible dream. In addition, there were visa formalities, smallpox, yellow fever, and cholera vaccinations, and only seven working days until the departure. My desire to visit China was so strong that I did not give up and used (against my principles) my friendly connections with the airlines over a period of more than 30 years. The outcome: Luba and I left June 29 for London, the first leg of our journey to Peking.

During my 44 years as an operator of international tours, I organized tours for over 250,000 tourists. Now, for the first time in my life, I became one of them. Like in the film *If It's Tuesday, This Must Be Belgium,* I would say to Luba, my secretary during trips: "What is the program for today? At what time does the sightseeing start? What will we see today? When is lunch, dinner, is there anything for tonight?"

The next day I would ask Luba: "At what time is the departure today? When do we have to leave our luggage outside our room? Where is the next stop? Are we going by air, train, or bus? How long is the trip?" We were like a flock of sheep, sticking together and waiting for the whistle of the shepherd—our tour escort. He did a good job taking care of visas and entry-exit formalities, checking in and out at departures, registrations of the baggage, and customs.

Our 18-day journey in China included Peking, Shanghai, Hangchow, Nanchang, Lushan, and Shaoshan. We visited silk, arts and crafts, tea and tool factories, people's communes, housing projects, private lodgings, the Research Institute for Arts and Crafts, department stores, temples, excavated imperial tombs, botanical gardens, schools, kindergartens, museums, historical monuments, scenic spots, also the "Forbidden City" (former Imperial Palaces), and the famous Great Wall (6,000 kilometers long, built over a period of 250 years).

Instead of describing the places visited, I prefer to present a picture of life in China in 1978.

The Chinese were honest, hard-working, officious, sensitive, and proud people. They acknowledged being a developing country, doing its utmost to improve from day to day. They were just as curious about us as we were about them. Hundreds and hundreds of them surrounded our bus (we were a group of 25 Americans), smiling, waving their hands, and showing us their best faces. The children we met in the kindergartens and in the streets welcomed us with candid smiles, shook our hands, showed us their toys and, through their parents and teachers, asked us to come again. It was a wonderful feeling.

To reduce the growing population, the government recommended that people not get married before 28 for men and 25 for women, and that they have only two children. Divorce was easy to get and free of charge, but very few used this bargain. An unmarried pregnant woman was rejected by her family. She could get an abortion free; if it were too late or she preferred to have the child, when it was born she would have the choice of keeping it or leaving it at the hospital. The hospital would then find a childless family to adopt it. Married women retained their maiden names.

At 6 A.M., loud-speakers called people to exercise in the streets and gave instructions to follow, or a volunteer instructor did this.

There was no gambling, drug abuse, prostitution, or juvenile delinquency. If a schoolboy or girl stole something, the parents were asked to punish their child in their own way. If it happened a second time, the child would be placed in a correction home for three months. When the young people were released, they had to go to their school and tell their schoolmates what happened to them and to advise the schoolmates not to follow their example. One didn't need to worry about strolling around the streets of any city at night.

All prices were fixed and there was no way of bargaining, no black market, no waiting lines for food or clothes. When you visited a factory, commune, or school, you were ushered into a meeting room, where tea and cigarettes were offered and the host greeted you as "our American friends" and explained the facilities. After the visit, you returned to the meeting room for a question-and-answer session. Tips were never to be offered at any time—warm personal thanks or an appropriate gift were appreciated. In China, strict punctuality was observed for social occasions or appointments.

Nobody went hungry, since rice and vegetables were in abundance, and there were no waiting lines for food. Tourists got the type of food that the local people eat in their homes, and the groups of visitors ate family style, with dishes passed around the table clockwise just like the Chinese did it. The food was good and varied in taste in the different provinces. Soup was served as the last course; when you saw the soup, you knew the meal was coming to an end. Beer and soft drinks were served with all meals. If tourists requested it, they could have Western-style food. (Breakfast was western-style.)

There were no private cars, but most people used bicycles or streetcars and buses, which were overcrowded. The people owned no dogs or cats and very few birds or other animals, since they needed the food they had to feed their 950 million people. Pictures of Chairman Mao Tse-tung and Chairman Hua Kuo-feng hung even in private homes. In offices, there were also portraits of Engels, Marx, Lenin, and Stalin. In the banks and offices, electronic calculators were used but results were checked with an abacus.

The people worked hard for the country where there was little emphasis on the individual. The administrators of all enterprises were required to work 60 days a year in the field, factory, office, or store.

There were no taxis in the streets, but one ordered a taxi through the service office. Nobody spoke English; contact with local people was through the guide.

We never met a fat Chinese person.

During our trip we visited two families. One of four—husband, wife, daughter, 28 years old, and son, 23—lived in two small rooms with kitchen and toilet shared by four families. The 51-year-old husband, a bicycle mechanic, made $57 a month. The wife, 49, made $34, the children kept some cash for lunches and pocket money and gave the rest to their father. This family of four spent $6.50 a month for rent, electricity, water and gas, $36 for food, $25 for clothes, furniture, vacations, 50 cents for the radio, and paid no taxes. The balance went into the bank at 3-and-a-half percent yearly interest. At 60, the father would retire at 70 percent of his salary. He said that before the liberation he had worked 14 hours a day making a lot of money but couldn't get much for it because of the inflation.

The second family of four—husband, wife, two boys aged 11 and 14—had one large room for all four, a kitchen and toilet for four families. The head of the house was an electrician, his wife a teacher. She proudly showed us the television which her husband made by himself from parts anyone could buy in a department store with instructions for putting it together.

There were still many slums in the center of Shanghai, and in the evenings the families left their meager apartments, together with their children and babies, to sit on the sidewalks and streets, disturbing the traffic. New apartment projects were in the building stage.

All in all, the Chinese looked happy. They were proud of their achievements and sure they would progress and succeed in many fields. But in technology and solving the housing problem, they had a very long way to go.

81

It's All Affordable for an Agent

On our way to the World Travel Congress in Sydney, we visited Tahiti (French Polynesia), Papeete, the capital, and the island Moorea. Also in the Fiji Islands we visited Suva, the capital, Yanuca Island, and Nadi. In the hotels there and in the motor launches to and from the islands we saw an American couple. We exchanged greetings but didn't start a conversation. Luba said to me that this couple must be very rich to afford going so far off the beaten track and to stay in the best hotels.

One week later, at the Congress in Sydney, we met again. Instinctively each of us looked at the badge of the other and I saw that the gentleman was a travel agent from Texas. He told me that he knew my distinguished company and when they had seen us in the Islands his wife had said to him, "This couple must be very rich to afford going so far and staying in the best hotels."

Both women had had the same reaction because this is a matter of fact. To afford expensive trips you have to be very rich, a senator, a congressman, or a travel agent.

Book V

MY FAMILY

82

The Family Wolsky

The book *Roots* in which Alex Haley described the lives of his ancestors as slaves, made him famous and wealthy. His story covered an interval of only seven generations. My ancestors were slaves more than 3,000 years ago in Egypt, and have since survived many bloody wars, tyranny, inquisitions, exodus, gas chambers, crematories. . . . The books about these events aren't Number One Bestsellers or even Bestsellers or Goodsellers. I will not climb my family tree too high and will go back only four generations.

In a world of computers, satellites, and supersonic jets, civilization advances very fast, and the divergence between one generation and the next is great. The deviation between parents and their children in religion is much greater in Jewish families where the parents and children are not living in the same city or even in the same country. Children born in the United States are ignorant about the lives of their parents and ancestors in the old country, in the *shtedl.*

I will try to introduce to my children, grandchildren, and their children, my parents, their children, ancestors, and relatives living in different countries with various political and social systems, their type of living, the misery of pogroms, the burden of anti-Semitism, the fires, floods, and wars which ruined their existence many times.

I will try to describe their system of education: the *cheder,* Yeshiva, city schools, and the "quota" for Jews in high schools and universities; the way they were brought up: not to spend more than their income and not to refuse helping others even at some deprivation to themselves. Despite the hardship of their lives in general and as Jews in particular, these simple, cordial, honest and helpful people were proud of their Jewishness and devoted to their families.

Wolsky was a familiar name among the Polish nobles; even the street Wolska in Warsaw was named after one of them. But no name Wolsky appears in any Jewish book, almanac, or encyclopedia.

Why is our name Wolsky? Jews had been accustomed to calling each other by their first and patronymic names, by profession, or by the city from which they originated. For instance, Chaim Moshe (the son of Moshe), Chaim Stolar (Chaim the Carpenter), or Chaim Warshower (Chaim of Warsaw). A century ago the Russian government ordered that everybody had to have a family name. At that time the Jews either kept the names by which they were known or adjusted them to sound more appropriate. In the Wolsky case there are two conjectures. According to the first, one of the ancestors was the manager of a farm owned by a noble named Wolsky so he was called David Wolsky's. The second supposes that the ancestor was very tall and was called David Veliki, which in Russian means David the Tall. One or the other was changed to Wolsky. (When my father's brother Morris—Moishe Meir—came to the States he shortened his name to Wolsk.)

83

My Grandfather David Wolsky

David Wolsky was born in 1827 in Domacheva, a small town 100 miles from Brest. His father, Zalman, was a scholar; all day he studied the Talmud while his wife took care of the business. David had three brothers: Isik-Kopel, Moshe-Leib, and Isaak-Aaron.

Military service in Russia was a great hardship for everyone but particularly for Jewish boys, who were badly treated and often

humiliated. Also, the food in the Army was not kosher and the Jewish boys had to work Saturdays and holidays. Therefore, Jewish parents did everything possible to avoid military service for their boys. Since the only son in a family was free from service in order to help support his family, many parents registered their sons with families which had no boys. This was the case of Isaak-Aaron, whose family name was Kempe, not Wolsky. This was only for the record, but he lived with his parents and was treated like his two brothers.

David received his education in *cheder* (Jewish religious school) and in the Talmud School, and at 18 he married Chana(?). Ten years later she died leaving two young daughters. Two years later he married Rochel Bash. She raised seven children: three sons—Chaim Zalman (my father), Moishe-Meir (Uncle Morris), and Jacob (Uncle Jake)—and four daughters—Sheine-Reisel (Forer), Malke (Tanenbaum), Slowe (Forer), and Bashe (Barlas).

David was leaseholder of a farm in Zbraz (200 miles from Brest), a one-street village of small wooden houses with straw roofs. The villagers were very poor and lived under very primitive conditions. Most of the houses consisted of one large room which served as kitchen, dining room, living room, bedroom for the children, bakery, and in winter, as a workshop with a hand-spinning mill where the men made and repaired all accessories for the field and gardens, and where the women made cloth for the whole family. A very small room served as the bedroom for the parents. A mile away was the landowner's estate of thousands of square miles.

David had a lease for many years on 500 acres of land, 15 horses, 100 cows, and 20 oxen. One fall day when the crops were already in the barn, a fire broke out and burned the entire harvest to ashes, and David was obliged to give up the lease. He rented some land with a house and a store. The store, a small supermarket, had a little of everything: sugar, salt, herring, candles, kerosene, tobacco, and even white bread. The peasants bought white bread only when their children were sick or when they celebrated birthdays.

The income from the produce of the land and the store provided only a meager life for the family, and my grandfather denied himself many necessities in order to provide the children with a religious education. He, with Jacob Forer, who after the fire took over his lease from the landowner, hired a teacher for their children and Forer arranged a

synagogue for Saturdays and holidays where the Jewish farmers from the nearby villages assembled for services.

David Wolsky was very religious; he fasted Mondays and Thursdays, and all eight days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The synagogue was three miles from his home, which was for very religious Jews too long a walk on a Saturday. So on Fridays, my grandfather would walk one-and-a-half miles and leave a package containing a piece of bread, salt, and meat *(Trum Sabbat)* in the bushes, which he considered as his "domicile." Under the Jewish law, he could walk the remaining one-and-a-half miles to the synagogue, the distance permitted.

The villagers in Zbraz greatly respected David and called him *Tchestni Yewrey,* the honest Jew. When he married off a daughter the entire village became festive; the peasants decorated their horses, changed the straw in the wagons, and brought the guests from the station. Musicians played all day and the peasants and their children surrounded the house and admired the well-dressed guests. the *hupa* was held on the outskirts of the village, and reached by a procession from the house: musicians playing; women dancing with *chales* and cakes in their hands; the groom with his parents; the bride with her parents; relatives, guests, and almost all the villagers, and their women and children. (Two of David Wolsky's daughters married two of Jacob Forer's sons: Sheine-Reisel to Isaac and Slowe to Joseph.

David lived in Zbraz almost all his life. In 1912, at the age of 85, he felt sick and was moved to the home of his son, Chaim Zalmen, in Brest, and when he recovered, his son rented an apartment in Brest where he and his wife, Rochel, lived. He died in December 1913.

84

My Grandmother Rochel Bash Wolsky

Rochel Wolsky was born in Mileitchitz, a small town 150 miles from Brest, in 1842. In her family were well-known rabbis and community leaders.

She was tall, intelligent, of strong character, and energetic. In 1860 she married David Wolsky and became active in his business. Twice a month she traveled to Brest to buy goods for the store, and tools and accessories for the farm. The trip from Zbraz to Brest was quite strenuous: one night by horse and wagon to the station 20 miles away, then the train to Brest, a full day of running from store to store to shop, and a second night on the train returning to Zbraz. The next day she went back to the business and household, with seven children.

Rochel, a sweet person, was always ready to help. When a beggar went by the village, she would invite him to stay at her home for a couple of days. These walking peddlers or "Jacks of all trades," at that time some of the Jewish "professionals," left their homes on Sundays, in the early morning, carrying one sack containing five or six pieces of everything a housewife might use, and another with tools and hardware. They walked all week from village to village, selling and taking orders of merchandise for next week, or repairing wood and metal objects. They returned home on Fridays in time to permit their wives to do last-minute shopping for the Sabbath. One or two nights every week, they would spend as guests of Rochel, who provided them with breakfast and dinner.

She was very religious and prayed three times daily. Her old bulky prayer book was an encyclopedia of different prayers, requests, appeals, implorations, and acts of devotion to God. The color of the pages revealed the importance of the prayers. If the pages were clean, those prayers were not used too often; if dirty in the left bottom corner, where she used her finger to change the pages, they were used daily; if

covered with many yellow spots, the pages reflected Rochel's warm tears. Her prayer on Saturday evening to accompany the fading Sabbath, "O, God of Abraham, Isaak and Jacob," was a piece of poetry, and the melody soft and touching.

In 1912, when her husband became sick, she was with him in Brest, and when he died in 1913, she returned to Zbraz, and with her youngest daughter Bashe, managed the store and the farm. Although she wished to stay in Zbraz, in 1922, when she reached the age of 80, her son Chaim Zalman moved her to his apartment in Brest. She spent the days praying and making up her own compositions. In one of them she said, "Dear God, I am old and a human being must die in order to leave his place in the world for others. I am ready any time you will call me, but please not on a Saturday or on a holiday. Why ruin the holiday of my family?" Her ideal was to die in Eretz Yisrael (Palestine), and she dreamed about this, but at her age and physical condition a wearisome trip to Palestine was not to be considered. However, after consulting several doctors, one of them told her son that her desire to go was very strong and this would help her to overcome the hardship of the trip. She went and enjoyed living with her daughter Sheine-Reisel for ten years.

In 1926, Morris Wolsk and his family went to Palestine to see her. This was the biggest surprise in her life, and she expressed it in her way: "Dear God, you are wonderful. All my life I dreamed about Eretz Yisrael and you brought me here. My son and his wife, who left me more than 25 years ago for America, and my grandsons and their wives whom I never met—you brought them from very far to see me before I leave this world. This is a real miracle. Thank you, dear God, I am ready, you can call me." She died in 1932 at the age of 90.

85

The Holocaust Victims

Our family shared in the terrible world tragedy in which hundreds of Jewish towns and cities were wiped out, thousands of Jewish communities were destroyed and six million Jews met death at the hands of the cruel Nazi murderers and their pitiless collaborators. Through ruthless murder and destruction we lost thirteen members of our family—our nearest and dearest—our unforgettable parents, our sisters, their husbands, and their children.

Not even one of them was spared. All our efforts to find further information about how and where they met their deaths were without result. Did they die from the effects of slave labor, from hunger, from exposure, from disease? Or were they destroyed in the fires of the crematoria at Auschwitz or Dauchau? Were they asphyxiated in the gas chambers of Treblinka or Maydanek? Or were they tortured? Did they expire in agony and pain? We do not know.

Where are their tombs? Where are their bones or ashes? We do not know. One thing we are sure of. We lost them all in the terrible Holocaust.

My Father, Chaim Zalman Wolsky

My father was born in 1868 in Zbraz near Domacheva. At the age of five he already had a tutor, and because there were no schools in Zbraz, he was sent at the age of eight, to school in Domacheva and after that to *cheder* in Brest-Litovsk. In the *cheder* he stayed 12 hours each day. On Saturday, the only day of the week when there was no school, he had to go to the synagogue until noon. After lunch there was a special session at the *cheder,* then later, evening services at the synagogue.

He looked with envy upon the children who played in the streets and was often tempted, at least for a while, to join them in their play. How-

ever, he was afraid to do this because some so-called "good friends" would immediately write to his parents that he was playing in the streets with the undisciplined children.

When he grew older he went back to Zbraz and spent his days working hard in his father's business, his nights studying late.

His childhood was monotonous—without friends, without diversion or recreation—because of the difficult conditions of life which he had to follow because of his parents' religious consciousness.

In 1888 he was called to the Army but because he was the eldest son and active in the business of his parents, he was deferred, put into the Reserves, and subject to call only in case of war.

That same year he married Libe Priluk and settled in Brest-Litovsk. He represented his father-in-law's business, flour and cereal. Gradually he started to bring in flour and cereals from other towns. Through hard work and diligence he built up a very reputable business which became known far and wide.

He was tall and substantially-built. His hair was dark and he wore a beard of a lighter shade than his hair. His complexion was ruddy and his face bore a vivacious and energetic expression. To his four sons and five daughters he was strict but he became more docile and mellow as the children grew older. Thus the older children felt some of the early discipline but to the younger ones their father seemed soft and affectionate.

He loved his wife dearly; his was an everlasting devotion with respect and utmost courtesy. This same feeling was instilled in the children and they virtually worshipped their mother. However, she never took advantage of this worship. Theirs was a beautiful, harmonious family relationship.

Chaim Zalman was extremely pious and attempted to educate his children in his way. When the children were small they went along with his wishes but when they grew older they gradually began to deviate from many of the religious customs their father held so dear. This they attempted to do gradually and with tact, so as not to hurt their parents, but the experienced eye of the father soon saw the changes in his children and he would admonish them, trying to explain how important were the Jewish rituals and traditions and even pleaded with them not to abandon the religious path he was taking. To discuss these matters

with him was useless because he was very religious and could not be swayed in his own beliefs. The children did their utmost to please him as much as possible and to cover their own religious feelings. But there were conflicts.

A *gimnazium* (high school) opened in Brest, and his oldest son, Moise-Lucien registered there as a student. This was a blow to Chaim Zalman. The tactful means one uses to break the news to a parent of a terrible family tragedy had to be used to advise a father that his son had passed his examinations admirably and was a top-ranking student. The family made every effort to conceal this news from my father as long as they could and, in the meantime, to find the most diplomatic way of "breaking the news" to him. They had to decide who was to be the bearer of the bad news. In the end it was the fate of my mother to deliver this message—she, for whom this was also a tragedy and who knew better than anyone else what sort of blow it would be to her husband. But thanks to her intelligent handling of the situation and her exceptional tact, she fulfilled her mission successfully.

However, Moise-Lucien had to forgo school on Saturdays. Also, Chaim Zalman refused to gaze upon his son when he was dressed in his uniform, looking like a "gentile." Then, too, the son was obliged to spend several hours after school on his Jewish education.

This was not the end of the incident. There was a quota on Jewish students in the schools. But the high school which Moise attended was a private one and the Jewish youth, thirsting for knowledge, began to fill the classes. This caused great alarm among the religious Jews and they attempted to find ways of preventing Jewish children from attending this school. They finally mobilized the best "general" they could find to conduct a campaign. This was none other than the famous *magid* (preacher) Chaim Getzel. Chaim Getzel was a short man with a dark complexion, black beard, and black, piercing eyes. He was one of the most forceful speakers in the country. Unlike other *magids* his object was not to disseminate propaganda for a yeshiva, for building a synagogue, or for collecting money to rebuild a town wiped out by fire. His theme was always on the subject of how important it was to adhere to the Jewish religion. He preached Judaism, the tenets of the Torah, and the Talmud. His speeches were brilliant, always masterpieces, and people from far and wide came to listen to him.

Chaim Getzel was enlisted to speak on this vital problem: "The New High School—Its Dangers to Jewish Children—The Blight on the Jewish Population." With his wonderful talent he drew a picture of the approaching threat to Jewish life. With pathos he moved his audience to the resolution that they would not allow this humiliation to their community. At the end of his speech he opened the ark and cursed the parents who besmirched the Jewish religion by sending their children to the high school.

Fortunately, Chaim Zalman was not present for that particular speech. When he learned of it he came home dejected and heartbroken, and for weeks he walked around in a daze. The "operation" cost Chaim Zalman a lot in health and spirits and despite Chaim Getzel's genius of speech, the gates had been opened for the other children in the family and they also went to schools and universities without any opposition.

The education of his children became Chaim Zalman's prime interest and he and his wife worked out educational plans and decided between them the field of education for each child.

In conversations with his children he tried to convince them that there was emptiness in the recreation afforded by the theater and movies and that they would have more joy in learning the Bible and the Talmud. He would say that if the youth could only know the real pleasure of studying the Bible or Talmud, all the theaters and such entertainment places would be empty.

Every evening between 8:00 and 10:00 Chaim Zalman himself would sit with a group and study the Talmud. His wife would always serve refreshments on these evenings. Occasionally there were special dinners held in Chaim Zalman's home for members of his group.

Being very charitable, he made substantial contributions to various institutions, particularly those of a religious nature. He served on the Executive Board of the Jewish Commercial Bank, the Old Age Home, Orphans Home, and other philanthropic institutions. Though he was active in social life he avoided those organizations in which there was internal strife or friction as he was of a peace-loving nature.

Several times during his lifetime, Chaim Zalman was completely ruined financially and was obliged to start again from scratch. It happened in 1902 on a Saturday during the summer when a fire broke

out in the town. Most of the houses were constructed of wood. It was an extremely hot but windy day and the fire spread rapidly over the whole town, virtually destroying entire areas. Water could be obtained only from the river or from special wells, which were a great distance from each other, and there were not enough firemen to fight the fire. The panic was indescribable. The screams of terror could be heard miles away. In the melee of fire, fear, and panic, Chaim Zalman discovered that two of his children were missing. The whole family ran all over town to find them. They ran through the streets among the blazing houses and through the dense smoke, and their fear that perhaps the children had perished in the fire grew greater from minute to minute. It was not until evening that they learned that the two children were safe. Someone told Chaim Zalman that they had been seen in the village Kotelne, three miles from Brest. They were found safe and sound. But the family living quarters with all the household equipment—bedding, all its furnishings, clothing, silver—all went up in the flames. The flour and cereal mill's warehouse of supplies and a salami factory which Chaim Zalman operated in partnership with his brother-in-law, Hersh Priluk, were wiped out. Out of all these worldly possessions only ashes remained.

Not only did Chaim Zalman lose what the fire consumed but he also lost money due him from his creditors since the creditors also suffered great losses in the fire and were unable to pay their bills. Even some who did not directly lose anything took advantage of the situation and withheld payments.

Several weeks after the fire, on the site of the old warehouse—and in the only suit he had left, his Sabbath outfit—Chaim Zalman could be seen standing in front of an improvised cabin, his new temporary warehouse. Inside were sacks of flour and cereal. That is how he started anew.

Though everything of a material nature had been destroyed, the fire could not destroy his good name, and gradually he was able to re-establish himself.

A wealthy man from Visoko-Litovsk, Moishe Pinchuk, had some money to invest. He and Chaim Zalman leased a flour mill in Techinitz, seven miles from Brest. At that time there were no automobiles, and the difficulty of traveling between the mill and the business office

was an extreme hardship on Chaim Zalman. The mill was built on a dam, the dam would often break and water would overflow the surrounding farms, necessitating damage payments to the farmers.

Sometimes the machinery in the mill would break down; occasionally the foreman, being drunk, would be careless and quantities of flour were completely spoiled. But Chaim Zalman's boundless energy and his great capacity for hard work overcame all these difficulties. His business prospered. He reorganized the mill, installed new machinery, and the mill ran without interruption 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The actual proprietor of the mill, the *puritz* (wealthy landowner), becoming aware of the improvements which had been made in the mill and knowing that the business was growing, tried in every way to break the lease. This put Chaim Zalman in a very precarious position but he eventually emerged from this predicament through a clever maneuver.

He bought a piece of land near the railway station in Brest, on a main highway over which all the commercial vehicles from the surrounding towns had to pass. From a well-known architect he ordered a blueprint of a large, modern flour mill, to be equipped with all the latest innovations and machinery. Through various channels, Chaim Zalman saw to it that the mill owner heard of the huge mill to be erected near the station where the wagons with wheat could come directly and where the farmers bringing their wheat and other grains to town for sale would pass. The farmers would be happy to sell to the new mill and not have to go further into the town. Also, the machinery in the new mill was to be of the latest type which would produce flour of a superior quality. Thus, the old-fashioned mill in Techinitz would become obsolete.

As expected, the owner of the mill learned about the project. He became panicky and made efforts to ascertain just how far along the project really was. Unable to obtain any definite information, one day he swallowed his pride and came to Chaim Zalman's office and said straight out: "I hear you are going to build a new mill. Is that true?"

Chaim Zalman, instead of answering him, walked to his bookcase and took out a large, rolled-up blueprint. It showed a four-story, modern building of brick and glass, with circular doors, interesting ornamental design and, on the top of the building, a huge sign which read: Power Mill—Wolsky & Pinchuk. The mill owner took the second

part of the blueprint, which showed all the interior installations for each floor separately, with all the new machinery—the sorters, refiners, filters, and freight elevators. The owner was so dejected that he walked out of the office without saying good-bye.

Actually, Chaim Zalman had no money with which to build a new mill but his clever idea had worked. Two weeks later he was given a ten-year lease under conditions stipulated by him.

In 1914 the First World War broke out. Bakers and shopkeepers stopped paying their bills and Chaim Zalman, whose money was tied up in credit extended to these people, found himself without funds.

Since Brest-Litovsk was considered a fortress, the town soon became crowded with soldiers, ammunition, and barracks, and the population was fearful of bombs, land mines, and explosions. Women and children were evacuated from the town. But the actual fighting front was still far from Brest and gradually life became normal again—for a time.

Chaim Zalman directed his business activities to another field. In Warsaw there was a shortage of food. But since sending flour from Brest was forbidden by the military authorities, Chaim Zalman bought wagonloads of flour in the Ukraine and sent them directly to Warsaw. This was allowed and resulted in a prosperous and remunerative enterprise. He sent his second son, Miron, to the Ukraine to supervise this transaction. Not able to return, Miron remained in Russia, where he was accepted in the University Medical School.

In July 1915, the civilian population of Brest was given three days to leave town. All the supplies of flour, the living quarters, and all the furnishings, were left behind. With little baggage Chaim Zalman and his family left for Pinsk.

By this time Pinsk was full of refugees from various surrounding areas as the Germans advanced. In a few days, Chaim Zalman was lucky enough to find two small rooms where the whole family of nine persons settled. (The oldest son, Moise-Lucien, was studying in France and the second one, Miron in Russia.) Two months later the Germans occupied Brest and Pinsk and Chaim Zalman decided to go back to Brest. Transportation facilities for civilians were prohibited, so with several other families, Chaim Zalman bought three horses and wagons, and piled up the wagons with the remains of the family pos-

sessions and the children and they all started on their trek back to Brest.

The journey was a hazardous one. The main roads were filled with soldiers and the families had to travel through small side roads which were full of sand and mud. On these roads they met German soldiers who took away the good horses and replaced them with one blind horse, a lame horse, and a pony. Chaim Zalman and the other family heads would get out of the wagon from time to time on the journey and push the wagons to assist the horses. Covering 200 miles took two weeks.

Along the journey Chaim Zalman got word that no civilians are allowed to go back to Brest. He decided to stop in Kobryn, the nearest town to Brest.

It was fall. It drizzled constantly during the day and the nights were cold. Drenched to the skin with sniffles and colds, the family at last arrived in Kobryn.

For three years Chaim Zalman and his family remained there. It was still war time and there was no way of doing business. He spent his time studying the Talmud and with the Committee for Refugees from Brest, of which he was elected president. But this was not enough to exhaust all his energies. He suffered intensely because of this and became nervous and apathetic. The family became worried about his health.

Finally, the Armistice was signed and Chaim Zalman and his family went back to Brest. As if in a cemetery, he walked from one clump of debris to another. Here was the flour mill in Techinitz with all its machinery reduced to molten metal. Here was his former dwelling, completely razed and practically unrecognizable. Here was his warehouse, of which only broken bricks and stones remained, and his apartment, of which only the shell was standing. That was all that remained of the many years of labor—a whole life. The anguish and shock were so horrible that Chaim Zalman became a physical wreck. He did not listen to the advice of his doctor, saying, "No doctor or medicine will help me. The only thing that can help me is to rebuild my business so that I can be occupied and use up my energies and again be able to make a living for my family." But at this point it all seemed like a Utopian dream. First, it was impossible to obtain construction material or machinery, and even when they were available there was not enough money to pay for them.

But willpower and determination can often overcome obstacles. Chaim Zalman started to buy bricks from destroyed buildings. Manpower was cheap so he got people to clean the bricks and bring them to the site of his ruined property. In the surrounding villages he found some lumber and in a small town not far from Brest, millstones. At a railroad station he bought a small steam engine. In the spring of 1919, from among the ashes and stones of the burned-out buildings, there started to emerge a new building. Full of hope, Chaim Zalman was starting again "from scratch." By the end of the summer, one could see smoke emerging from the metal chimney and hear the sound of activity and people working again. Gradually the smoke became heavier, the machine sounds noisier, and the millstones started to grind out the first bushels of wheat.

Chaim Zalman was ecstatically happy—his dream had been realized! He stood surrounded by his joyful wife and children who once again saw him full of energy. It is true he had achieved his goal, but he still had many obstacles to overcome. The machinery was old and in need of repair as well as replacement parts, which were almost impossible to obtain. It was also hard to find experienced workers and it took him a full year of effort and hard work, with aggravation, before he succeeded in putting everything in order and in securing the necessary experienced personnel.

At that time the war between Russia and Poland broke out and in the fall of 1920 the Red Army occupied Brest. Chaim Zalman was happy to see the anti-Semitic Polish Army, which had given him a lot of trouble, leave town. From his apartment window he had one day seen Polish soldiers beat a Jewish man to death. Chaim Zalman himself had once been caught on the street by Polish soldiers. They had thrown him to the ground and attempted to cut off his beard. He grabbed his beard to protect it and thanks to his strength, the soldiers could not accomplish what they set out to do. But they did beat him and he returned home with swollen, half-closed eyes.

Before the Polish Army left Brest, they tried to put fire to Chaim Zalman's flour mill, break the machinery, and put kerosene on all the wheat. Only because Chaim Zalman paid them off heavily was he able to prevent them from carrying out their devilish plans.

When the Red Army took over Brest all this stopped, but the next day he was advised by the authorities that his flour mill and its com-

plete stock of wheat, flour, etc. no longer belonged to him but to them. He was told that he was responsible for seeing that nothing was spoiled or missing. Also, he had to deliver the whole stock only to the persons in possession of written authorization.

By this short notice, Chaim Zalman lost everything he had achieved with so much difficulty.

Six months later the Red Army left Brest and Chaim Zalman again became the owner of the flour mill. All the stock had been taken away but the machinery remained in its entirety and was in good working order.

Fortunately, all these drawbacks did not break his spirit nor lessen his energy. He started to improve the machinery, add some new machines and change the steam engines to diesel motors. He also built an apartment house near his factory. But he worked much too hard. He would stay at the factory from six in the morning until late at night. The family insisted that he rent out his factory as it was too hard for him to carry on, but his answer always was, "I must work to use up my energy. If I don't, I will go to pieces."

He carried on at this pace until 1936, when he decided to rent out the mill. But by then it was under much less attractive conditions than he had been previously offered. He explained his action: "When you are in business you must take credit and give credit. All my life my goal was to keep ahead of my creditors and pay my bills on time. Many times in my life I was ruined. People owed me thousands of rubles but despite that I always paid my creditors in full. I am now 68 years old and I am beginning to feel tired. If something happens to me and my creditors will not pay their bills, who will pay my debts? I don't like to leave this world and owe anyone anything. That is why I decided to rent out the mill, so that I will be able to liquidate my business and pay off all my debts."

Chaim Zalman retired and spent his days in social work and in studying the Talmud.

In September 1939 World War II broke out. Chaim Zalman and his family left Brest and went to Vasilkof, a small town near Bialystock. The Germans occupied this town and from then on we were unable to obtain any information as to what happened to him and his family.

My Mother, Libe Priluk Wolsky

Libe Wolsky was born in Trestenitche, county of Brest-Litovsk. Her father, Israel Priluk, was a descendent of the famous Saul Whal, who had been King of Poland for one night. Mr. Priluk was a scholar and author of religious books.

When Libe was eight years old, her mother died. Being the eldest of the children, she became the mother of her younger sister and two brothers. Though only a child, she fulfilled her duties like a grown-up.

Her father remarried and his second wife bore him two daughters. Libe had to care for these two children also, and on top of it, had to listen to her step-mother's constant complaints. She swallowed everything very quietly and never complained.

Libe was 17 when she married Chaim Zalman Wolsky. She bore him 11 children. Two died of childhood diseases, but nine were reared by her with a great deal of loving care.

She was very energetic. In addition to the heavy task of caring for such a large family, she helped her husband in business, and at the same time she was a mother to her two brothers and sister until they married and were on their own.

Libe was of medium height, well-built, and very beautiful, with natural coloring, black hair, and vivacious bright eyes. She was always groomed according to the latest fashion and in perfect taste.

The entire family always turned to her for advice. They appreciated her intelligence and know-how. Whenever there was a marriage in the offing within the family circle, Libe had to look over the prospective bride, to see if she passed muster. Whoever had to furnish his home went to Libe for expert advice. Whoever needed a dress or coat asked Libe to make the choice.

She was good-natured and very devoted to the whole family: when her grandmother fell sick, she took her into her home; when her brother was ready for marriage, she set him up in business to make him a more attractive suitor; when her uncle was unsuccessful in business, she gave him a position in her own business; for years after her sister

was widowed, she took care of her needs and those of her four children; and she helped all the needy very generously.

In those times, between 1890 and 1910, hygiene was unknown, and sickness was healed by grandmother's medicines; a thorough house cleaning was done once a year for Passover, a bath was taken only for religious—and not for hygienic—purposes; malaria was cured by throwing a stone into water; an ulcer was healed by conjuration; a toothache was healed with a heated iron plate enveloped in a towel; a broken arm or leg was healed by a knacker, and when the sick person was unable to move, a pseudo-doctor (a *felsher*) was called in.

In this period Libe bore and brought up her children, and it is amazing that she had such a natural instinct for hygiene and modern education. Cleanliness was almost a mania as far as she was concerned. Her house was spotless, the floors were often washed, even under the beds. The children were always well scrubbed and neatly dressed.

There was even a bathtub in the house. It was made of tin, wide on one side and narrow on the other. On the narrow side was a small stove heated by charcoal, like a samovar. Heating the water for a bath then was more difficult than operating a plant employing 10,000 workers is today. The procedure took a couple of hours: charcoal was put in the stove, kerosene was poured on top of the charcoal, and the fire lit through a small door in front of the stove. Sometimes the flame appeared outside the stove and literally licked up the droplets of kerosene that had spattered the stove. After the flame, heavy smoke developed, and only when the smoke thinned out was it known whether the operation had been successful or if it had to be started anew. In rainy or windy weather, the draft was bad and the same procedure had to be repeated twice or even three times. When the charcoal finally started to burn, the job was not yet finished. The pipe leading from the stove to the chimney had to be taken off and a carpet beater, used for the bedclothes, was moved back and forth to produce a draft. (Instead of the carpet beater a boot could be used by upending it and moving it up and down to produce a draft.) While doing this, smoke and dust spread all over the room. Every 15 minutes the grate had to be scraped with an iron bar, so that the ashes fell down and permitted the coal to start glowing. The bathtub was covered with a quilted blanket, like a child trembling with fever, in order to prevent the water from cooling.

All week long the bathtub and accessories were stored in the attic. Every Thursday morning it was brought down and washed. Water was brought from the river Muchawetz in barrels by horse and wagon, and when the water carrier arrived at the house he poured the water directly into the bathtub. He always got into an argument with the maid, because he was careless and wet the floor. In the evening, the operation of warming the water started. A band of children would stand around, impatiently awaiting their turn to get into the bathtub and splash in the water. But before being admitted to the bathtub, we had to endure a thorough operation: Libe brought a tureen of warm water, turned up the sleeves and without pity started to rub and scrub heads, ears, and necks. Screaming and shrieking were heard all over the street.

In addition to cleanliness, Libe taught her children to sleep on a low pillow, not to be heavily covered, not to use scarves around their necks in winter time and not to be afraid of drafts.

She also took an active part in the moral development and education of the children, except regarding religious schools and education, which were the domain of our father. But together with her husband she saw to it that we learned Hebrew, Russian, and general science. The girls were taught by her to cook, bake, do the laundry, and scrub the floors.

Libe was full of life and always ready for a joke or a proverb. When the children grew up and brought home their friends, boys and girls alike, she took part in their conversations and discussions with such youthful élan that nobody could believe that she was the mother.

She spent a lot of energy on the household. When the family increased it was necessary to move to larger quarters and to change the furniture accordingly. This was not an easy job, because Libe had very discriminating taste. Not everything was to her liking, not everything was stylish enough for her. After spending a lot of energy and work, she succeeded in furnishing a nine-room apartment, hoping for a temporary respite. But this was not to be.

The landlord, Jossem the dentist, made an opening in the wall supporting the foundation of the second floor, where the apartment was located. He did so without an architect, and in the middle of one night, when everybody was asleep, the wall collapsed and the floors of two rooms and everything in them collapsed. The shock was so great that

all the windows shattered, and the neighbors got up in panic. My parents jumped off their bed and tumbled down through the hole. Libe had injuries on her head and all over her body. She felt blood trickling from various wounds, but retained her consciousness, thinking of her children, yelling to them not to make a move, because it was dangerous.

Police and firemen arrived, and with ladder and rope they rescued my mother, father, and my brother Miron. All were wounded, but Libe worst of all. She was in bed for six weeks. All newspapers wrote about the accident; even the *Forward* in New York gave the news under the headline, "Jews Under a Collapsed House."

As soon as Libe recovered a little, she started worrying about her home and furniture, which was destroyed, more than about her wounds. She worried needlessly—she found a very nice apartment on Nievsky Boulevard, with a balcony and view of the Boulevard. In Warsaw she bought new, modern furniture and a new form of kerosene lamp, where the flame had a blue glow, like an electric lamp. (Electricity was to be found only at the railroad station and the fortress.)

We children brought our friends to admire the special lamp, which was "imported" from Warsaw. Libe invited the whole family and friends, and she was delighted when the guests admired her purchases.

My mother was very religious and at the same time mundane. In this respect, more than once she had her internal battles. The bad angel wrestled with the guardian angel, but she always found a compromise.

She wanted her children to be well educated but at the same time she was afraid that they would lose their religious feelings. So although she sent the children to the regular state and private schools, she requested that the boys pray before leaving for school and attend religious courses after school She also requested that they make friends only with children from homes which had the same atmosphere as theirs.

Libe was fond of theater and movies, but since there were often scenes which, according to her principles, were improper, she went rarely and only chose shows of historical or Jewish background.

Being religious, she had to wear a wig, but she preferred showing her own hair. So she wore the wig and covered it with her hair. She did it so well that it was hard to see that she was wearing a wig underneath.

In other dilemmas she always managed to find a favorable expedient. For example, she was envious of her husband's learning the Talmud every day for two hours. She was not envious that he spent two hours with dry books, but of the reward he was to get in heaven for this. So she told her husband: "We are doing everything together. Everything we have belongs to both of us. We are partners in everything, and I would also like to be your partner in heaven. You should promise me 50 percent of your reward, and I will share with you my reward there." Her husband, who loved her dearly and never denied her anything, accepted the deal immediately. He was very pleased with this arrangement. Why should he sit in one place and his wife in another? It was much better that both of them would pass through hell (every human being was committing some sins) and live together in heaven. They shook hands, and the deal was closed.

It is really amazing that a woman brought up in a small town, who was always working and had no time for studies or even for reading books, should have such wisdom, good taste, knowledge, and common sense.

Brest-Litovsk was too small a town for her natural intellect and eagerness to see and know everything. Therefore she traveled often to Warsaw and came back refreshed, more courageous and morally satisfied. She went three times to Paris and each time stayed for a prolonged period. Her sojourn there was used to the maximum. She did not lose one single moment. She had to see everything: museums, monuments, theaters, movies, music-halls, opera, and why miss out on the department stores, where so many nice things could be found? It was an art to find how not to spend much and at the same time get a good bargain. She always left Paris physically exhausted but happy and full of life.

Libe gave much of her time to charity organizations, becoming very active in the women's society, Beth Jacob School for Girls, the Old Age Home, and Orphanage. Everywhere she was well liked. Everywhere she brought life and gaiety. In the orphange she fondled the children and showed them motherly love. In the old age home she had a joke for everyone, a nice word, a story, or a piece of wisdom. In the organizations she always visited the kitchen to see whether it was sufficiently clean and whether food was nutritious enough. The cook, anxious

to show her efficiency, would offer Libe a plate of soup and say: "Dear Libe, isn't this a treat, a dish worthy of kings, only to eat on weddings and banquets? The old people here don't deserve it; eat please, do me a favor."

Libe would taste the soup, slightly, give her opinion about it and push the plate away. In order not to hurt the cook, she would say, "When after my death I will arrive at the great beyond and be asked: 'You worked for charity organizations, very nice. But did you get something from them?' I will be able, in good conscience, to say 'no.' But if I eat this soup, which belongs to the organization, I will not be able to say so."

She suffered very much when her grown-up children moved far away. She used to say, "So much work, energy, and cost spent to raise and educate the children, and when, thanks God, they are grown up, healthy, well educated and capable, and I could enjoy them, they are scattered over various towns and countries. And for me the most important person now is the mailman, and the biggest joy a letter from them."

When the youngest daughter, Beila, married and settled in Brest, she was overjoyed. But this happiness was short-lived. The Second World War broke out. Brest was occupied first by the Red Army, then by the Nazis, and my mother and Beila shared the sufferings and death of the six million Jewish martyrs.

Gitel Lew

My sister Gitel, the daughter of Chaim Zalman and Libe Wolsky, was born in Brest-Litovsk in 1900. Being the first girl after three sons, she was a welcome guest to our parents. She was treated with more tenderness than the boys, and she took advantage of it. She expected attention from everybody and was proud of being an only daughter.

She resented her brothers very much, because we refused to play with her, and she objected to her not being able to do the same things as we did. When mother gave birth to a second daughter, Feigel, her pride lessened somewhat, but she still remained the favorite.

At the age of eight, Gitel entered school. She was a good pupil and finished school with great success. She learned how to read and write Yiddish, as well as Jewish tradition and history.

Gitel was very beautiful, tall and slim, and had blond curls, blue eyes, regular and fine features; she was an intelligent, gay, good girl, devoted to the whole family. It was no wonder that a very attractive young man, Fishel Lew, fell in love with her. They married in 1919 and moved to Bialystock where Gitel led an interesting life.

Ten years later her husband's business deteriorated. She then learned the trade of making girdles and bras, to enable her to give her two children the best possible education and supply all the needs for their physical and spiritual development.

Her love for our parents was infinite. She and her family went to Brest to spend every holiday with them and between holidays her mother had to visit her.

In 1937 she made a pleasure trip to Paris. The city enchanted her, and she decided to send her daughter to study in Paris two years later, after she would have finished high school. But this was never to happen. The Second World War broke out and after that nothing was ever heard from either her or her family.

Fishel Lew

Fishel Lew, Gitel Wolsky's husband, was born in Bialystock in 1897. His father was a manufacturer of blankets and one of the leaders of the Zionist organization in that town. Fishel had a Jewish education and went at the same time to the commercial school, from which he graduated with honors, receiving a golden medal. Afterwards he went to France to study medicine. When World War I broke out, Fishel was on vacation in Bialystock and could not return to France. When the Germans occupied Bialystock, he left for Kobryn, to join his grandfather. There he met Gitel Wolsky (who had taken refuge there) and married her in 1919.

After the wedding he joined his father's business. When the blanket business deteriorated, he became the executive secretary of the Jewish

Community in Bialystock. He was very popular among friends and acquaintances and led a happy and interesting life.

Beila Lew

Beila Lew, daughter of Gitel Wolsky and Fishel Lew, was born in Bialystock in 1920. She was of middle height, blond, with blue eyes and beautiful features.

She was a good pupil and fond of sports, and dreamed of going to Paris, to continue her studies.

David Lew

David Lew, son of Gitel and Fishel Lew, was born in Bialystock in 1923. He was bright and full of life, but was not too eager to study. Nevertheless, he was a good pupil, and when the second World War broke out, he had almost graduated from the Hebrew high school in Bialystock.

Feigel Friedman

Feigel, the Wolskys' second daughter, was born in Brest-Litovsk in 1905.

She was short and had a round face, black eyes and hair, and very beautiful. She was a mixture of two contrasting characters: she was quiet and reserved, but from time to time she was a fighter. An assiduous and calm student, at the same time she instigated a protest strike of the students against the teachers. She was the most obedient of all children, but at the same time she did not always follow the instructions or advice of her parents.

Feigel's favorite company was formed by teachers, writers, and poets.

She married Pinchas Friedman and lived in Lutzk. There she devoted her whole time to being a housewife and mother to her two children and to leading a happy family life.

In 1940, when the Red Army took over Lutzk, Feigel's husband was deported to Siberia, along with the other wealthy citizens of Lutzk.

Feigel and her children joined her parents, who at that time fled from Brest to Wasilkov, near Bialystock. She was in a desperate position: no news whatsoever from her husband, no home, living in a small apartment with her parents, who were refugees themselves, in a tiny town, always afraid of the tomorrow.

Pinchas Friedman

Pinchas Friedman, Feigel's husband, was born in Lutzk, in 1900, the son of a distinguished and rich family in Lutzk. He enjoyed a Jewish and general education. After finishing high school in Lutzk, he went to France to study chemistry, but when his father died he had to return to Lutzk, where he and his brothers took over his father's business.

Pinchas was of nice character and devoted to his wife, as well as to her family. He took an active part in everything concerning the Wolskys, be it business or family matters as if he were a son. He was a Zionist and went to Palestine and bought land, hoping to settle there. The occupation of Lutzk by the Red Army brought an end to his plans and hopes. His property was confiscated, he was deported to Siberia, and he succumbed to the inhuman conditions of work and slavery there.

Jankele Friedman

Jankele Friedman, Feigel's son, was born in Lutzk, in 1928. His poor health caused his parents a lot of worries. He had all the childhood diseases and was always among the first ones to catch any epidemic sickness which appeared in Lutzk. But thanks to the wonderful care by his mother, he grew up to be a healthy and strong young man. Jankele was a good student and he was a joy to his parents.

Rachele Friedman

Rachele, Feigel's daughter, was born in Lutzk in 1935. She was a healthy child and her upbringing was easy. Her parents were most happy with her. Their happiness was not of long duration. When Rachele was five, World War II broke out, and the child perished with her mother.

Beila Leshner

Beila, the youngest Wolsky child, was born in Brest-Litovsk in 1910. She fit her role as the baby in the family very well. She asked for more attention than any of the other children, she had to be privileged. She was endowed with special charm and beauty, which helped her get everything she wanted. She was not too excited about studying, but she was very capable and graduated successfully without trying too hard.

Beila won a few beauty contests and was very popular with the boys. She was eager to accept the compliments of her escorts, but she decided in favor of Israel Leshner, a student in medicine and a young man who had every quality.

The first few years of her married life were hard until Israel received his medical degree and started practicing medicine at the Brest Hospital. The Wolskys were delighted with the young couple, the only children who remained with them in Brest. This was the only consolation in their grief that the other children were spread all over Europe.

Beila's husband started making a nice living, a child was born to them, and they had a happy and joyful life. But their happiness was for a short time only.

Israel Leshner

Israel, Beila Wolsky's husband, was born in 1908 in Lutzk.

He lost his parents when he was a young boy, but relatives helped him through school. He graduated successfully from high school and

was accepted by the School of Medicine at the University of Wilna, a particularly noted achievement because the school accepted few Jews. While a student, he took an active part in the Zionist movement.

After he married Beila Wolsky, the young couple moved to Wilna, where he continued his studies. A few years later he received his degree and moved to Brest. He was happy to live near the Wolskys, who replaced his parents.

Israel became a doctor at the Brest Hospital. A bright future lay before him, because of his great capacities and energy. But he was denied the fulfillment of his future, because of the world tragedy in which he lost his life.

Gitele Leshner

Gitele Leshner, the only child of Beila Wolsky, was born in 1939. A pretty, well-developed child, she was a pride to the parents and a joy to the Wolskys.

Nothing stopped the Nazi murderers in taking the life of such a young, innocent baby. Among the thousands of baby shoes found near the crematories of Treblinka and Auschwitz, there are certainly the shoes of baby Gitele.

After the War ended, I wrote to the City Administration in Vasilkof and inquired as to what happened to the family Wolsky. I received the following answer: "They were taken away by the Germans, together with all the other Jews of that town—destination unknown."

I also wrote to the Central Committee of Polish Jews in Warsaw asking them to locate my parents and the families of Fishel Lew, Pinchas Friedman and Dr. Israel Leshner. I received from the committee an address of a Fishel Lew, but no record of the others. I wrote to Fishel Lew in Wroclaw, Poland and in his answer he gave me the names of his parents, place of birth and age, to ascertain whether or not he was my brother-in-law, but unfortunately he wasn't.

In 1958, I made a special trip to Bialystock to find somebody who could give me any information about my family. There were few residents who had been there before the war, and only a small Jewish community. The chairman organized a special meeting for me. Some

people knew the family Lew, but had no information on what had happened to them.

I went to the cemetery in the ghetto, looking for some monument, some names. Nothing, only graves and one monument for all, that told the story of the revolt, the courage, dignity, and heroism of innocent human beings who perished by the German machine guns.

I looked at the monument and asked myself whether someone from my family was in this cemetery, but had no answer. Very depressed, I bowed my head before the graves and left.

We bow our heads before the graves,
We swear before tombs, the sky and stars for all the martyrs,
for their innocent souls, for all children and babies, to take revenge.
—part of a Ghetto song

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My Brother Lucien (Moise-Leizer)

Lucien was born in Brest in 1889. Being the first child, and a boy, he was a welcome guest to my parents. Although he remained their favorite always, Lucien didn't take advantage of this and the other children respected him.

When he was five years old he was sent to a *cheder* (a private Hebrew school) with 15 to 20 children. At the age of eight he was transferred to a *cheder* with eight children, and at twelve to a smaller *cheder* for four. After his bar mitzvah he went to three private teachers for Talmud and religion, to learn the Hebrew and Russian languages and other subjects. In 1906 a *gimnazium* (high school) was opened in Brest where Lucien registered and passed the examinations admirably. This was a shock to our parents.

Thanks to the intelligent handling of the situation by our mother, and her exceptional tact, our father finally changed his mind somewhat. A compromise was reached: Lucien would go to the *gimnazium* but he would have to change his clothes going to and from school for the sight of the *gimnazium* uniform was an offense to our parents and, of course, he wouldn't attend classes on Saturday. Moreover, after school every day he would have to spend several hours on his Jewish education. Lucien was a top student and graduated with a gold medal.

According to the quota, only 5 of every 100 students could be Jewish in the Russian universities. On the day of the entrance examinations Jewish candidates were not allowed to spend the night in town. Lucien spent the night at a relative's home in St. Petersburg nearby, got to the university early the next morning for the exam, passed it brilliantly, and was admitted. However, the climate for Jewish students being what it was, he left for France and was accepted at the University of Nancy. In 1915 he received his degree of electrical engineer as the best student of his class.

Every two weeks for three years we got letters from him. He was homesick and we sent him the local weekly paper regularly. Once a month I described, in Hebrew, life in Brest. Lucien corrected my Hebrew and sent it back to me. This was his idea and I had promised before his departure to do it.

The First World War broke out in 1914 and we didn't get any news from him for four years. After the Armistice we received his first letter telling us that after his graduation he became employed as an engineer at the General Electric Company of Nancy. In his following letters he described events and episodes of the four war years.

In 1919 he moved to Paris and got a position as chief engineer for designing, construction, and testing of electrical motors for industrial application at the Electro-Mechanic Company of Montreuil (Seine).

When I arrived in Paris in 1921, Lucien introduced me to his fiancée, Sophie-Sonia Kroupitzki, and a year later I was the only member of our family present at their wedding.

When I graduated as an electrical engineer, my father suggested that Lucien leave his job, that he and I start our own business, and he offered to help us with money. In 1927 Lucien resigned from his job and we opened a shop under the name Constructions Electriques de Paris. We bought used electrical motors, reconditioned them, and sold them as second hand. The shop was without windows, scarce light, and air came in from the office in front of the shop. Lucien was the "outside man," traveling in his small old-fashioned car (a real antique). When the motor stopped, he had to leave the car and ignite it by a crank. Buying and selling motors and taking care of the finances wasn't an easy job.

The income from the business was insufficient to support two families, and in 1933 I sold my share in the business. The buyer invested additional capital and Lucien continued in the business until 1938.

In 1939 he became chief engineer at the Manufactory Jacquet, which designed electrical motors, dynamos, and generators.

World War II erupted, and the Germans advanced. His wife Sonia, being executive secretary of the Radical Socialist Parliamentary Group at the Chamber of Deputies, left for Tours with their daughter, as did all the Parliament members. After Tours was bombed, the government went on to Bordeaux. Lucien was not able to go with them because his factory worked for the war and he wasn't authorized to leave.

When the Germans were about to occupy the city, Lucien left the factory, but no transportation facilities were available. He attached the factory documents which he felt could be of use to the Germans to a bicycle and walked out dragging his bicycle with him. Lucien was one of tens of thousands who left Paris that day by car, truck, horse and wagon, or carriage. At night, the cortege was able to proceed slowly undisturbed, but in the early morning German planes would machine-gun the crowds on the roads. People hid in the bushes, the forest, and the fields. Many were killed and their cars and wagons abandoned on

the roadsides. Once, near a tree, Lucien found an old Jewish prayer-book; another time in the grass, a student's notes. He kept both. Tradition and learning were very close to him. After two days of walking, Lucien found a farm where he was allowed to stay for the night. Using different means of transportation, walking most of the time, he reached Lyon eleven days later.

He was told that many families had been separated by the war and that some people were sending letters to different cities to the people they were looking for, in care of General Delivery. Others were advertising in the newspapers. Lucien went to the Post Office, which was overcrowded, and there he found a letter from Sonia. The family was reunited in Vic-en-Bigorre and decided to go to the United States. But getting a visa was a long procedure and it was impossible to find a job in this small town.

I, with my family, were in Marseilles, and Lucien joined us there, where he learned that in Perigueux, near Toulouse, there was a vocational school of the Organisation for Rehabilitation through Training (ORT), and also that 18,000 refugees had been placed in camps at Gurs and Drancy in the free zone.

Lucien immediately got the idea to collect the young and capable refugees from these detention camps and to place them in ORT schools to learn a trade. The headquarters of ORT were in Marseilles and Lucien presented the idea to the president of ORT, Mr. Bramson. ORT was very much interested in the idea, but it took them three months to persuade the Vichy government how important for France it would be to train young workers who would be scarce after the war. In this way, many were taken out of the detention camps. Lucien returned to his family and they moved to Toulouse. He again came to Marseilles to work out with ORT officials the facilities and program for the new students from the camps. He then went to Perigueux to make the facilities ready to receive the first group freed from detention. Lucien became the director of the school.

Uncle Morris Wolsk issued an affidavit for Lucien's family and Sonia's mother, Mrs. Kroupitzki. Isidore Wolsk and Sonia's friends succeeded in obtaining for them a nonquota visa.

On February 27, 1942, the Wolskys and Mrs. Kroupitzki sailed on a French boat for Casablanca. There they were placed in a camp for

eight days until the Portuguese ship *Serpa Pinto* arrived to take the emigrants from Casablanca to New York.

Lucien at the time didn't speak English. When he showed his address to a policeman and asked him how to get there, the policeman told him, "Du binst kraink zu redn Yiddish" (It is shameful of you to talk Yiddish), and he realized that until he knew English he would not be able to get a job as an engineer. He looked for a job in a Jewish shop. There, he had to conceal that he was an engineer or a specialist, since the owner would never accept somebody with more technical education than he had. Some of the Jewish owners of small factories or shops, when they hired a newcomer, considered themselves benefactors who were helping a "refugee." In reality they exploited him, paying him less and asking him to do undesirable work.

Lucien accepted this kind of job, where he worked very hard, but never complained. He used to tell stories about the shop and his relationship with the owner with a humor that was very typical of him, for he was very observant of people. For a couple of years, he moved from shop to shop until he found a position as an engineer in a motor factory in Paterson, New Jersey.

Life became more comfortable. Sonia got a job at the United Nations, they moved from Brooklyn to a nice apartment in Manhattan, and Lucien got an important job at Eastern Air Devices. The company appreciated his knowledge and abilities, and from time to time they advanced his position. The company filled orders for secret jobs for the Army, and Lucien became their confidential technician for these jobs. The company later moved to New Hampshire, and prepared an apartment for Lucien and his family, but Sonia didn't wish to leave her job at the United Nations. Lucien used the apartment alone, and for weekends he came to his family in New York.

Lucien was proud of his achievements with ORT in France, when he helped to liberate young people from camps and taught them a trade so that they could become useful members of society. When World War II was over, Lucien wanted to leave his job and go to Europe to organize vocational training schools for the young people who had survived the Nazi death camps. His family was against this plan, which would separate them.

His experience in design and construction of electrical motors was

without equal—from a motor to move tremendous weights day and night for the subway to a miniature motor an inch long and half an inch high to be used in spaceships. When he reached his retirement, the company refused to let him go.

One day, he decided to quit his job. When asked why, he explained: "Since I organized the vocational school in Perigueux, I fell in love with ORT and have been in contact with them all these years. They asked me to organize for them in Switzerland, where their headquarters have been located since the war, a school to train instructors of the vocational schools; my salary will be half of my present one at Eastern Air Devices, but here I am working on secret inventions for war materials, such as missiles or other sophisticated gear to kill people, and in ORT my job will help young people to improve their skills and also their standard of living. I would like to do something for my people."

His company presented attractive offers to him and gave him a one year's leave of absence. They organized an elaborate farewell party and presented him with a silver plate on which was engraved, "We hope to have you back." From the president of the company to the cleaning women, his coworkers didn't say "goodbye," but rather "we hope to welcome you on your return." He didn't return.

Sonia retired from the United Nations, and they moved to Geneva. Lucien organized an ORT school to train instructors for their schools at Asnières, near Geneva. After a couple of years, when everything in the school was organized and running smoothly, Lucien appointed someone else to replace him and worked on organizing educational tours for the foremen of the industrial enterprises in the kibbutzim and various factories in Israel to visit factories in England, Scotland, Belgium, Holland, and France, and to practice for two or more weeks in one place. It was an excellent idea, but a task that proved very difficult and complicated to carry out. First, he had to get leading factories to accept a group of instructors from a foreign country to study their system of operation, a procedure that would disturb the regular run of production and take up time of the factory engineers, who would have to devote much attention to the group. Second, the schedule of all visits to be included in one trip had to be acceptable to all companies involved.

After eight months of hard work and many trips to different countries, the first group from Israel left for England, Holland, and Belgium. The trip was a tremendous success, and was repeated for five years afterward. Lucien and Sonia were invited to Israel, where they received a splendid reception and were showered with mementos and souvenirs from those who had participated in these educational tours and also former students from the school in Asnières.

Lucien's passion for designing and carrying out novel vocational training programs for young people knew no bounds. Europe was too limited for this, so he returned to New York. His son-in-law Sol Chaneles, a criminologist active in improving the life of prisoners, asked Lucien to help him resolve the problems connected with the need for job skills for young criminals in prison, something that they would be able to use after serving their terms.

Also, in those times the Jewish ultraorthodox youth in America studied the Talmud, but not a trade. Lucien organized for them different classes in the field of servicing computers, following the programs of a private college, where the students were examined and received their diplomas. These students, many of them family men, were capable and eager to learn; they were successfully employed and supporting their families. These programs were considered as exemplary by various government officials, and were duplicated in many parts of America.

In 1970, Lucien went to Geneva for a vacation. This was his last trip. He suffered a heart attack and died on July 11, 1970. At his funeral, representatives of the Jewish community, the central ORT organization, and the City Council were present, along with many friends, young and old.

On the occasion of his 70th birthday, I had written a letter to Lucien in Geneva.

October 16, 1959

Dear Lucien,

Birthday cards and gifts in America are important business activities, but in our home town people didn't know the birthdates of members of

their families. For girls, the day was best not recalled and for boys the date was useful only for bar mitzvahs and military service. The bar mitzvah date was recorded by the head of the family in the *Sidur* (the prayerbook). The exact birth date was not terribly important for military service: a date would be determined eventually, depending on circumstances. . . .

When Sonia told me that you will soon be 70 I was taken by surprise; it gave me a lot to think back on. Why? I'm not sure. But a film about your life unwound before my eyes: I saw our home in Brest-Litovsk, our father—tall, energetic, calm, with a determined look hiding his gentleness; our mother—vivacious, sprightly, intelligent, beautiful and reserved, both deeply religious and demanding of their children strict observance of Jewish laws and traditions. Though we—the new generation—had different ideas on the subject of religion, we respected their wishes and did everything we could to spare their feelings.

As the eldest, you had to shoulder the heavy burden of breaking the barriers of rooted traditions and to open the doors to modern civilization. You fulfilled this mission with tact and diplomacy, keeping to a minimum the disappointment of our parents. I recall, especially, two occasions on which you did this:

1. In secret you passed, brilliantly, the admissions examination to the Lyceum; in hiding, to school from home, you were able to wear the mandatory secular school uniform, with the help of a friend. And all the while you continued your Talmud studies by obtaining an exemption from Saturday courses at the Lyceum.

2. You made the decision to leave for Nancy—in France—to continue your studies. Today's generation would find it hard to imagine the difficulties this decision of yours had to overcome: (a) a son, 23, from a good family was expected to marry and not become a student; (b) the eldest son was expected to stay with his father and not leave the family roof; (c) Russia also had universities and with your gold medals for academic accomplishment you had been accepted in St. Petersburg University; (d) the few young people who went abroad to study went to Germany, close to home, where the language was so similar to Yiddish. But you chose a country whose language was that of diplomats and the high-born, and a city whose existence we didn't even know about.

Your departure fell like a blow on our parents and left a sense of emptiness in our home. But you succeeded in opening the door for others who followed you.

It's sad that not everyone followed your example. Those who stayed

behind might have been able to escape the awful atrocities and . . . the destruction.

On your seventieth birthday, in looking at the balance sheet of your life, you can take credit for the haven we found here, for those of us who have survived thanks to your courageous initiative.

You are celebrating your birthday far from your children, your closest relatives and friends, because instead of being satisfied with a life of quiet contemplation that is usually appropriate at the age of wisdom, you have renewed your work with youthful enthusiasm, unflagging courage and unlimited devotion. At 67 you left your adopted land and position voluntarily to go abroad with one goal in mind: to put your talents and experience at the disposal of your fellow men in unfortunate circumstances and to consecrate yourself to the creation of a cadre of teachers who would be capable of providing job training to those in need of skills in accordance with ORT's beautiful motto: "Help those in need to help themselves." Luba and our entire family join me in sending you our most affectionate wishes for your health, happiness and success, hoping that you will be able to continue to enjoy these blessings for many, many more years to come.

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Sophie-Sonia Kroupitzki Volski

My brother's wife Sonia was born in Lodz (Poland) in 1897. Her father, Pesach Kroupitzki, was a very wealthy textile merchant. Her mother, Sabina Jerusalimski, was the daughter of a well established Jewish family in Russia.

An only child, Sonia had a governess to train and instruct her, and when she became older, a private teacher came to the house to educate her. Even later, her parents didn't send her to school, but hired two tutors, one for languages (German and Russian) and the second for the other subjects. They followed the program of the *gimnazium* in the city, and at the end of the year she was examined at the *gimnazium.* At the beginning, the tutors praised Sonia for her ability and willingness to study, but later she stopped cooperating, and often her tutors resigned. Her Hebrew teacher had the same troubles. However, she was very able and easily passed her examinations.

Her grandparents, the Jerusalimskis, lived in Poltava (Russia). She often spent a couple of weeks at a time with them. Sonia also traveled with her parents to distant parts of Russia, and even, to foreign countries—Germany, Austria, Hungary, and so on—which she enjoyed very much.

One day, there were riots in Lodz, and a curfew was established. As Sonia and her mother looked out of the window, which was forbidden, a Kozack pointed his gun at the window and fired. Instinctively, Sonia's mother ducked, and pulled Sonia down, and the bullet struck the buffet. The political situation was not stable, neither was Mr. Kroupitzki's business, so he decided to emigrate to Paris.

In 1911, the Kroupitzki family arrived in Paris. Mr. Kroupitzki, a very energetic and intelligent person, started a wholesale fur business. Mrs. Kroupitzki, a fashionable and sophisticated lady, liked Paris very

much. Only Sonia did not like it. She spoke three languages, but French was not among them at that time. Unable to communicate with other children, she felt lonesome.

A teacher was hired. Sonia made progress in the French language, but had it in her mind to return to Russia and study at the *gimnazium,* a plan her parents opposed. After long discussions and arguments, Sonia promised her parents that she would bring back from Russia a diploma and a golden medal from the *gimnazium* if they allowed her to spend one year with her grandparents. Her parents, eager to give her a good education, finally gave in. Sonia returned from Russia one year later with a silver medal instead of a gold one, because she disliked geography.

Sonia considers the time she spent in Poltava among the best in her life; many of her schoolmates were very bright, dreaming about revolution and talking about revolutionaries as "heroes." She was reading many books, with no one to control them, and the love of her grandparents for her was without equal.

Upon her return, Sonia found Paris most attractive. It was the right place to satisfy her intellectual curiosity; the Louvre Museum, the Library of Ste. Geneviève, the Collège de France, where lectures on philosophy or Japanese poetry were free, and the like.

Sonia was accepted at the Lycée Fénelon and, in addition, she managed to enter the Municipal School for Industrial and Fashion Design. One day, the female director of the school came to see her parents and told them that Sonia should become a professional designer. She was very talented and could make a brilliant career if she gave up the Lycée. Her parents were flattered, thanked her politely, and promised to study the question but did not accept the idea.

In 1916, Sonia entered the University of Paris and among the many lectures she attended was a well-remembered sociology class given by Professor Durkheim. At the same time she studied at the Sorbonne for a degree in the humanities also took a degree in law at the Law School.

In 1920, Sonia met Lucien Volski and in 1922 they were married; I represented my parents at the wedding. Sonia polished up her Yiddish, which she had learned in Poltava at her grandparents' home. She mastered the traditional proverbs and folk humor, and went with Lucien for a trip to Brest to meet our family.

The family grew. A girl was born. The parents and grandparents were happy, as the child was beautiful and in perfect health. They named her Janine.

In 1928, Sonia became the secretary of Jacques Kayser, administrator of the Radical Socialist Party's group in the French Parliament. One year later, when Mr. Kayser resigned, Sonia was interviewed by Herriot, former prime minister and president of the Party. Herriot nominated her as executive secretary of the parliamentary group consisting at that time of nearly one hundred deputies, ninety senators, and many ministers. Their number changed often, because the government in France changed often. (There was a joke in my travel profession: "Why do the Americans go to Europe so often? To see the changing of the guard in London and the changing of the government in Paris.") I would need a calculator to figure out how many ministers Sonia was in contact with during her 12 years in the French Parliament. Her most pleasant cooperation was with Herriot, Daladier, Delbos, Campinchi, Chautemps, Elbel, Chichery, and Albert.

Fluent in four languages and a perfect translator, Sonia translated the documents of the Foreign Affairs Ministry in Russia and *The Dardanelles and the Channels* in two volumes from Russian to French.

When World War II broke out, the French Parliament, including the staff, moved to Tours, later to Bordeaux. (Lucien, having been drafted at his engineering job by the Army, was not allowed to leave.) When Laval became prime minister of the newly formed Vichy government after the Armistice, the Parliament was dissolved. Mr. Gaston Manent, former Assistant Secretary of Commerce, took Sonia and Janine to his car and offered to bring them to Vic-en-Bigorre (Hautes Pyrenées) where they would be able to stay with a friend of his. Janine insisted on joining my family in Mont de Marsan. It was dangerous to waste time. On the road, Mr. Manent told them that he had to go back home, but he could still bring them to his friend. If they preferred to go to Mont de Marsan, he would stop at the crossroads and would have to leave them there. This left them no choice, and they went with him to his friend. Sonia and Janine got a warm reception and received shelter and food until the arrival of Lucien and the departure of the family for Toulouse.

Sonia's first job in the United States was at the Office of War

Information, with the French Department; from there she went on to the United Nations, where she was an economic affairs officer until she reached the U. N. retirement age of sixty.

In 1959, she moved to Geneva, where Lucien organized an ORT school for instructors in Asnières, near Geneva. Sonia lives in Geneva to this day.

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My Brother Miron (Meir)

Miron was born in Brest in 1891. He was a merrymaking fellow, always playing wild tricks. My parents worried about him, but he enjoyed himself immensely. When there was a rumor that a child was stricken by a car, my mother always said, "I am sure it is my Meir." He didn't want to study, and when the teacher told him, "It is a sin to take money from your parents when you don't learn," he answered, "You are doing your job. I don't want to learn, it is not your fault." My father placed him in a *cheder* where the teachers were rigorous. One of them, Chaim Yosel, known as *der shmayser*, not only slapped the children but whipped them. He dramatized it. First he announced that the child would be whipped because. . . . Later he put two benches together, brought a pillow and the whip, asked the child to stretch out full length on the benches, and with a sadistic pleasure slowly counted the number of lashes he had decided upon for this child. Miron was often the attraction for this show.

Another of his teachers, Sholem Menashe, wasn't a sadist but he practiced flogging. He had two kinds of whips: a light one which he used frequently, and a heavy one with many cords which he called the "Queen" and used for wrongdoing. Miron was often a candidate for the "Queen." It reached the point where no teacher would accept Miron, and my father was compelled to send Miron to a relative in Kaminetz, a small town 200 miles from Brest.

Miron was very happy in Kaminetz. He saw a horse, he climbed it to ride; he saw a cow, he started to milk her; he saw a cage full of chickens, he opened the door and let the chickens go, or he opened the door of a stable and let the lambs and goats go free. The complaints against Miron grew and a delegation of the city's inhabitants came to our relative and asked him to send Miron back to Brest, which he did.

When Miron grew a little older, he became more settled, and my parents sent him to the Yeshiva Hopetz Chaim in Radin, near Vilno. He returned home one year later completely serious and eager to learn Russian and other subjects. A year after that, he was accepted in high school and three years later graduated with a silver medal.

In 1913, OSE (Organization to Protect the Health of the Jewish Population) opened an office in Brest, and Miron, one of the organizers and secretary, devoted most of his free time to it.

That same year he was called to the Army. Miron wore glasses, and with the help of a paid lobbyist he was exempted from military service.

In 1914 when World War I broke out, my father's business deteriorated and he directed his activities to another field. My father bought wagonloads of flour in the Ukraine and sent them directly to Warsaw where there was a shortage of food. To supervise these transactions, he sent Miron to Zitomir, in the Ukraine. In the meantime, Brest was occupied by the Germans and Miron was not able to return. For the next four years of the war, the family didn't have any information about him, or hear from him, which worried them greatly.

In September 1918, I went to Moscow and by chance Miron was there for a couple of days. Our unexpected encounter was dramatic and emotional. We spent all night telling each other all that had happened during the four years of war. Miron told me that when Russia was occupied by the Germans he had money left from the business and decided to continue with his education. He gathered

information about universities that still had openings, and went to Samara where he was admitted to its medical school. He liked the medical profession and planned to devote himself to the field of research when he graduated two years later. He promised to write often as soon as the mail service was re-established. This happened only two years later, when we received the first letter informing us that he had graduated as a medical doctor and continued to work in the research department of the university's laboratories. Regular correspondence was established between Miron and the family.

In 1925, Miron was sent by the university to Paris to study the progress made in medicine there. Lucien, Alexander, and I, who were then in Paris, met with him often and on his way back to Russia he spent a couple of days with our parents in Brest. This was Miron's first reunion with his parents and family after more than ten years, and unfortunately, the last one.

Correspondence with Russia was very slow, and the family's recollection of Miron and Alexander was very hazy. It was decided that I should go to Russia to see them. In December 1933, I went to Moscow. Miron came to Moscow at the same time, and the three of us spent a week together. He was then an assistant professor at the University of Kubishev and his scientific articles were published and reprinted in medical magazines. He was very happy in his situation.

From later correspondence with Miron we learned that in 1936, he was nominated professor of the Kubishev University, and he represented the University at medical conventions and congresses.

The Second World War put a stop to all communications with Miron for almost 20 years.

In 1956, when I was in Moscow, I tried to find somebody in the family. After a few days I located Alexander's daughter, Ludmila and learned that Miron was a professor at the University of Frunze, the capital of the Kirghiz Republic; that he was married, his wife being a doctor in the same field as his, and that they had no children. I learned that during the war, when Moscow was evacuated, Alexander, his wife, and children had lived with Miron, who was highly respected in the University and in the medical societies. He would often come to Moscow to attend conventions or lectures there, so Ludmila agreed to advise him that I was in Moscow and have him contact me. Two days

later I received a cable from Miron saying that he would call me the next day at 4 P.M. It was a bad connection and two days later I received a letter stating that because of illness, he could not come to Moscow at that time, but would meet me there the next time, and that I should write him as soon as I arrived in Moscow rather than to mail letters from a foreign country.

On the day of my arrival in Moscow, in 1959, I wrote him a letter. Miron was in Moscow when my letter, without the name and address of the sender, arrived at Frunze. Miron's wife, being very ethical, did not open the letter and mailed it to Alexander in Moscow. Alexander, living in a suburb of Moscow, put the letter in his pocket to give it to Miron when they met. No one realized that this letter was from me and that I was already in Moscow. Miron planned to leave a day later and called Alexander, who had no telephone at his home, at his office to ask if he had some mail for him. They met and only then found out that I was in Moscow. Miron called Intourist to get the name of my hotel.

I had not seen him for 26 years. He had aged and looked shorter. He found no drastic change in me and complimented Luba, whom he was meeting for the first time. He postponed his departure for a couple of days and spent most of the time with us talking about everybody and everything, especially how the thirteen members of our family perished at the hands of the Nazis. We decided to meet again on my next trip to Moscow.

When I arrived the next time, he had just recuperated from a cold. A year later, when I arrived, he was in the hospital with heart disease. I did not see him again. The government organized the funeral. His body lay in the University for 24 hours and many hundreds of people from all walks of life passed by to pay their respects.

In 1970, Luba and I traveled to Frunze and visited the University and the room named in Miron's memory, the library where his manuscripts, publications of his scientific work, and magazines containing his writings were preserved. We went to the cemetery to visit his grave, but he was not registered there. We were directed to an old Jewish cemetery, where there was also no registration. His wife was out of town and we went to the University for information. We were told that there was a cemetery for VIPs, which had already been closed, but they had succeeded in burying him there. The administrator of the cemetery

showed us the grave, encircled with an iron barrier. On the grave were fresh flowers, ordered and paid for by his wife, to be changed weekly. The monument was of black granite, and on it, engraved in gold, it said:

MIRON EFIMOWITCH WOLSKY
1891-1958

A notice had appeared in *Pravada* of Frunze on January 3, 1959:

M. E. Wolsky

The Ministry of Healthcare of the Kirghiz Government Medical Institute and the whole Medical Society of the Republic suffered a severe loss: on the night of December 30th to 31st, 1958, Miron Efimowitch Wolsky suddenly died in his 67th year. He was one of the oldest professors of the Kirghiz Government Medical Institute—also in charge of the chair of therapy of the faculty—a man of science honored by the Kirghiz SSR.

After graduation from the Medical School of Saratov University in 1920, he started to work at the therapeutic Clinic of Kubishev University. Since then, his activity has always been connected with educational scientific research and community work at the Universities of the USSR—until 1940 in Kubishev, from 1941 at the Kirghiz Medical School of the University.

Miron Efimowitch Wolsky did important work as the President of the Science Division at the Frunze City Council. As a scientist and therapeutist, Miron Efimowitch was famous in the USSR and abroad. He was a member of the Society of Therapeutists and at the same time President of the Society in the USSR.

M. E. Wolsky died while still full of strength and energy. He was an excellent clinician, an unusually erudite scientist and an outstanding organizer. Pitiless death tore away from our midst a great scientist and wonderful educator, a responsive physician and the teacher of many generations of physicians—among them some of the Kirghiz nationality. The workers of the Kirghiz Republic knew Wolsky as a popular physician, a modest and always available man and as a friend of his co-workers. The Government highly appreciated the activities of M. E. Wolsky and rewarded him with two decorations of the 'Red Banner' and with the order of the 'Acknowledgement of Esteem', two

medals and two honorary diplomas of the High Council of the Krighiz SSR.

The memory of Miron Efimowitch Wolsky will continue to live in the hearts of all who knew him.

—The Ministry of Healthcare of the
Kirghiz Republic

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My Sister Sara Wolsky Bystryn

Born the sixth child, Sara's early years were filled with feelings of being unwanted and unloved. These feelings were heightened when her mother became ill and Sara, along with her brother Alexander, was sent to live with their grandmother in the tiny, rural village of Zbraz.

The woman Sara loved was her grandmother. The woman Sara idolized was her mother. She adored and admired her for her exceptional intelligence and tact. However, she and Alexander could never bring themselves to call her Mother. Both children felt unwanted by their mother and suffered from the authoritarian attitude of their father. Sara handled the situation by submitting and Alexander by rebelling. He was about thirteen years old when he ran away to Russia, never to return.

When old enough to attend school, Sara regretfully left her grandmother to live with her parents in Brest-Litovsk. Life was difficult for a young woman growing up in this city. Girls from business or professional homes could not look forward to a higher education, careers, or even semi-skilled jobs, only to marriage, home responsibilities, and children. Though active with many girlfriends in school life and literary clubs, Sara spent much time helping her mother at home. She resolved when quite young that she would never marry a businessman, her father's ideal husband for her, regardless of how many university degrees he might have earned.

When Sara finished the *gimnazium,* she dreamed of going to Paris where her two brothers lived. She wanted a higher education and to learn a trade. Finally, her dream came true. She spent two years at the Sorbonne and learned a trade at the same time.

Through two sisters and a brother of Iser Bystryn, who lived in Brest-Litovsk, Sara was introduced to her future husband. Iser was living in Paris after having graduated first in his class with a diploma in engineering from the University of Caen, France.

Iser's father was a rabbi and Iser had been raised in an extremely orthodox family in Droitchin. He was a brilliant Talmudic student and at age seventeen had been ordained a rabbi. Though Iser revered Jewish traditions, he was not pious and longed to know the Western world and study its ideas. A book about Western thought was so rare in Droitchin that his heart would flutter wildly when he saw one. So, he ran away to Warsaw to study. He studied there under severe physical sacrifices, and suffered even hunger, but he was happy to study. He later left Warsaw to continue his studies in France.

In December 1930 Sara and Iser were married in Paris. It was a memorable year; that year marked the start of the great depression. When Iser asked his employer for two weeks off for the honeymoon, he was fired. The prospect of getting another job was almost hopeless. At the same time, the suit he had bought (the first complete suit he had ever owned) on the installment plan, was stolen even before the first payment had been made.

During the first year of World War II, Sara continued to live with Iser and their two young children, Denise and Jean Claude, in the Nazi-

occupied industrial Paris suburb of Colombes, where Iser worked for many years as Chef de Bureau d'Etudes in a firm which, over the years, patented many of his inventions. Since the Nazis had not yet begun to round up, imprison, or deport Jews, Iser hoped that he could continue at his job and the family life would remain stable. One day, when ordered to report to a police station, Iser was arrested and placed in the concentration camp Beaune-la-Rolande. He was among the first Jews arrested in Paris.

For many weeks Sara did not know of Iser's whereabouts. She spent days in Paris searching for him and had to leave her two young children alone in Colombes. Finally, she did locate him. She succeeded in developing a method for communicating secret messages to him and a plan of escape, and smuggled false identification papers in the hollowed-out portion of a heel on a pair of shoes. At last, after eleven long months in camp, the escape was realized.

Escape, however, did not mean immediate safety. He still had to cross the heavily patrolled zone between the Nazi-occupied and the so-called "free" zone, and had to avoid being taken into a camp on the other side.

With survival of her family uppermost in her mind, Sara took greater and greater risks to keep Iser hidden, take care of her children, and find food. Denise, only eight, was the only "adult" person to whom Sara turned for advice on complicated, secret, and dangerous problems. When, as often happened, Sara was in Paris to find ways for Iser's escape, Denise was responsible for caring for her brother, age three, and taking him to a shelter when the alarms sounded when English or French planes appeared in the sky. Denise very often asked an agonizing question, "What shall I do with my brother if you don't return and Papa is in concentration camp?"

During the second year of the war, when the danger increased, Denise and Jean Claude were sent to a convent to hide. One day Sara received a message from the nuns that Claude was very sick. Sara did not have the right to leave her forced residence, nor to go to the city of Cahor, where the convent was, but she disregarded all this and set out on foot (80 km.) to reach him. Once in Cahor, she was faced with an additional problem. The only doctor there was a collaborator and she

feared that, if called, he would discover that Claude was circumcised and Jewish. She called him, praying that his humane sentiments would prevail. They did.

One day the Nazis arrested Jewish children hiding in a convent near the one where Denise and Jean Claude were hidden. The Mother Superior immediately removed them from the convent and sent Denise to the parents of one nun and Claude to the aunt of the nun in another village.

People whom Sara had never met before became committed to helping her and her family. These were people from all walks of life: a surgeon, two doctors, two peasants, an old woman, an old landlord, a neighbor, a lawyer, a Mother Superior, a nun, a baker and his wife, and many, many others. She is very grateful to them for helping her to save her and her family's lives. Without their help, it is more than likely they would have perished in a gas chamber.

Iser and Sara were active in the Jewish French Resistance. Sara's most memorable action was when she single-handedly organized escapes from concentration camps for Iser, two men, and three girls, a nine-year-old and two fifteen-year-olds. Ironically, she was almost shot by other members of the Resistance as a spy. They found her traveling on foot on a dark, deserted road after the curfew. They undressed and searched her and discovered a hand mirror in which two false "cartes d'identité" were hidden; knitting measurements for her children were interpreted as code numbers. Every alibi she tried checked out against her. They refused to believe she was Jewish. By a lucky coincidence, the surgeon who had operated on Iser was the local Resistance leader, and he vouched for Sara's identity. In those troubled and dangerous times, the Resistance preferred to shoot an innocent suspect rather than take the chance of letting a spy slip through.

With the liberation of France, Sara and her family returned to Paris. The war was over and she had to adjust to living without fear. It is ironic, but it was a difficult thing. Fear had become a drug for her and suddenly she was deprived of it. She was ashamed of these feelings.

Now that the war was over, the Bystryn family could reactivate plans they had made during the war to join the family in America. They

wavered over their decision to leave. Iser's material circumstances had greatly improved. They could look forward to a secure life and the education of their children, to which they attached the utmost importance. Reluctantly, they left in 1949.

In New York, Sara was united with her relatives for the first time and she became fond of them immediately. They were devoted and helpful to her and her family in every way, and she was grateful. But in spite of this, the first few years in America were disappointingly difficult and jobs were scarce. Finally, Iser obtained an interesting position as an engineer-designer. Shortly thereafter, tragedy struck, and Iser died.

On Iser's untimely death in 1954, Sara started an import cigarette business which became the family's sole means of support. She threw herself into the business with great intensity for, as a woman, she had to assert herself in a merchandising world dominated by powerful corporations and government-owned monopolies. She persuaded the French and Italian monopolies to sell to her exclusively even when, in the beginning, her only office and warehouse was her apartment, and her "secretaries" were her daughter and her son. She succeeded in developing a business that provided a living and a higher education for her children.

It is ironic that Sara, who disliked the world of business so much, was selected because of her business achievement for inclusion in *Who's Who of Two Thousand Women of Achievement, since 1972* and in *Who's Who of American Women, since 1974.*

Sara had a very difficult life, with many ups and downs. Despite all the tragedies and hardships, she does not regret anything except Iser's death, for she believes that hard work and overcoming hardship is what creates character. And it is from the contrast between the bad and the good that true happiness is derived.

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My Brother Alexander

Alexander was born in Brest in 1906, the fourth boy and the seventh child in a family of nine children. When he was three years old, his mother became sick, and he and his sister Sara were sent to their grandmother in the village of Zbraz. He had a good life there with his sister and other children to play with, green fields, gardens, cows, horses, and chickens. His grandmother took good care of him; he took advantage of her and got everything he wanted. At five, he returned to his family in Brest, and then there were no more children of his age, no more green fields, cows, horses, and even chickens, no more freedom.

His mother instructed him how to behave, what to do, and what not to do and he considered this an affront. The other children (with the exception of Sara) did not get so many remarks from their mother, so that he felt like a rejected child and carried a grudge against his mother for years. When he was six, he was sent to a *cheder* of twelve boys, when he became older, to a *cheder* of ten boys, and later to a *cheder* of eight boys.

In July 1915, the whole civilian population of Brest was evacuated and Alexander, with the family, left for Pinsk and Kobryn. In 1918, when the war was over, he returned with the family to Brest. The war, the displacement from city to city, and the austerity in food and lodging is not easy on the life of a child of his age, and not helpful for his education.

Living three years like a gypsy and returning to a destroyed city helped to develop in Alexander a feeling of revolt. One day when he was thirteen, he came home with a bicycle. My father told him that a boy of his age had to study and not to run around town on a bicycle. A hot discussion erupted, after which Alexander left the house and disappeared. One year later, we received a letter from Miron in Samara saying that Alexander had been arrested as he crossed the border into Russia, and that Miron had been called to sign that he was his brother

so that he could be set free. In 1924, Alexander arrived in Paris. How and why I don't recall, he shared my attic room (the maid's room of Lucien's apartment) as he looked for a job. He found one at Intourist in Paris. Later, he was transferred to a higher position at a high salary and lived like a prince.

In 1926, he was called to military service in Russia and left for Samara. When he was released from the army, he got a job in a wool wholesale office and a couple of years later became the administrator of a production designing and lighting enterprise for theaters. He was not a designer or an electrician, but he managed to have the orders ready in time for the openings of the shows. His reputation grew and the productions of the most important shows in the Soviet Union were under his administration. This procured for him a high salary, private car, and chauffeur; famous producers looked for his friendship. His crowning professional achievement was the production for the gala of the inaugural of the Grand Kremlin Palace, for which he expected to get one of the most important decorations of the Soviet Union. Everything went according to schedule, but before the gala was ready he discovered sabotage in some sections of the project. He tried to remedy the situation, but he found sabotage in other sections as well. It was clear to him that a small group was determined to delay the production for the gala and he could find no reason for it. He was on very friendly terms with his superiors and subordinates, and he hadn't had any arguments in the immediate past. The only possible explanation was jealousy or anti-Semitism. The production wasn't ready for the gala. He was offered another job, but he was hurt and decided to retire before the retirement age.

In 1934 he married Elena, and is now the father of two beautiful daughters and three grandchildren. He lives in his own *dacha* in the suburbs of Moscow.

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My Sister Paula Wolsky Hayden

Paula was born in Brest. Being the fourth girl and the eighth child in a family of nine children, she could not expect special attention from her parents or her brothers and sisters, but she was fortunate in that her older brothers and sisters opened the way to schools, *gimnaziums,* and universities which were not the choice of our parents. They were very much concerned about the education of their children and hired the best teachers in town, but they were afraid that the atmosphere of the *gimnaziums,* where the majority of the students were not Jewish, could harm the Jewishness of their children. They were also against the children's departure to universities in foreign countries.

Paula followed in the footsteps of her sisters in education and studied Hebrew, Yiddish, and Jewish tradition and history. She strictly observed religious traditions and became the favorite of our father. He hoped she would not leave for Paris like the other children, but would marry a nice boy and remain in Poland like her sisters Gitel and Feigel. He was disappointed; she did leave for Paris.

There she met Maurice Hayden, a graduate of the prestigeous École Supérieure d'Électricite. He was intelligent, capable, nice-looking, and a music lover. They were married in 1936. In France, Paula experienced some of the best years of her life and she was very happy. However, she missed her parents and whenever possible went back to visit them. The good years lasted until 1939, when World War II started.

To leave Paris, a permit was necessary. Maurice, who worked as an engineer for an aviation company which was being moved, had a permit to leave Paris. But Paula was told she had to remain in the city. She spoke up and said, "When the Mayor of Paris married us, he told

me, 'Wherever your husband goes, you go.' " Immediately, she was told she would get a permit.

In 1940, three days before Hitler invaded Paris, they left and were refugees for the next five years, traveling from city to city in France.

When I left Marseilles on May 10, 1941, Paula and Maurice moved into my apartment and waited there for American visas. One day, two gendarmes arrived and asked for me. When Maurice told them that I had left for the United States, they took him to join a group of men in a boat headed for an unknown destination. Paula was left alone in a terrible situation.

Destiny played a hand, however. While walking around the boat, Maurice noticed that the ship's office was deserted. He walked in, found his papers, took them and walked off the boat to safety.

At the end of November, their American visas arrived. Two days before their appointment with the American Consul, the United States entered the war, and their visas were canceled.

They finally procured a visa to Cuba, through Uncle Morris Wolsk and his family, and were lucky enough to get on the last ship leaving France. The ship was designed to hold 500, but for this last trip they took 800 passengers so conditions were very bad. They had to stop at Casablanca for several days, where they stayed in barracks.

When they finally arrived in Cuba in 1942, they were detained in camps until they were thoroughly checked and then, although they had a visa, had to pay to get out of the camp. The saying was, "Cuba welcomes you with open hands, so that you can deposit money in them." So Paula and Maurice had to live very modestly because there was no work available for foreigners. Meanwhile, they waited for a new American visa, so that they could leave for the United States.

In January 1943, Paula gave birth to two girls, Bebe and 18 minutes later, Lily. There was a great commotion at the hospital. Cubans adore children, and twins were very exciting. Many of the passengers from the ship also came to visit, so the doctor finally had to restrict the number of visitors.

A year had already passed since the time of their arrival in Cuba, and they were still waiting for their visa. At long last they got word that their visa had arrived, and they were able to leave for the United States.

They then became refugees of a different sort. Jobs were at a premium, even for Americans; it was a very bad time for engineers.

During this difficult time, Maurice took a variety of different jobs, no matter what they were, in order to earn some money. He finally landed a job in his profession. The firm had had an engineering problem for several years which could not be solved. Maurice came in, studied the project and resolved the problem. The president of the company had Maurice sign a release and gave him a check for the huge sum of one dollar.

When the company had to move to New Hampshire because of the strikes they were having in New York, they asked Maurice to come with them. Paula looked for a place to live in Dover, New Hampshire.

The first Sunday they spent there, the twins came home and said the other children asked why they hadn't seen them in church. This made Paula decide to stay in New York. They saw Maurice on weekends only.

He finally found a position in New York, as project engineer for Bendix. After several years there, he realized that at his age there was little room for advancement in electrical engineering. He decided to study for a professional engineering degree, so that he could work for himself. He got his diploma from the University of the State of New York in November, 1965.

Through the Building Department of New York State, he was recommended to builders and architects for planning, designing, and renovating commercial and residential buildings. Maurice's signature was necessary for them to proceed with the work. He did well and was happy in his work.

From her parents Paula inherited the desire to do volunteer work. She threw herself into selling bonds for Israel. When Aba Eban was ambassador to the United Nations, he presented Paula with a plaque for her devotion to Israel and her unusually excellent record of bond selling. She became vice president of the Sisterhood of Young Israel of Forest Hills, a member of the Rambam Club, and Emunah, a women's organization for Israel. Her dream to visit Israel became a reality in 1976 when she made the trip with Lily, Allen, and her grandchildren. Mere words could not convey her exalted feelings.

During all the troubled times in their lives, Maurice and Paula never

lost their hope and their belief in a better future. Their love for and devotion to their children, sons-in-law, and grandchildren brought them immeasurable happiness and pleasure. Paula's great religious faith sustained her and brought her solace and joy.

Maurice became ill and passed away in September 1977.

Book VI

LUBA'S FAMILY

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The Soloveichik Dynasty of Great Talmudists

Joseph Ha-Levi Soloveichik (1) was the *parnes* (executive) of the community of Slobotka (1758-1766). His son (2) Moses built the great synagogue of Slobotka in 1772 and was appointed rabbi. His son (3) Joseph was rabbi of Kovno. His son (4) Isaac Zeev was appointed the official rabbi of Kovno. His son (5) Joseph Baer Soloveichik was Luba's great-grandfather.

Joseph Baer Soloveichik

Joseph Baer Soloveichik was born at Nieswish, Russia, in 1820 and was educated by his father, Isaac Zeev Soloveichik of Kovno, and his great-uncle, Issac, son of Hayyim of Volozhin. While in Volozhin, he married into a wealthy family, but was shortly thereafter forced by his father-in-law to divorce his wife when he failed to give the correct order of the recitation of some minor prayers on festival.

This so embittered him that he left Volozhin and subsequently studied under S. Kluger in Brody and J. N. Orenstein in Lemberg. His reputation spread, and he was appointed teacher at the yeshiva in Minsk. He finally became rabbi of Slutsk. In Slutsk, he found scope for his energies, both in Torah teaching and in communal organization. He deployed his abilities and his industry for the community's needs, devoting himself wholeheartedly to helping the poor and the needy.

During the severe famine of 1866, he founded a society to help the poor, put himself at its head, and collected subscriptions from door to door. He was devoted to the needs of the community and was an

outstanding humanitarian. Even when fighting those who wished to change or undermine Jewish religious life and values, he retained the love and respect of all.

With his fiery spirit he could not continue in the rabbinate and in 1875 relinquished his position, settling in Warsaw where he lived privately and in great poverty, devoting himself to study and deeds of benevolence. In 1878, when invited to become rabbi of Brest-Litovsk, he agreed on condition that he would be obeyed in all communal matters and that aid for the poor would be under his direction. In 1890 he was associated with a group that bought land in Eretz Yisrael.

My father-in-law, Rabbi Israel Soloveichik, was an ardent admirer of his grandfather, Rabbi Joseph Baer, and always told stories about his grandfather's important humanitarian activities and quarrels with the rich community members for more help for the poor and needy.

He told of one Yom Kippur evening, after the services in the synagogue, when the rich people came to the Rabbi to wish him a happy New Year. Rabbi Joseph Baer told them, "You are going home, where an elaborate meal is ready for after the fast. Look at these poor people on the last benches, how pale and tired they are. What have you done to make sure that they had a nutritious meal before the fast began, and that they have something now, after the fast is over?"

Jews who strictly observe their religion are against photographing people. One evening, while Rabbi Joseph Baer was absorbed in the Talmud, he raised his head to see a man drawing a picture of him. He became furious and asked angrily, "What are you doing?" The artist answered, "Rabbi, I have a large family, two daughters to marry off, and not enough food at home." Rabbi Joseph Baer returned to his study of the Talmud. And this is how his picture later came to be in all Jewish homes.

His passion to help the poor was so strong that he spent a part of his salary on this, and even deposited valuable personal objects with a pawnbroker to lend money to the needy.

Hayyim Soloveichik

Hayyim Soloveichik known as R. Hayyim Brisker (1853–1918), was a Talmudist and predominant figure in orthodox Jewry in his time. Born

in Volozhin where his father Joseph taught at the yeshiva. At the age of 20 he married a daughter of Raphael Spira, one of the heads of the yeshiva at Volozhin, and he remained there pursuing his studies with great diligence.

Soloveichik was the initiator of a new trend in Talmud study. Possessed of remarkable analytic powers, he would carefully analyze the subject under discussion into its categories and component parts. He evolved a suitable terminology with which to describe the different concepts and showed that the differences in the Talmud itself and among its authoritative interpreters derived from them. The method spread and was adopted in yeshivot throughout the world. Thousands of students flocked to hear him; many of them became distinguished teachers. Naphtali Zevi Judah Berlin, head of the yeshiva, would consult him before making any change in its administration.

After the Volozhin yeshiva closed in 1892, Hayyim went to live with his father, the rabbi of Brisk (Brest-Litovsk). His father died that same year, and Soloveichik succeeded him as rabbi. He at once threw himself into communal activity, using his great talents to improve existing religious and social services and to establish new ones. His reputation grew; rabbis and laymen of the surrounding district consulted him on all matters. His opinion was always asked for and heeded, his leadership being taken for granted. He participated in every important rabbinical and communal council.

Of a friendly disposition, he kept open house for all, whether Talmudists or scientists, learned or ignorant, religious or irreligious. He was ready to help everyone, sympathizing, comforting, and advising. Scholars would bring him their difficulties; even unmarried mothers came to him for assistance and advice. None left him empty-handed and without renewed courage. Most of his salary was given to the needy, and as a result, he was frequently in debt. In the winter he left his wood store unlocked so that the poor might help themselves. The lay leaders complained they could not afford the cost involved, but he replied that he would have to instruct his wife not to light his fire since it was impossible for him to sit in a warm room knowing that the poor were freezing.

In 1895 Brisk was swept by a fire which destroyed many homes. All of Hayyim's energies were devoted to the rebuilding. He slept on the

synagogue porch among those who had lost everything in the fire, and the stream of scholars and lay leaders who wanted to consult him came there. Personally stringent in the observance of religious precepts, he was always lenient when applying them to others. In public religious practice, however, he was firm and uncompromising, and did all he could to stem the erosion of Jewish life. Because of his sincerity, great knowledge, and personal piety, he invariably prevailed against those who wished lightly to introduce changes into communal institutions or places of learning.

Abraham Baruch Soloveichik

Abraham Baruch Soloveichik (6), Luba's grandfather was born in Volozhin in 1850, where his father, Rabbi Joseph Baer, taught at the yeshiva and was also his teacher. Abraham Baruch pursued his studies in the yeshiva until his marriage to Yachne Katzenelson, daughter of a wealthy family in Bobroisk (Russia). He invested his sizeable dowry in the rubber business. While he was an excellent Talmudist, he was not a businessman, and he lost his investments.

He became the rabbi and spiritual leader of the Jewish community of Smolensk, one of the most ancient towns of old Russia, with a population of 75,000. Smolensk was a typical Russian cultural town and his daughter, Cyrl, and two sons, Israel and Samuel, received a Jewish education, learned religion, and also absorbed Russian culture and literature.

Samuel's dream was to become a lawyer, but his father was against it and refused to help him. Samuel found a teacher who offered to prepare him for the university free of charge. Very capable, Samuel was accepted by the university and received his lawyer's diploma with a citation.

In 1905, Samuel became active in the revolutionary movement and was obliged to stay in hiding for a long time to avoid being deported to Siberia, from where there was no return.

Most of the Jewish community members were businessmen, but there were many poor, sick, or old people, widows, and orphans, and Abraham Baruch devoted himself wholeheartedly to helping them. He was an outstanding humanitarian. One day, the Jews in Smolensk expected a pogrom (an outburst against the Jews), and one of the rich members of his congregation invited him to stay in his villa, which was guarded, until the pogrom was over. He refused, saying, "I can't leave my people in danger."

People in need did not have to ask for an appointment—the door was always open to them or to anyone with a problem. His policy was that it was not ethical for a rabbi to save money so long as there were needy people in town, and he not only gave his money away, but borrowed from his friends and gave to the needy.

When he died in 1910, he left a list of people from whom he had borrowed money for the needy, asking his children to repay the debt. This was his will.

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Luba's Father

Rabbi Israel Soloveichik (7), was born in Smolensk, Russia, in 1874 of an illustrious family in the rabbinical world, became a well-known Talmudist and one of the most distinguished rabbis in South Africa.

Son of Rabbi Abraham Baruch of Smolensk, and nephew of Rabbi Hayyim Soloveichik of Brest, he followed in their footsteps and became a student of the famous Volozhin yeshiva. A scholar in the field of the Talmud, he also devoted himself to secular studies. He mastered the Hebrew and Russian languages, and also gained a profound knowledge of the Hebrew, Yiddish, and Russian classical literatures. Israel Soloveichik and the renowned Hebrew poet Bialik, then a student in Volozhin, organized a club to popularize the Hebrew language. This club helped Bialik to print his first poem "Hazipor" (The Bird). Israel Soloveichik displayed an outstanding command of Talmudic knowledge and obtained a *Smicha* (rabbinic diploma), but he decided not to use it as a profession.

He married the daughter of Yehuda Gelin, a wealthy banker of Lachowich, Russia, where they settled. The Jewish community of Lachowich was proud of their new distinguished member, and turned to him with their problems, even to settle quarrels between two parties. As Israel Soloveichik had mastered the Hebrew and Russian languages, the young people sought his advice about their secular studies and used his rich library. He was eager for education and sent his children to high school and to university. He always said, "Education is a treasure you can't lose, and no one can take it away from you."

He invested his dowry in wholesale forest timber, and this was a profitable and growing business. So was his family: five daughters—Luba, Bluma, Rachel, Cyrl, and Michelle—and a son, Avraham Baruch.

When World War I errupted in 1914, Soloveichik left for Minsk with his family. The town was filled with refugees, and Soloveichik devoted

all his time to helping them. When the revolution broke out in Russia, the situation of the Soloveichik family deteriorated; the Bolsheviks nationalized his business, everything became scarce and very expensive. Some of the Soloveichik children worked, and this was the only source of income for the entire family.

According to the Polish-Russian agreement, Lachowich and Vilno became parts of Poland, so that the Soloveichiks were considered citizens and were allowed to return to Poland. The family moved to Vilno, where Israel Soloveichik became a well-known figure, active in Jewish community life, and was elected to the Kehillah (Council) of Vilno. For a decade, Israel Soloveichik and his family lived comfortably from his business and savings, but then the situation changed. He lost his business and could not find anything interesting to do.

In 1930, his friend, Rabbi Herzog, chief rabbi of Israel, advised him to emigrate to South Africa. He left his family in Vilno, and went to Johannesburg, where he became rabbi of the Jeppestown Congregation and a member of the Johannesburg Beth-Din (Jewish Court). He participated in the work of the Board of Deputies and also contributed to local Hebrew and Yiddish publications. His library, rich in Russian books, was used by the Russian Literary Club.

A man of religious convictions, he was a staunch fighter for the ideas and practice of orthodoxy, while at the same time displaying the utmost tolerance for people who disagreed with him. Three years went by, during which he stabilized his position and decided to bring his family to South Africa.

Two daughters and his son had died of different diseases. In 1933, his wife Chana passed away, his daughters Luba and Cyrl were married and had emigrated to Paris; only the youngest Michelle (still a child) emigrated to Johannesburg after her mother's death.

In 1951, Rabbi Israel came to New York to live with his children (Luba and Cyrl emigrated to New York during World War II, and Michelle joined them in 1948). He passed away the same year at the age of 78.

It was a consolation for his children that their father had been able to spend the last three months of his life with them and to meet and spend time with his grandchildren.

In 1969, when Luba and I were in Johannesburg, we got a warm reception from his congregation and friends. We also learned how beloved, cherished, and esteemed Rabbi Soloveichik had been.

A notice appeared in the Jewish press in Johannesburg on June 21, 1951:

DEATH OF RABBI SOLOVEICHIK

Distinguished Spiritual Leader

News has just reached us of the death of Rabbi Israel Soloveichik [sic], one of the most distinguished Rabbis ever to have held office in South Africa, who passed away on the 19th June in the United States, where he had gone to live with his children. . . .

The late Rabbi Soloveichik was outstanding among spiritual leaders for his illustrious ancestry—an ancestry without parallel in the rabbinic world. His father was the famous Rabbi Abraham Baruch Smolensker, a man not only outstanding in the Talmudic field, but frequently referred to in Jewish literature (as, for example, in Reuben Brainin's "Reminiscences"). Rabbi Soloveichik was a grandson of the great Gaon, Rabbi Joseph Ber Brisker, and a nephew of Rabbi Chaim Brisker. Rabbi Joseph Ber Brisker was a son of the illustrious Rabbi Isaac Velvel Kovner, and a great of the outstanding Gaon, and beloved pupil of the Vilna Gaon, Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner.

Even this does not end the distinction of the late Rabbi Soloveichik's ancestry, which goes back several generations through Rabbi Joseph Rappaport, the Pilsker, Rabbi Nahum Rappaport, the Grodner, and Rabbi Simcha Lemberger to the famous Rabenu Tam 16 generations previously, who was accredited to have descended directly from the House of David.

In keeping with his famous line, the late Rabbi Soloveichik proved an Ilui and obtained Smicha at an early age, displaying a brilliant command of talmudical knowledge. He was one of the greatest talmudical scholars who has ever held office in South Africa. At the same time, he had a profound knowledge of Russian and German literature. In Vilna, where he was a noted rabbinical figure before he came to South Africa, he was one of the leading Agudah representatives in the Vilna Kehilla.

The late Rabbi Soloveichik came out to South Africa after the Russian Revolution and became spiritual head of the Jeppestown Congregation and a Dayan [judge] of the Beth Din [Jewish Court]. He was deeply respected by a wide circle, who will receive with profound regret the sad news of this passing.

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Luba's Mother

Chana Gelin was born in Lachowitz in 1879. Her father, Yehuda Gelin, was a banker and devoted himself to helping the poor, the needy, the Jewish community, and organizations. Her grandfather, Saul Moishe Gelin, built a synagogue, a hospital, and a group of stores which he donated to the Jewish community, so that they could cover a part of their budget from the rental of the stores.

Chana was very active in charity organizations; help for the sick and old people, pregnant women, and assistance to women after childbirth, help to orphans, and loans without interest for small merchants.

When the First World War errupted and the family moved to Minsk, Chana carried on with her activities there. She loved people. Her home was an open house of people discussing the situation of the refugees and the means by which they could be helped. When the Bolsheviks took over Minsk, the Soloveichik and Gelin families, along with her husband's mother, left for Vilno. They resided together and Chana, with the help of her mother Fradel, managed the household of a family composed of eleven people. The first two years of the '30s were the most tragic for her; she lost three children, and from the great shock and sorrow, fell ill and died in 1933 at the age of 54.

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Luba's Aunt Cyrl

Cyrl Danishewski was born in Smolensk, Russia, in 1877. Daughter of Rabbi Abraham Baruch, rabbi of Smolensk, she received a Jewish and secular education, learning Hebrew and absorbing Russian culture and literature. Her father tried to marry her to a rabbi, but she refused because the rabbi, in those times, got a meager salary, and all the worries of the Jewish community fell on his shoulders. Instead she married Mendel Danishewski, an intelligent and successful businessman from Vilno, and had a comfortable and happy life.

A girl Frida, was born to them. During World War I, the family left for Kharkov, where Mendel opened a wholesale leather business and was very successful until the Bolsheviks occupied Kharkov and requisitioned the business.

The family then returned to Vilno, where Mendel started a new business, but without success. Frida graduated from the university, married a schoolmate and both became teachers. Cyrl died in 1931, and the rest of the family perished in the gas chambers.

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Luba's Sister Cyrl

Cyrl was born in Lachowitz (300 miles from Brest) in 1908. Her childhood was a happy one; she got attention and love from her parents, grandparents, and sisters. But when World War I broke out, at the age of six she was already exposed to the atrocities of fighting. When the German army was near Lachowitz, she left with her family for Minsk; the city was full of refugees and she couldn't have the comfort and the necessities to which a child was entitled.

In Minsk, Cyrl attended the Russian school and her parents were still in a financial position to give her joy and happiness. In 1918, the revolution erupted, the Bolsheviks occupied Minsk, her parents lost their income, life became more difficult, and the Soloveichik family left for Vilno, (Poland).

Cyrl worked hard to learn the Polish language and was accepted in the *gimnazium,* where she showed ability in mathematics. When she graduated from the *gimnazium,* she applied for acceptance at the mathematics faculty of Vilno University. She was entitled to get in with her *gimnazium* diploma but, as a Jew, her application was rejected. She went to Warsaw, registered at the mathematics faculty and returned to Vilno. Since her father was not in a position to keep her in Warsaw, she attended mathematical lectures at Vilno University and, at the end of the school year, was allowed to take the examination at the University of Vilno instead of Warsaw. The professor was very pleased with her answers and said, "I realize that you are a student of the famous university in our capital." The second year, she was admitted to Vilno University to continue her studies.

When Cyrl graduated from the university, she became a teacher of mathematics at the *gimnazium* in Kletzk, where her relatives lived. In Kletzk, she met Abraham Kacew, a nice-looking, intelligent student, and two years later married him. After their marriage, they left for Paris to join her sister Luba.

First, they had to learn the French language, and after a couple of

months Abraham bought a cleaning store from our cousin Vidomliansky. The store was managed by a professional, with the help of Cyrl, and Abraham got a job as a bookkeeper.

The family grew—a beautiful girl was born and they named her Lucienne. When World War II broke out, Cyrl and the child joined Luba with the children on their journey to Poitier and later to Mont-de-Marsan and Aush, where Abraham joined them.

Paris was occupied by the Germans, and the Kacew family, still in nonoccupied France, waited for a visa to the United States. When we arrived in New York, we located Mr. Fogelman, editor of the Jewish daily *Forward,* an uncle of Abraham, and he sent them an affidavit.

It took time to get a visa, and in order to get them out of Europe sooner, Cyrl's father sent money from Johannesburg for a visa to Cuba. After the visas were obtained, the Cuban government recalled them, but at the same time the U.S. visa was granted.

The Kacew family arrived in New York in 1942. It was a new country, a new language, but they were emigrants with experience and education, and Abraham got a job in a mechanical factory, on the night shift. His salary wasn't enough for a family of three, so Cyrl got a job as a teacher in a Yiddish school of the Workman's Circle. To improve their situation, Cyrl attended some courses in statistics. After that, she got a job in an office, where she is employed to this day.

Abraham died in 1968, and Cyrl still keeps her job. Lucy is married to a lawyer and has three beautiful girls.

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Luba's Sister Michelle

Mickey (Michelle) was born in Vilno. The Soloveichik family was happy to be out of Minsk, under the Bolshevik regime, where every-

thing was scarce and rationed. In Vilno, life was easy; they had a nice apartment, ample food, clothing, and all necessities for raising a baby.

Mickey's arrival was welcomed and a joy for all of the family, especially for her grandmother, Yachne Soloveichik. Yehuda and Fradel Gelin lived with the Soloveichiks since Israel Soloveichik had married their daughter Chana. Fradel, in devotion to her only child, took care of the children, and they became very attached to her. In Vilno, Grandma Yachne also lived with the Soloveichiks and when Mickey was born, she became very attached to her and considered her her very special grandchild. This devotion and dedication remained until the last days of her life.

It was no wonder that Mickey was a happy, gay, and cheerful child. She easily made contact with other children and later became their leader. One day, she announced to Grandmother Yachne that she had invited a group of children for the next day to celebrate her birthday—for the second time.

Mickey attended a Hebrew school, and Grandma Yachne told all the neighbors that she was the best student in school. Mickey was very young when her mother died; her father sent her an affidavit and visas for South Africa and alone, without knowing one word of English, she left for Johannesburg. After a couple of months, her English improved and she was transferred to a regular class. After graduation, Mickey worked in an office until her departure for New York.

Speaking perfect English with a British accent was a plus in getting a job in New York, and she got one at the admitting office of Montefiore hospital, soon becoming supervisor. She still holds this position. The doctors and staff admire her for her cooperation and devotion.

When Luba and I were in Johannesburg, we realized how many friends Mickey had left behind there. Many telephoned us, some came to visit us. For the past five years, she has been spending her vacations in Johannesburg, which she refers to as "going home."

Mickey lives in a comfortable, beautifully decorated apartment, and she welcomes as guests many friends from Johannesburg every year.

Book VII

THE WOLSK FAMILY

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My Uncle Morris Wolsk

Morris (Moishe-Meir) Wolsk was born in Zbraz (in the Brest, or Brisk area as it was then called) on May 25, 1874. When he was four years old, his father started to teach him the alphabet, then the prayer book. When he was ready to learn the Bible, a teacher, who also taught the Jewish children from the neighboring villages, was hired. At the age of eight, Morris was sent to Domacheva, where there was a Hebrew school. The rabbi there was easily irritated and would violently whip the children at the drop of a hat. Morris could not even complain to anyone, as he lived with his aunt Kawfel (his father's sister), who would always say that undoubtedly the rabbi knew well what he had to do. Morris would return home only for holidays. Frequently, he would quietly cry to himself and plead, dear God, that he might rid himself of both the school and his rabbi there. Finally, his prayers were answered. He developed malaria and was brought back to his home.

It was said that Purim was not a holiday and malaria was not an illness, therefore it was not deemed necessary to run to a doctor. One resorted to "old wives" remedies. For example, a spoonful of salt and a spoonful of pepper were added to a glass of water, and the patient was made to drink it. Or, if he had a bad attack, Morris would be taken to the pond, where he would throw a stone into the running water and quickly run away. Or certain herbs and grasses were cooked and mustard would be added, and this "tasty" brew was consumed. Only when all of these remedies were to no avail was Morris brought to Brest to a *felsher* (not a doctor, but someone with a slight knowledge of medicine, who was legally permitted to apply his meager knowledge), who prescribed quinine. With great difficulty, after a year of these remedies, Morris became better and immediately was sent to Brest to attend the school called the School of the "Long Trousers." This was the nickname of his teacher there, because he wore spats and long trousers instead of the customary boots with the trousers tucked into them.

A bar mitzvah boy had reached the age when he had to think of his future, or earning his living, and it was then decided that he should be helpful on the farm where his parents lived, work in the fields, and assist at the store they maintained. But when Morris reached the age of 16, it was decided by the family that he should learn a trade. For this purpose he was apprenticed to Aaron Yeddel, a carpenter in Brest, under certain conditions. For two years he was to work without any pay whatsoever. This was to be a six-day week, 8 A.M. to 8 P.M., after which, until 10 P.M., he was duty-bound to do messenger service, including carrying things made or things that needed to be made or repaired, sweeping the workshop clean, and placing all the tools in an orderly manner. Thursdays he worked longer—until midnight.

After two years of such apprenticeship, when he passed his examination, his earnings started at a very low scale for an 80-hour work week. Morris continued to work in this difficult manner until he reached the age of 20, the year when one had to register for military training.

In those days, the Jews in Russia were mishandled as inferior beings; they did not have the same rights as other citizens of the country. In the army, they were subjected to all kinds of mistreatment, and thus they sought ways to avoid military service.

Two months before the *priziv,* the date of military examination, Morris began to starve himself, as part of a program of self-flagellation which would make it impossible for him to pass the physical examination. He did everything to make himself weaker, thinner, and paler. Morris would eat as little as possible, once a day, sleep only two hours at night, walk a lot, frequently take castor oil, and inhale drugs that were so strong they caused the heart to beat faster and irregularly. Before the two months were up, the treatment he had subjected himself to had made his breathing so difficult that doctors had to be called to rescue him.

His family did not rely entirely on these methods, but to make doubly certain, they contacted a certain politician who promised that all would be well, when this politician bribed the military doctor with 500 rubles. The politician kept the entire 500 rubles for himself, and went out of his way to tell the military doctor that when the name

Wolsk was called, the doctor should immediately, without any question, approve Morris as acceptable for military duty. That is what the doctor did, and Morris became a soldier in the Tsar's army.

Morris was sent to Kremenchug (Poltaver Gubernie). The early period of his service was during peacetime. Life in a Russian barracks was hard, the discipline was severe; the activities were complicated, the attitude of the officers inhuman, and to add to all these troubles, he did not eat from the military kitchen, as it was not Kosher, but kept alive only by eating dried food.

Soon, however, the situation improved. The head of the division, who was much more human in his attitude toward the soldiers than the lower-ranking officers, once questioned the soldiers about their needs. When he came to my uncle, Morris said to him, "I am a good cabinet maker, and I would like to make a chair for your child." The commander was quite pleased with the offer. He immediately freed Morris from all his daily duties and permitted him to go into the town and make the chair there.

It took him three months to make the chair, and when the commander asked why it had taken to long, Morris answered that throughout the period the tools were always being used, as the mechanic from whom he borrowed them needed them for his own use; Morris could use them only when the mechanic was eating or was through with his work for the day.

It was truly so—the tools were being used all day, but they were being used by Morris Wolsk, who was working for the mechanic and earning a comfortable living. He did work on the chair in the evening, after completing his other work. Thus it did take him a long time, but the chair was a beauty, an excellent piece of furniture.

The commander was very pleased and immediately decided that Morris Wolsk should remain in the Military Carpentry Shop. From that point on, there was a big change in Morris Wolsk's situation. He would make miscellaneous gifts for the officers, and was almost entirely free of military duties ordinarily required of each soldier. Later, he was transferred to Zvinegrotke, but he remained in the carpentry shop and benefited from the same privileges as he had before the shift.

Military service took four years of the most productive years in a

man's life away from Morris. At the termination of his service, he returned to Brest-Litovsk and a short time later became the manager of a farm 70 miles from there.

Twice a month, he would ride to Brest to make necessary purchases of tools, utensils, food, pots and pans, and other things needed for the farm and for the workers who were employed there.

On one of these trips to Brest, he became acquainted with Esther Burstenmacher. He would visit her each time he got to Brest, and on the 4th of July 1900, they were married. After the wedding, Morris went to Byiale, where he became the commissioner of flour and groats.

In 1901, he became the father of a son, and about two years after this event, his second son was born. He then moved to Molorita and lived there until war started between Russia and Japan. He was among those mobilized for service in this war and was about to be sent away with the army group. His family pleaded with him to escape to America. They said he should not sacrifice his life for a country where Jews were oppressed, tortured, and had lesser rights than all the other citizens.

Against his will, he acceded to the demands of his family and in June 1904, left for America. He could not obtain a passport, and was compelled to steal his way across the border. During the days that followed, he would be hidden in farmhouses and at night he would walk distances and often crawl on all fours, until finally he came to a small river which was on the border. The depth of the water was over his waist, and he crossed it. On the other side, he found himself in Germany.

After so many days of strain, efforts to survive, and great fear of being caught by the Russian police, which surely would have meant the death penalty, he was finally able to breathe freely. He rested for a while, rode to Hamburg, and from there boarded the S.S. *Graf Waldersee* bound for America.

After a difficult journey lasting twelve days in the dormitory or hold of the ship, packed to overflowing with all manner of people, on a hot Sunday in July 1904, he arrived in New York.

Knocked out by his very arduous trip, which took five weeks from the time he left his home, the sweat pouring down his face and body from the burning July sun, his heart full of pain from longing for his wife, children, and parents, all of whom he had left in Europe, Morris

stumbled over the streets of New York, holding a paper in his hand on which was written the address of an uncle of his wife's who lived in Brooklyn.

There were no subways yet, and the sun was beginning to set when he dragged himself to Brooklyn with the last of his strength. Unfortunately, the address he had was of the uncle's store, and since this was a Sunday, the store was closed. Seeing his predicament, neighbors located one of his cousins. Schie (Gorin), who brought him to his uncle, Label Rubin. By then it was late at night, and Morris was so tired that he could barely stand on his feet. The uncle and the uncle's wife talked together in English, and Schie told Morris that he was the subject of their conversation. They had only seven rooms for their rather large family, and were unhappy that they had to put up the new arrival, *der Griner.*

Morris Wolsk immediately left his uncle's house, and Schie brought him to the house where Schie was a boarder. There Morris rented an army cot placed in a dark corridor without a window nearby. He advanced payment for a week and on this, his first night in America, he slept in his own bed.

Very early the following morning, he rode by trolley car to Manhattan and placed himself at one of the corners of Hester Street. For those looking for work, this was the market place where employers knew they could always find unemployed workers.

A short, stocky Jewish man appeared. He had a protruding stomach and a large head with the remnants of red hair. He was looking for someone to work for him. The other workers standing around wanted $2 per day, and this short Jew only wanted to pay $1.50.

Morris Wolsk would have been willing to work even for $1 per day, as he was quite anxious to earn his first dollar in America, but he believed in solidarity among his fellow workers and was not willing to spoil the market value for them. After the would-be employer walked away, the other workers standing around agreed that it would be permissible for Morris to work for $1.50, and when Morris heard this, he chased after the departed employer and agreed to work for him.

The new employer immediately saw that he had obtained a skilled worker, and as he didn't want to lose him, the next day he paid him at the rate of $2 per day.

When Morris wrote to Brest that he was earning $12 per week, the

entire city counted his wealth—could one imagine it—$12! This was equal to 24 rubles a week. Steinberg the physician wasn't earning that much.

Morris worked very hard, saved each dollar, and put it aside with other money he had earned. It did not take him too long to save a sufficient sum to send steamship tickets for his wife and children to come to live with him in America—the "Golden Land."

Morris rented a three-room apartment, and furnished it himself so that when his wife and his two sons arrived in July 1905, they could come directly to the home that had been prepared for them.

Then Morris started to free lance on his own account. He saved some money, with which he purchased a house for himself and his family in Brooklyn. He was also enriched by the birth of a darling daughter, Bessie. Gradually, he enlarged his sphere of work by taking larger and larger jobs until he reached the stage where he became a builder of houses.

Morris developed from carpentry to general contracting and then to building. The house they moved to was built by him. People looking for a well-built home offered him a price so attractive that he accepted, and decided to build a new house for the family. In those days, profits of any kind were meager and difficult to come by. When all the furniture was on the moving van bound for a new house, Morris rushed in to say that he had just sold the house into which they were about to move.

After this, he started to build a number of houses at one time to sell to customers. From this, he went into larger building ventures, such as the 75-family house on Avenue K, a commercial building in Jamaica, and so on. In the construction field in Brooklyn, Morris Wolsk became a known builder of high reputation.

In 1921, Morris and his wife Esther took a trip to Europe to visit their families, whom they hadn't seen for 17 or 18 years. Later, in 1926, Morris and his entire family took a trip to Europe and Palestine.

Always a hard-working and busy man with constant involvements with his business activities, Morris was not prevented from finding free time for institutions that were beneficial to society—schools (Hebrew), temple, hospital work. In 1920, he helped to found and build the Israel-Zion Hospital, where he was very active, and where he served as a director. Similarly, he was a director of various societies, Talmud-Torahs, Yeshivas, and other organizations.

Always, to his last days, with a generous hand, he assisted many relatives and friends in various countries. No one can say that he was ever turned down when he appealed to Morris for assistance.

When the French branch of the Wolsk family (Lucien, Sara, Paula, myself, and our families) arrived in New York, Morris gave us apartments in his building on Avenue K in Brooklyn free, until we were able to pay rent. He offered us loans that were to be paid back after we started to make a living. But the most important thing he gave us was a warm atmosphere, guidance, advice, love, and devotion extended to all of us by him, his lovely wife Esther, and their children—Isidore, Paula, Sam, Ceil, Bessie, and Jiggers—and their families. This gave us a very warm feeling. This feeling, mixed with gratitude, is renewed on the occasion of each family gathering.

A few years before Morris Wolsk died, he was almost blind, but he still continued his active business and philanthropic work. The rabbi of his synagogue, in a speech honoring him for his many contributions, said, "Morris Wolsk may be losing his sight, but he will never lose his vision."

The life of Morris Wolsk can serve as an example of how, by hard work, thrift, and honesty, a person can reach a beautiful, ideal life, with children well educated and brought up nicely, with a home open to anyone needing advice or a helping hand, and how he can earn a fine and enviable reputation in the largest Jewish center in the world—New York.

Morris died August 29, 1970 at the age of 96.

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My Aunt Esther Burstenmacher Wolsk

Esther was born in Brest in 1880. She was a lovely little girl, slight of build, with long, light brown hair, hazel eyes, and a sweetness all her own.

When Esther's father died, her mother Shayne sold fish from a stand in the local market to support the family. Esther continued as she had been doing, running the home for her family, doing the cooking as well as all the household chores. She became an excellent cook and baker.

Morris Wolsk often visited Esther. He was handsome and she was beautiful. They quickly fell in love. In July 1900 they were married. Their first son, Itzchok (Isidore), was born in December 1901, and their son Yehoshua (Samuel) was born in February 1904. This family moved from Brest to Biyale and Molarita.

When Morris left for America, Esther and her two baby sons moved back to Brest, where she stayed in her mother's house.

Esther did not want to be separated from her family and she hoped that Morris would come back to Brest. Her efforts failed to convince Morris to return. When Morris sent her a *shifscarte* (steamship ticket), she decided to leave for America with her two little ones to join Morris, from whom she had been separated for over a year. She shed many tears over the thought that she might never see her family again, and her eyes became greatly inflamed. When she arrived at Rotterdam, the port of embarkation on the North Sea, the authorities mistakenly diagnosed her eye condition as tracoma and refused her permission to leave. She was hospitalized for two weeks before she was allowed to leave for America.

A happy Morris was at Ellis Island to greet Esther and his two sons. He took them to Third Avenue and 18th Street in South Brooklyn, where he had set up a small apartment. He had rented this apartment from Esther's uncle Label Rubin. The apartment was three flights up

over a hardware store. The kitchen stove supplied the heat and there was no bathroom in the apartment, but there was a toilet, shared by others, in the hall. It was in this apartment that Bashele (Bessie) was born in February 1907.

The apartment was too small for the family, so Morris looked for a larger place. In the price range he could afford, landlords were reluctant to rent to a family with three small children. It was at this time that Jews started to move to Boro Park, a section of Brooklyn then called "Blote-town"—mudtown. Morris was able to buy a house there at 1208 39th Street, consisting of a store on the ground floor and an apartment on two additional floors above the store. With $1,000 in cash and three mortgages, this house became the happy home of Morris and Esther.

Esther not only took care of her home, but also worked in the store where Morris had set up his shop for carpentry and glazing. While Morris was away on jobs, Esther would cut glass to size for customers who came into the store.

This was a period when immigrants were coming to New York and needed a place to stay on arrival. They felt welcome at the Wolsk home and for a number of years there was always a relative living with them, not as a boarder, but a guest: Jake Wolsk, Meyer Forer, Dverelaye, and others who stayed for months at a time. When Esther's sister Chaia came, she stayed on until she married Max Silver.

At the Wolsk home, if you were a relative or friend, or a friend of a relative, or friend of a friend, you were welcome. Friday nights were open house for all. Esther always prepared an abundance of delicious food and tasty cakes. There was always good conversation and a feeling of warm togetherness around the table. It was of great importance to Esther that the family be as close as possible with one another. She always found time to visit members of the family, to listen to and offer good advice when asked, or to heal developing rifts when necessary.

Esther had a good ear for music. She sang arias from operas as she did her work around the house. In the early days, she would take Morris to the Metropolitan Opera House and it didn't matter to her that she sat in the far-up family circle. If no seats were available, she thought nothing of standing through an opera. She went to night school to brush up on her English, but saw to it that her children had a Jewish education.

Esther's relatives and friends living in Europe, who as a result of the war were forced to leave their comfortable homes, their businesses, and jobs to come to the United States, were invited by Esther to her home. These individuals, unable to speak English, uprooted from their homes, and prevented from working at their professions or trades, were very depressed. Esther was blessed with a talent to make them talk and feel at home. She used her sympathetic understanding to cheer them up and make them realize that they had the power and ability within themselves to overcome their many problems, and she would intelligently advise them how to cope with their critical periods.

Esther's death on December 13, 1943 at the age of 63 was a great loss not only to her close family, but to all who knew and loved her.

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My Uncle Jacob Wolsk

Jacob (Jake) Wolsk was born in Zbraz in 1888. Even as a youngster, he was of great assistance at home and in the fields, and would accompany one of the peasants to bring liquor by the barrel from the city. He went along with the peasant in order to keep an eye on him because, as honest as the peasant was, he found it difficult to resist the temptation of a full barrel of liquor. In the course of the trip, the peasant would rein his horses, knock off the plug from the barrel a bit, bore a small hole, take a straw, and drink the liquor through it. Then he would close up the hole he had made, put the plug back into its original position,

nail the hooks back into place so that no change would be noticeable. The presence of a child was to make the peasant fearful of doing what he was eager to do.

When Jacob was eight years old, he was sent to Brest-Litovsk to start his schooling there. He had a variety of teachers, some good-natured, but others quite nasty and incompetent. Some of the nasty ones happened to be good teachers. There was never any agreement between him and his parents and his older brother Chaim Zalman on this score. It was Zalman who was responsible for caring for him when in Brest. The teachers that Jacob felt were good because they did not attempt to "stuff" the entire Torah into him in short order, teachers who did not mind Jake's arrival in *cheder* (school) a bit late in the morning, or teachers who did not resent a bit of fun or play with the other youngsters there, these were the teachers for which Jake's brother Chaim Zalman had no use. On the contrary, the teachers who were very severe with Jacob, who would whip him for the smallest infraction, or bang him on the shoulders and even at times place him on his stomach and lash his behind with a strap or whip—these were the teachers that Jacob hated as his greatest enemies, but Chaim Zalman, his older brother, considered perfect for Jacob's education. Chaim Zalman would say that students had the greatest respect for such teachers, and since children like Jake were not too eager to learn, at least they would learn out of fear of the teacher.

Jacob lived with his brother Chaim Zalman for quite a while. He was the same age as his brother's son Moise-Leizer (Lucien). They were playmates, had all kinds of fun together, and played all kinds of tricks. But they were very protective of each other. If one of them broke a pane of glass, or took a dish out of the house and forgot to bring it back, or did some damage to something of value, neither one "snitched" on the other and one never knew which one of them to punish.

When Jake's parents saw that he would never be a rabbi, they signed him up as an apprentice at a leather store. Apprenticeship in those days was not much different from being indentured. As a youngster learning a trade, he was used for all purposes, constantly. All day he chased back and forth, bringing and returning packages of leather. Some of these packages were so difficult to carry, so heavy, that Jake had trouble straightening out his body before he even reached the intended

destination. Although he was not paid at all for his work, this did not prevent his employer from mistreating him in many ways, such as cursing him or yelling at him. However, Jake was a quiet sufferer. He would never utter a protest, and never complained about his condition to anyone.

This situation did not last long. One evening, after a long day of gruelling work, his boss took Jake down to the basement of the store, locked the door, took out a sharp knife with which he usally cut the leather and said to the boy, "Listen to me, Jake. I am missing a large piece of leather. I know you have taken it. Tell me at once to whom you have sold it. If you don't, I will immediately kill you with this knife."

Jacob, who by then had reached his fourteenth year, shivered in great fright, cried in great sorrow, and swore that he had no knowledge of the lost leather.

The next day, the large piece of leather was found. The employer came to Jacob's home to apologize for his unfounded suspicion of the boy in this matter. Jake forgave him, but he never went back to his store.

After that, Jacob became an apprentice to Shmulke, the iron monger. Work there was even harder than at his previous place. He had to drag and carry loads of heavy iron boxes containing nails. But the attitude of his employer toward him was that of one decent human being to another. Jacob valued this much more than any monetary gain. For a very small wage, Jacob worked for Shmulke for six years.

Jacob's faithfulness and loyalty to Shmulke were beyond description. Once Shmulke noticed that he was missing an important iron part which had to be fitted into a kitchen. The suspicion fell on one of the peasants who had been in the iron store (Factory) long before the loss was discovered. Jacob did not consult anyone before acting. He ran to the market center, the place where the peasants placed their wagons when they came from their villages. There he hunted up this particular peasant on whom suspicion of the theft had fallen. Jacob searched the peasant's wagon, and pulled the stolen part from under the straw. He then went to the peasant, and attacked him with all his strength, punching him as hard as he could. Jacob hoisted the heavy missing part on his shoulders and brought it back to the shop where he worked. He risked his life by his action, because if it were not for the

fact that the peasant had been taken by surprise and consequently become confused, the thief would have attacked Jacob with the assistance of other peasants standing around, and would have killed him. But Jacob's loyalty was such that nothing could stand in his way, if it involved his employer.

By this time, Jacob had reached the age of 20, which meant that in a short time he would be examined for his fitness for military duty. Jacob was a healthy young man, muscular and well built with a pair of broad shoulders, so there was no hope that he would be released from army service. He asked himself why he should give up to the Tsar the most fruitful years of his life. In view of the sorrows and troubles that the Jews were enduring during the regimes of the Tsars, in view of all the things that other Russians were permitted to do to earn a living, to gain an education, while Jews were prevented from participating equally, in view of the pogroms during which the Jews were attacked and murdered and their possessions robbed, in view of all this, should he serve in the Tsar's army? Jake decided that he should not, and that is when he decided to go to America.

Without a passport or any kind of document, he managed to steal away from Russia across the border. He suffered the terrific problems that all illegal immigrants of that period went through. It was in the year 1910 that he arrived in the United States. His brother Moishe Meir (Morris) met him at the pier when the boat landed and took him to his home.

Morris was so excited at the meeting, so filled with emotion when he first saw Jake, his youngest brother, the youngest member of the family who was born when his parents no longer had their youth, that he did not notice that his pockets had been picked and a considerable amount of money taken.

Jacob lived in his brother Morris's home for a considerable length of time, until he became familiar with things in America.

During his first year in America, Jake worked in a grocery store and went to school in the evening. Then he became a peddler. It was hard to make a living peddling in New York, so Jake decided to go to the South where his sister Malke lived, and he began to ply his trade there. During the first four years he did this, he managed to save some money and, with Malke's son Meyer Forer, he opened a grocery store in Augusta,

Georgia. After a partnership lasting one year, Jake paid Meyer off (half of the value of the store) and became the sole owner of his business.

When Jake had lived in New York, he had become acquainted with a girl, Sonia Wolf. He courted her and when he left for the South, they corresponded. When his business had improved sufficiently, he came to New York to marry Sonia, and they set off to live in Augusta.

Sonia helped Jake in the store and the income from the business continued to grow, principally because Jacob had established his reputation for honesty and reliability. From the surrounding villages, people would come to town to buy their wares from "Honest Jake," as they called him.

The work in the store was hard. By this time, Sonia had given birth to two children and was compelled to devote less of her time to the business. Jacob worked beyond his strength, and became sick. The store was then sold for a considerable sum, and in 1924 they returned to New York.

New York was a large city, and living there was difficult for them. The cost of maintaining a family of four in New York was high, and building a business anew to support the family was not easy.

Jake became a builder, but this was during a period when many builders found out that it was a bad time to be involved with construction. So Jake decided that he had made a costly mistake, and left that business to deal in automotive supplies. This did not go well either. The next venture was a grocery business. There he made enough to support his family, but he worked very hard. Thus he gave this up, too, and brought a wholesale business, the sale of dry fruit.

Jake was always a very good person, the kind of man people relied on and trusted. These qualities were ingrained in his character, as one could see when World War II started. In his store were articles of merchandise that he had imported and which during wartime kept jumping up in price from day to day. Jake would not increase the price of any article he had in stock. When it was pointed out to him that certain articles he was selling at the old prices could only be replaced at a higher price, he ignored the advice that he raise his prices. He said that he did not wish to make any larger profits and to take advantage of the war situation in this way.

When his youngest son Marvin was 17 years old, Jake pressured him

into enlisting as a volunteer in the U.S. Army. He said, "I am too old to do this, but I regret very much that I would not be accepted by the U.S. Army. It breaks my heart to succeed in getting my one and only son into the army, my son whom I love so much. But if we want to win this war, we must make the greatest sacrifices, no matter how painful and difficult this may be."

When World War II ended, Jake's son Marvin and son-in-law Seymour joined the business. Jake had a tremendous drive and was always striving "to go up the ladder" (a favorite expression of his). He had aspirations that the business would become strictly wholesale; instead it expanded both retail and wholesale.

In February of 1949, a long-awaited dream became reality; Sonia and Jake sailed on the *Queen Mary* to Israel. Israel was a young nation, having just celebrated its second anniversary of independence. Their first stop of this trip was Paris and there they were greeted and entertained by Jake's niece Sara. After enjoying their visit with Sara and seeing the sights of Paris, they left for Marseilles. An Israeli boat was waiting at this port to take them to Israel. It was a very dramatic moment for Sonia and Jake to see a boat with an Israeli flag flying at its mast and they wept with joy. Sonia had been a Poale Zionist in her youth and this symbol had great emotional impact on her.

In Israel, they were met by members of both sides of the family. Jake and Sonia were delighted to renew old relationships and anxious to meet all the family. Jake loved people and especially the family. They visited the cities of Rama, Rehovet, and Tel Aviv and took great pride in what their people were accomplishing. They stayed in Israel from Purim until after Pesach. It was one of the happiest times of their lives. Afterwards, they reminisced about their visit to Israel. Jake was looking forward to going back, but because of his ill health, Sonia was afraid to leave the United States and made no plans to this effect.

Due to Jake's neglect of his health, he was forced to retire, something he had never anticipated. He was a very stoic person with a great deal of stamina and never bemoaned his fate. A physical therapist taught him how to walk after the amputation of his leg, and with great determination he resumed his life. Jake's loving wife was always with him and together they were a very devoted couple. He also had great love for his brother Morris who was a pillar of strength for him.

Jake started each day by putting on his *tfilin* and saying his prayers.

When asked about his health, Jake would reply with a big, broad, beautiful smile, "For a man in my age and in my condition, I am ahead of the game." He had great faith in God.

On Friday, August 25, 1972, Jake had a premonition that his end was approaching. When his grandson Philip told Jake that he wanted to visit his paternal grandparents, Jake said, "Make it some other time, I have many stories to tell you and the night is long." Jacob then told his daughter Estelle to "light the Shabbos candles." Surrounding his bed were his daughter June and son Marvin; Sonia was sitting nearby gently stroking Jake's hand. He put his right hand on his head (instead of asking for a yarmulka) and softly with his lips recited the *Shema Yisrael.* Jacob fell asleep with a beautiful smile on his face; he was at peace and at rest.

Jake lives on in the values he instilled in his family. He leaves a legacy of all that was good in life, and as he told his children and grandchildren, "The Mountain is there for you to climb, if you want to."

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My Aunt Sonia Wolf Wolsk

Sonia Wolsk (Jake's wife) was born in Bialystock. Her father, Reb Mattel Wolf, was a weaver who owned his own weaving factory. He was well off financially and Sonia received a good education and upbringing while enjoying a happy childhood. She attended *gimnazium* (equivalent to our high school plus the first two years of college). A teacher came to her home to teach her Yiddish and Hebrew as well.

Sonia was a young girl when her father died. It was a result of her mother's great efforts that Sonia was able to continue her education in both Yiddish and Hebrew and in school.

In 1905, a pogrom raged in their city of Bialystock. Some of the Christian inhabitants, with the help of the rougher element and the drunkards, forming a mob, ran through the streets, yelling *"Bey Zhidov, Spasay Russayv"* (Kill the Jews, and save Russia). Jews were assaulted, attacked, and murdered. They were robbed of their holdings, and what the mob could not take away, it broke and destroyed.

Sonia and her mother ran to a nearby town on foot, and from there they went on to Grodno. Sonia's family in Bialystock could not find them, and were certain that they had been murdered, so the family hunted for their bodies among the dead. When Sonia and her mother finally returned to Bialystock, they found their house destroyed and all their belongings stolen. Saddened by all they had gone through, they decided to leave Bialystock for America.

Three of Sonia's brothers and the family welcomed them with great warmth and concern. They rented an apartment for Sonia and her mother, furnished it, and arranged for Sonia to go to school.

Two years later, Sonia began to work for one of her brothers as his bookkeeper. She was a tall girl, and had a fine figure. Her face always wore a charming smile and her lively eyes indicated an energetic person.

In 1917, she married Jacob Wolsk and they settled in Augusta. Sonia found it difficult to acclimate herself to life there. The city was small at that time, and Sonia found the mode of living of the people with whom she came into contact quite different from what she had been used to and not at all to her liking. They in turn frowned on Sonia's joyfulness and liveliness.

Sonia helped her husband Jacob in his business and devoted herself to the proper upbringing of her children. She saw to it that they not only received their education, but she influenced them in all ways that would enable them to grow up to be attractive people.

Sonia loved music, opera, and spent many enjoyable hours reading. A book was always her companion, and she instilled this love of reading into her family. She was happy when June asked to study the violin.

A few months passed, and when June complained about the long hours of practicing, Sonia realized that her daughter would not make a concert violinist. Instead, she encouraged June to apply herself to scholastic studies. Estelle showed a talent for fine arts and was encouraged to study art although the prospects for a future in this field looked dim. Marvin was interested in forestry and Sonia encouraged him to research this subject.

Regardless of how tired or burdened Sonia was with helping Jake in the business, she always found time to devote to her children. She was a beacon of hope for her family. She exposed them to culture and the beauty of the world around them.

An exceptionally beautiful woman with an air of regal bearing, she became even more beautiful with age.

Jake was ill for many years and Sonia spent those years extending his life as wife, nurse, and mother, always his constant companion. She was fond of Jake's family and loved them all.

After Jake's death, Sonia resumed her normal activities and continued to live with Estelle and Seymour. She spent her winters in Miami enjoying the beach, the water, and the companionship of her friends and was always ready to see a play, hear a concert, or a lecture.

One day before she was to depart for Miami she fell on the sidewalk, and went to the doctor to check for injuries. Since there were none visible, she was told to take X-rays the next day. That meant delaying her trip. Instead, the next day she took the plane to Miami. Two weeks later, Sonia complained of leg pains and it was discovered that she had a broken hip bone. A pin was placed in her hip and Sonia was walking within a few days. In the hospital she was always jumping up to take care of her personal needs and when asked, "Why don't you call a nurse when you need help?" her reply was, "the nurses are here for sick people. I am fine."

Sonia was very much part of this generation. The marvelous rapport she had with her children she also had with her grandchildren. She understood them and their problems, they loved and respected her and her judgment, and many a time would ask her advice.

While Sonia was ill in the hospital her granddaughters Barbara and Meryle came to visit her with joyous news. They were both engaged and planning to be married shortly after. Sonia was having difficulty

breathing but this news gave her renewed energy. This was what she was holding on for, for she loved her grandchildren. Sonia spent the next twenty-four hours bubbling with enthusiasm and pleasure about the coming *Simchas.*

At the end of the second day of Rosh Hashonah, September 1, 1977, with Frieda and Marvin at her bedside, this most beautiful woman, who only knew to say "thank you" to everyone, fell into eternal sleep.

Book VIII

THE PRILUK FAMILY

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My Maternal Grandfather Israel Priluk

About 250 years ago, in a village named Priluk, near Brest, lived Rabbi Hersh Niven, a scholar and very religious man. The peasants in the village called him "The Holy Man" and asked him to walk through their fields when he took a stroll, since they believed that this would help their harvest. Among his famous ancestors was Saul Whal, who was king of Poland for one night.

During the course of the years, the name Niven of Priluk was changed to Priluk.

When my great-grandfather, Meyer Priluk, died, he left three young children: a son Kiva, a daughter Feige, and my grandfather Israel. Their mother was active in business, and was able to give the children a good Jewish education. Israel was a nice-looking boy, intelligent, highly educated in the Talmud and, since he was the son of the famous family Priluk, many rich people sought to capture him as their son-in-law. The lucky one was Mr. Leiser Vidomliansky from Kamenitz. Israel married his beautiful, 17-year-old daughter, Chana Gitel. He received a nice dowry and his board, so that he could spend his days in the synagogue studying the Talmud.

A year later, my mother was born. Israel rented an apartment and invested his dowry in the flower business. The family grew: there came a daughter Sheine and two sons, Meyer and Hersh. Four weeks after Hersh was born, his mother died. Israel remarried after a time, and when two girls, Perl and Sara, were born, he sold his business and leased a water mill on the Lesne River in Trestenitze. He sent the flour and cereal to a go-between in Brest, who sold it for a commission. In addition, he had some income from the floating barges loaded with forest timber which stopped at the mill, since he had to open the dam to let them through. Business was good, and the family was happy.

One year, when the water in the river was low, my grandfather began

to ask for more money because he had to keep the mill closed longer to accumulate enough water to run it. The barge owner refused to pay the raise. At night he sent his crew to open all the barriers at once, and when the barges rushed through, they broke the supports of the bridge and carried the bridge with them. It took a lot of time and money to rebuild the bridge. My grandfather's creditors took advantage of the situation to withhold payments due; new credit was impossible to get. Israel was ruined. He took the family to Warsaw, where he opened a restaurant, and above it, a large apartment with rooms to rent.

I met my grandfather only a couple of times; he was a very quiet man and his conversation with me was limited to how the family was and how many hours a day I studied the Talmud.

During the First World War, he, his daughter Perl, and her family left for Moscow, where his son Meyer was established. In September 1918, I went to Moscow to find out the whereabouts of my brother Miron. When I arrived at the building where my aunt Perl lived, I recognized my grandfather walking around in the yard. When I told him my name and mentioned that I was the son of his daughter Libe, he did not react, and I realized that he had apparently lost his memory. He did tell me the apartment number of his daughter Perl. Although I saw him every day during my stay in Moscow, I was unable to hold a conversation with him, but his pale face, with his intelligent eyes and lovely smile are still before my eyes.

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My Uncle Meyer Priluk

My mother's brother Meyer was two years old when his mother died. His childhood was an unhappy one; his step-mother disliked him and, if something was missing or broken, Meyer was punished. He wasn't happy in *cheder* and, after his bar mitzvah, he was placed in a fur workshop for two years, where he also got lodging and board, to learn the fur trade.

He married an intelligent and energetic girl and opened a fur shop in Warsaw. Business was very successful, but the couple had no children. When World War I erupted, he left for Moscow and opened a fur shop there. During the war, he became rich and, at the Seder meal on Passover of 1918, murderers broke into his apartment and killed him, his wife, and her brother.

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My Uncle Hersh Tzvi Harold Priluk

Hersh was born in 1879 in Kamenitz, near Brest. When he was one month old, his mother died and left four children: Libe, my mother, eight years old; Sheine, six; Meyer, three; and Hersh. His father Israel gave him to a nurse whose child had just died, and she was able to breast-feed him. Her husband, nick-named *Shmayser,* had a boarding-house for thieves and many storekeepers paid him a salary to make sure that their shops would not be burglarized. Shmayser loved the baby, and when Hersh was three years old, he took him to restaurants and saloons and gave him sweets and vodka.

His father remarried, a child was born and Hersh remained with the nurse until he was five years old.

At five, Hersh was sent to the *cheder* of Kopel, The Limp (he had a wooden leg), and enjoyed playing with the other children. His father leased a water mill in Trestenitze, which was a village with no place to educate the children. Thus he rented a room at the home of his relative in Kamenitz for his three children, Meyer and Hersh, who were to attend *cheder,* and Libe (my mother) who was to cook and take care of them.

For the holidays, the children went to Trestenitze, which Hersh enjoyed very much; horses, cows, chickens, green fields to play in, and trees to climb.

At seven, Hersh was placed in Peisach's *cheder;* the teacher was stern with the children and punished them often. When a child complained that he did not know why he was being punished, he answered, "If you are not guilty today you will be guilty tomorrow."

There was an inn not far from his father's mill in Trestenitze. The owner, Noske Grinwald, had two sons of the same age as Hersh and his brother Meyer. A full-time teacher was hired for the four boys, and

they did not have to go back to Kamenitz. These years were the best in Hersh's life.

When Hersh started to study the Talmud, his father asked his brother Kiva in Brest, who had a *cheder* for boys advanced in the Talmud, to accept Hersh in his *cheder* as a boarder. Kiva agreed, and Hersh was happy because his uncle and his family loved him and took good care of him. When his father was ruined and decided to move to Warsaw, he came to Brest and told Hersh the sad news and what his plans for the children were; Libe was married and her husband would take care of her; he could place Meyer to learn a trade; and Hersh had to go to Biale (two hours by train from Brest) where his relatives were to give him shelter and board while he devoted all his time to study to become a rabbi. Hersh became depressed and wept, something he very seldom did.

The relative in Biale was a *Hasid* (a religious sect) and when Hersh arrived, he told him that he would have lodging and food at his home and sent him to a small hasidic yeshiva to spend all his time studying. In the yeshiva, fifteen boys spent more time in telling stories about the miracles made by their *Rebe* (spiritual leader) than in studying the Talmud.

The atmosphere at the relative's home was strange to him, the yeshiva not to his liking, so that after two days Hersh left for Brest and came to his sister Libe. A couple of weeks later, on the advice of his uncle David Vidomlianski, Hersh left to study at a yeshiva in Bialystock. He rented a room for one ruble a month, and the yeshiva arranged for him to have his meals in private homes, each day in another home. Hersh disliked this, but it was the only way to survive, and it was only temporary. The rich Jews were looking for such boys as husbands for their daughters and took care of them for life.

There was a cultural organization which secretly provided modern literature and poetry in Hebrew and Yiddish to the students in the yeshivas, along with propaganda to show them that they were fanatics and were wasting the best years of their lives. One of the students in the yeshiva gave one of the books to Hersh, who found it most interesting. He started to keep these books on his open Talmud book and to spend more of his time reading modern literature than in studying the Talmud. Books about astronomy caused him to realize that God had

not made the sunshine and sunset, day and night, and his deep religious conviction collapsed.

Hersh was almost 17 years old when he left the yeshiva and got a job at a store for two rubles a week. When his father learned about this, he wrote him to come to Warsaw for Passover which was approaching.

His father and step-mother were not pleased to see him dressed in modern clothes, but his sisters were happy to see him. In Warsaw, Hersh secured a job at a doll factory, but after five months the factory closed and, since it was imposible to get a job without a trade or profession, Hersh decided to go to America. His father was against it, and he gave him only five rubles so that he would not be able to go too far and would return. Hersh took the five rubles and his savings and left for Grayevo, at the German border. There, he was recommended to a family which was looking for someone to accompany their sick relative to a hospital in Koennisberg. When Hersh told them that he was a yeshiva student, he gained their confidence and they arranged to transfer him without a passport to Germany and paid his expenses to Koennisberg.

There, he learned that in each city in Germany there was a committee which covered the transporation to the next city for poor people. This is how Hersh arrived in Hamburg. There, he met a Jewish missionary who discussed the Talmud with him, along with the Bible, and invited him for a lecture and a good meal. This man proposed that Hersh live in his home, where he would get training to become a missionary. Hersh refused, and left for London by cargo ship. In the spring of 1896, he arrived in London, carrying the address of a Jewish family which lived in a poor section of the city. The husband was a carpenter, his wife managed a store on the street level of their three-floor apartment. They lived on the second floor with their two children, and on the third floor was a large room with four beds. There were already three boarders, and Hersh became the fourth.

The landlord found a job for Hersh at a factory of bamboo furniture for 21 shillings; it was easy work and Hersh liked the job and particularly the 21 shillings a week. Feeling lonely, he joined an anarchist club, since he liked the idea of freedom, freedom from religion, from the Tsar, from the police. He also liked the idea of working only 24 hours a week. When he felt depressed and missed his family, he went

to an old synagogue, studied the Talmud and hummed the old familiar sad melody.

At the end of 1899, Hersh received a letter from Libe in Brest informing him that he had been called to the army, and if he did not register, his father would have to pay a three-hundred-ruble fine. Hersh withdrew his savings from the bank and started his trip to Warsaw, to visit his family there, and then go on to Brest. When he arrived to register, he was told that they had made a mistake—he didn't have to register until one year later.

Hersh got a job at the business of Chaim Zalman, his brother-in-law, until it was time to register for the army. One year later, at the army physical examination, Hersh was freed from active duty and placed in the reserve because he was a little shorter than the required height. He learned later than Chaim Zalman had paid one hundred rubles to make him shorter.

Salami and smoked meat were imported to Brest from Warsaw, and Chaim Zalman suggested to Hersh that they open a salami factory in partnership. Hersh left for Warsaw, where he paid twenty-five rubles for a course to learn the trade of salami making. Two years passed before the population of Brest and neighboring cities realized that the salami of Brest was as good or even better than the salami of Warsaw. Business grew, and Hersh was happy.

In 1901, a fire broke out in Brest. The day was extremely hot and windy, and the fire spread over the entire town. The salami factory went up in flames, and only ashes remained.

Hersh became very depressed and left for Warsaw.

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My Aunt Sarah Weitzman and Her Life with Hersh

On his way to Warsaw he was asked to visit a distant cousin of the family, Reb Alexander Weitzman, who was looking for a husband for his youngest daughter. An important man in his village, Weitzman owned a ranch and farm that required many peasants and an overseer to run. He, of course, spent his time studying the Talmud.

Naturally, the land did not belong to him, because Jews could not own land. It was rented to him by a nobleman. Travelers and beggars alike would stop for meals and many times for a night's lodging—all were welcome.

Sarah, his youngest and favorite daughter, was born in 1883. She usually got to pull his boots off and put his slippers on when he came indoors—this was considered a great privilege by all the children. With hair the color of wheat, soft blue eyes, a pretty face, and regal bearing, she was a beautiful girl of about 19 years of age at this time. With a good dowry and her beauty she naturally had many suitors. But she turned them all down until Hersh Priluk appeared.

Sarah's best friend said in amazement, "You chose him? He's short and skinny and starved looking." Sarah told her his intelligence and fine character made him beautiful to her.

When they were married in 1902, her father came back from one of his trips with a beautiful silver wine goblet (a becher), which is used today at the family seders, filled with wine for the *Ali-a-novi.* The family also has the talis bag of black velvet which Sarah sewed for Hersh all by hand, down to the buttonholes and, which is still in remarkable good condition.

Sarah was raised in comfort and pampered, but in spite of this was a warm, unselfish person with a great love for people. This was felt by everyone who came in contact with her and each one of them respond-

ed to it. Her daughters later on were embarrassed by this many times, because everyone, men and women alike, were drawn to her. Even in her later years, when she was in the hospital with cancer, people who had had contact with her would call and ask after her. Sarah was social and outgoing, in contrast to Hersh, who was reserved and quiet.

After they were married in 1902, they moved to Warsaw and opened an underwear manufacturing business. Things in Russia (Poland) became very bad for the Jews. So, after their first child, Minchi, was born in 1903, they decided Hersh would go to America. He left in 1904. Sarah worried about Hersh's crossing the ocean and was happy when she received his first letter from New York. She answered that she was delighted that he hadn't suffered from seasickness and that the trip was over. Sarah asked him not to worry if he did not find a job for some time, and told him that Morris Wolsk had written from New York that he made twelve dollars a week; he certainly worked very hard to make so much money and she begged Hersh not to do the same; he hadn't gone to America to become rich, but only to earn a living.

While Hersh was gone, the pogroms started. During this time Minchi became very sick with a terribly high fever. The Cossacks were riding their horses through the streets of the city, shouting and brandishing their swords. In spite of this, the sheltered, timid Sarah took to the streets to get a doctor. Hiding in doorways, and running from one door to another, she finally reached the doctor, only to have him refuse to come. She fell on her knees, holding on to his feet, weeping and pleading and saying that if she had made it coming to him, he could surely do the same. He relented and took care of the child's illness.

Meanwhile in America, not having a trade and not fit to be a laborer, Hersh had been advised to get a small business and Americanize his name to Harry. Six weeks after he arrived, he opened a stand and began selling cigarettes and "soda water"—not bottled water, but a carbonated water from a faucet that was mixed with various fruit syrups, as desired. He could only speak Hebrew and Yiddish, but that was no problem, because in those days the East Side was almost 100 percent a Jewish-speaking community.

After a year he sold his soda stand and sent for his wife and child. Money was scarce, so they came steerage. This meant terribly crowded conditions in the hold of the ship, very poor sleeping condition, and

very little and poor food. Most passengers brought along food, including jars of chicken fat. However, Sarah's aristocratic beauty and fashionable trousseau attracted the captain's attention and he invited her and her child to his table for several meals.

Hersh had bought a small restaurant, where his hours were long and he could not leave when he wanted to. Therefore, when Sarah and Minchi arrived at Ellis Island, he was not there.

All the other immigrants had finally been lined up, interviewed, sorted, okayed, and gone. So, all alone, sitting on one of the hundreds of benches in the vast high-ceilinged arrival hall of Ellis Island, they sat. Sarah was frightened at arriving in a new land and at the thought that if they had to wait much longer they might be sent back with the "ineligibles."

Finally, Hersh arrived, and an entirely different life started for the formerly carefree young lady.

They opened a small restaurant and worked very hard, just the two of them, from five in the morning until late at night, seven days a week. They did the buying, cooking, table-waiting, bookkeeping, and dishwashing. But she could bear it all because of the deep love and devotion they had for each other. The signs and menus were printed in Yiddish; the customers and dealers spoke the language.

In 1907 they had their second daughter, Gerry. Then followed a series of small restaurants, where they could finally employ people to help them. This enabled them to partake of the Jewish cultural life of the city, its concerts and, above all, the great Jewish theater of that day. Their daughters went with them at an early age, and remember seeing Boris Tomashevsky, Jacob Adler, and all the other popular actors in plays by contemporary and classic Jewish writers. Especially outstanding was Boris Tomashevsky in Shakespeare's *King Lear.* When their daughter Minchi (Americanized to Miriam) married Rik Shaw, they gave them, as a wedding present, subscription tickets to the Old Metropolitan Opera House, at the time of Chaliapin, Galli-Curci, Gili, Geritza, etc.

There were always people who came into the restaurant for a free bowl of soup and bread and butter. Among these were several that were called "steady customers"; one, a man called Gordon, would write a poem to pay for his meal.

In their East Broadway place near the Jewish *Forward* newspaper

building, their customers included the socialists of that day: Eugene Debs, the future Judge Panken, and the revolutionary Trotsky.

Eventually, Hersh started building and opening attractive, large restaurants where his only role was manager. After these restaurants became successful, he would sell them and go on to the challenge of finding another neighborhood in which to build a restaurant and start the same procedure all over again.

It is interesting to note the high moral code he held to. If a broker showed him a neighborhood in which there was another restaurant, and said, as the brokers were wont to say, "This is a wonderful spot," Hersh Priluk would say, "No, I will not take the bread out of another man's mouth. He has a small old place, and my attractive new restaurant will drive him out of business." The brokers could not understand this kind of thinking. They said it was unbusinesslike.

However, Hersh could also see the "other side of the coin." Once, when established in a very large restaurant, another one opened across the street with a sign in the window: "Eat all the dinner you can for only $1." Hersh gave all his steady customers $1 each and sent them across the street in groups to eat, eat, eat!

In those years they enjoyed more time off. On Friday nights the house was always full of relatives and "Sarah's orphans," people she would invite to share meals—single people, families, it did not matter. She would come home laden with packages of food to cook, and they would arrive at different hours, being fed all hours of the night. Then, there was singing, talking, and card-playing. The family resented all the dishes that had to be washed, but the practice continued for many, many years.

Hersh's business prospered, so after nine years he bought a home in Bensonhurst, a quiet residential, country-like neighborhood in Brooklyn.

His daughters graduated college, World War I ended, and Hersh was busy buying, selling, and building restaurants in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. He made his share during the prosperous years.

When the Depression came, everything that he had undertaken went wrong. He lost his business. His wife died in 1939 at the age of 56. He took sick with heart disease.

Since his younger daughter Gerry lived in California, he went there.

After a year, his health improved. He came back to New York, where Miriam and Rik had fixed up a separate apartment for him in his house in Bensonhurst.

At long last he had time to continue his studies, having been too busy to learn to write English well enough to correspond with his daughter and grandchildren. So at the age of 65 he started going to night school.

It was then that he started to trace our geneology and completed the family tree. In 1943 he started to write and completed his autobiography, which included all the members of his family. It is a truly intelligent and sensitive piece of work, interlaced with his inimitable and unquenchable humor.

He became a vegetarian in his later years, in reaction to the killing of animals. Hersh Priluk died at the age of 74 in 1966.

Sarah and Hersh were exceptional people by any standard.

When I was in New York in September 1938, I went to see my uncle Priluk. At our encounter, he became very emotional, listening attentively to my stories about his sisters and other members of the family in Poland and in Paris, and didn't say one word. It was a pathetic moment. Then, in a low voice, he said, "I feel guilty, I sent money to my sisters Sheine and Sara but I didn't write to anyone and this cut off our relationship."

I went to see my Aunt Sarah, who was in the hospital with cancer at the time. She recognized me, asked me to sit near her bed, and questioned me about everybody and everything and didn't let me go until the nurse came to give her some treatment. A day before my departure from New York, I went to the hospital to see her and told her that I was leaving the next day. She asked me what time I was leaving, and when I told her in the evening, she asked me to visit her in the morning. When I arrived the next day, she kept me close to her, embraced me, certainly feeling that this was for the last time. When I left, I walked backwards for a couple of minutes, while Sarah waved her hands and smiled (to raise my morale). I couldn't take my eyes off this pale, most beautiful face that I would never see again.

After I became a resident of New York, I met with my Uncle Hersh many times and our conversation was always most interesting. Uncle Hersh hadn't graduated from any school, but he was an intellectual

person. Up to the age of seventeen, he had devoted himself to the study of the Talmud. (The Talmud consists of sixty-two volumes; the greatest part of these works is devoted to religion and ethics; they also contain writings that may be classed as history, philosophy, and the sciences.) When Hersh left the yeshiva, he concentrated all his free time on reading books about astronomy, physics, nature and also about socialism, anarchism, and humanism. He lost his religious conviction, but stayed with the study of ethics, natural philosophy, and science.

From the Talmud, together with his knowledge of humanitarian and political literature, he composed his own code of ethics. He was against capital punishment, for protection of the working people, schools and jobs for the handicapped, brotherhood between people and countries, and against wars. He admired Dr. Zamenhof, author of Esperanto as an international language. He felt that if all people in the world spoke the same language, they would understand each other better, and this would build friendship and avoid wars.

I am sorry that hectic life in New York did not allow me to see Uncle Hersh more often and to enjoy spending more time with him. I regret that he passed away too early.

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My Mother's Three Sisters

Sheine was 6 years old when her mother died. When she became older, she helped her sister Libe in taking care of the household. When Libe got married, Sheine lived with her until she herself was married to a

school teacher named Daniel Basel, and moved to Warsaw. She had five children: a son Max and four daughters—Gitl, Feigel, Dobe, and Sara. After sixteen years of marriage, her husband died. Max went to his uncle Priluk in the United States, and my mother helped Sheine until the girls grew up and opened a workshop of women's dresses.

During the war, Sheine left with the children for Biten. In 1918, when our family arrived from Pinsk in Kobryn, we learned that Sheine was in Biten. I went there and arranged to move them to Kobryn, where they lived with us. When we moved to Brest, Sheine moved with us. Later, two of the girls left for Warsaw. In order to reunite the family, my parents furnished an apartment for them in Warsaw and Sheine, with the other two girls, left for Warsaw and again opened a workshop for women's garments.

Her son Max volunteered for the Jewish Legion during World War I and settled in Palestine after the war. The youngest daughter, Sara, joined her brother in Palestine, where she became a teacher, married and had a son Dani. Dani, married and the father of two children, became a medical doctor in Jerusalem.

Sheine and her three daughters shared the sufferings and death of the six million Jewish martyrs.

Perl, my mother's step-sister, was born in Warsaw in 1882. She was charming and sweet, always trying to be helpful. She married Eli Gilevitch and bore three children. When the First World War erupted, Perl, with her family and her father, left for Moscow. In 1918, when I arrived in Moscow to find out the whereabouts of my brother Miron, I stayed in Perl's apartment. This was the last time I saw her.

Sara, my mother's step-sister, was born in Warsaw in 1884. She was tall, intelligent, and withdrawn; she seldom took part in the family conversation and kept her eyes in a book. When her sister Perl, her husband, children, and father left for Moscow, Sara remained with her mother in Warsaw and managed a boarding house. Sara married when she was forty and two years later divorced. Her mother died and she perished in the Holocaust.

Book IX

REFLECTIONS

Reflections

Today there is a tremendous desire for people to know who they are. Thousands of Americans are sifting through courthouse files, marriage licenses, birth and death certificates, searching in libraries, and in census records for their roots. These sources are much less available to Jews who have been wandering from country to country—their communities and records destroyed. For them it is much more difficult to trace their roots.

Thus I succeeded in climbing my family tree for only four generations. I was more fortunate with my wife Luba's family, by being able to climb eight generations.

I have had to depend on letters, momentoes, photographs, and other relatives to add to my greatest tool—memory.

It is with the tool of memory that I have tried to set down the real story of three generations, the story of a middle-class Jewish family living in three countries with different civilizations, languages, customs, and morals. I wanted to record a life filled with struggles and achievements, with sorrows and happiness, with failures and success. I needed to describe the horror of wars and the joy of surviving. It is this need to record and to remember that has made me describe with such detail my parents, my sisters, their husbands, and their children—all lost in the terrible Holocaust.

I am not a historian or a professional writer. I have not set out to write a comprehensive description of the times. Rather I have hoped to set down a personal remembrance that will give a picture of the times and places I have lived in. For this book will not be for sale. It is a gift and I hope a legacy to my family, friends, and to libraries.

I would like it to be a legacy that shows honesty and industry to be the basis of success, that drive and energy are needed to fuel talent, and that it is wasteful to imitate and compete. It is far better to search out the new and the different. Immediate success is not a goal, far better to reach a step, to consolidate, and then go on to the next step.

Finally I would like this book to be a testimony to the need for helping others. Helping others has been a lifelong ambition for myself and Luba. It consumes time, eats up energy, but the rewards have been countless.

I hope my children, grandchildren, and their children will be proud of their roots. I hope they climb the tree higher, and they continue to record, and to remember.