Chapter 10
My Mother's Sisters and Brothers and Their Children

My mother, (Eva in English, Khawhveh Bahsyeh in Yiddish, and Khavah Batyah in Hebrew) as I have already related elsewhere, was born in Nemirov in 1889/1890. Like my father, she also was one of seven children. However, she was the eldest. She and her sister Libeh were contemporaries of my father's younger siblings. Her younger brothers and sisters were all born later at the turn of or during the first decade of the twentieth century. My mother, about thirteen, and Libeh about ten or eleven years old, came to America with the experiences of their childhood in Nemirov still recent and fresh, the fundamental influences in the formation of their outlook on life. They recalled the years of their childhood in Nemirov, especially my mother, for the rest of their lives.

In 1905, the year my grandmother Sooreh Dintsyeh and the other children joined my grandfather Shaiyeh and my mother in New York. Accompanying my grandmother were: Libeh a few years younger than my mother; Benny (Bentsion in Hebrew, Ben in English), born about 1899 or even 1900; Davey (Doodyeh in Yiddish, a nickname for Doovid, that is David in Hebrew) was born about 1900/1901; Becky (Brahneh in Yiddish, I do not know the Hebrew equivalent and her official English name was Ray, at least I believe it is the name that appeared on her grade school diploma) was born in 1902, a year before my grandfather and mother left for Nemirov. The last two children were born in America: Julie, or Julius was born in New York in 1906/ 1907, the one whom my mother carried on the Staten Island ferry to relieve his whooping cough; and finally, Ida (Eedis in Yiddish or Yudith in Hebrew), the youngest, was born in 1909, the year may parents were married. It was only when I was a grown man that I realized that Eedis was the Podolian Yiddish pronunciation for Yudith in Hebrew and that her name in English should have been Judith.

All of my mother's siblings knew how to speak Yiddish. However, I am certain that my mother was the only one who could read it too. My mother and Libeh spoke Yiddish to each other and to my grandparents. The other children knew Yiddish as a house language which they spoke only to their parents, but conversed in English among themselves and with my mother and Libeh too. Language, was a diagnostic a measure of the degree of Americanization, a sort of scale of American traits or mores on one end of the balance beam and Nemirover diagnostic traits on the other. The two oldest children who spoke Yiddish as a first language to each other, my mother and Libeh, were weighted more to the Nemirover end, while the other children

for whom English was the primary language, were weighted more to the American end of balance beam.

Libeh was enrolled in school, probably not long after her arrival in 1905. I do not know if Benny and Davey were also sent to school at once. Probably not, they may still have been just under school age, as Becky most certainly was. My mother wished to go to school when she arrived at age thirteen but went to work instead. She often told me, and not without some sadness in her voice, that Libeh, who had the opportunity to go to school, was not a very enthusiastic pupil. She would persuade the janitor's son of the tenement where they lived to do her homework for her. I do not know how long Libeh attended school, but long enough to learn how to read and write English. It is so long since I heard her voice, but I believe she spoke without any trace of a Yiddish accent and sounded like any other New Yorker. My mother also spoke English well, but there was always a trace of her mother tongue Yiddish and Russian in her speech.

LIBEH

My earliest recollections of Libeh, visual memories so to speak, are all from the time when we lived on Essex Street in East New York between 1917 and 1926. She married Louis Pogorelsky, a young man about her age or perhaps a year or two older. They must have been married before we had moved to Essex Street in 1917 and before I was in the first grade in P. S. 63 a few blocks away from where lived in a downstairs flat in a three-family frame house on Alabama Avenue between Glenmore and Liberty Avenues. That same term, probably the Fall of 1917, we moved to a two-family brick house in Essex Street, the first house my parents owned. I was transferred to P. S. 64 on Belmont Avenue and Shepherd Street, if I remember the street names correctly.

The English speakers of the family pronounced Libeh's husband's name Louis as "Loo'ee," while those who spoke Yiddish pronounced it as "Looyeh." He came from Ekaterinaslav in the eastern Ukraine and was a member of a talented and educated family.

His brother Shaiyeh, who frequently came to visit us even in later years when my parents lived on Saint Johns Place, spoke Yiddish with a marked Russian accent. Shaiyeh was a stocky ruddy faced individual and well learned in Judaism. Louis' sister Vera Gordon was a stage actress who eventually settled in Los Angeles where she acted in films. Her husband Nahum was a pharmacist trained in Russia but whose only occupation as far as I could discern as a child was that of manager of his wife's career. They had two children, Willy and Nadyeh.

I still remember a film in which Vera Gordon acted. It was titled "Humoresque," a silent film in which she had the part of the mother. It was a real tear-jerker. The piano player who supplied the musical background while the film was on the screen played Dvorak's "Humoresque." The reason I remember this story

is that one of the pieces my violin teacher gave me to play was "Humoresque" to which words had been added, the first line of which I still remember as "Go to sleep my dusky baby...."

Louis had another sister, Lyubah, who was married to a labor union organizer whose family name alone I remember, Babitch. They had two children: the girl became a ballet dancer and the son Solly, a violinist.

Louis father had died some years before he married. His mother was a small gray-haired lady who also spoke Yiddish with a strong Russian accent. I am sure my cousins Bernie and Florence who now live in Los Angeles will know more about their aunts and uncles and paternal grandmother than I do.

As I already said above, Louis and Libeh were married before 1917 about the time when I entered grade school, perhaps a year or two earlier in 1915 or 1916. Unfortunately, soon after they were married, Louis came down with a severe illness. I imagine it may have been tuberculosis, but I really do not know for certain. I remember my uncle Loo'ee as very thin, hollow cheeked and generally frail looking. Tuberculosis was known in Yiddish as "di proletahrisheh klooleh," the proletarian curse, and very common among the Jewish sweat shop workers in New York.

There were no antibiotic cures in those days, and patients were hospitalized and kept immobile in bed for long periods of time. In the Catskill Mountains in Liberty, New York, some Jewish organization, I never knew its name, maintained a sanitarium where tuberculosis sufferers were treated. The fresh mountain air and rest were the only cures available. Denver, Colorado was also the location of a number of Jewish tuberculosis sanitariums as well. Thomas Mann's novel, *The Magic Mountain*, is set in a TB sanatorium in the Swiss Alps.

The woman who stood in for my mother at my wedding, di tante Khahna Leebeh, an aunt of my mother-in-law, was from Denver where she had moved because a member of her family was a patient in a sanitarium there. My mother-in-law told me that for a period of time her aunt Khanha Leebeh worked in a sanitarium to support the family.

During Loo'ee illness, Libeh had to close down her home. She stored her furniture in the front room of our flat on Alabama Avenue and probably went back to live with my grandparents while he was hospitalized. Eventually, he was restored to health and they set up housekeeping again. This must have been about the time we moved to Essex Street in the Fall of 1917 or Spring of 1918.

Louis and Libeh had two children: Bernie, or Bernard, Shmeel Ber in Yiddish; and Florence or Flossy, Faygel in Yiddish. They are the only cousins with whom Esther and I had a close relationship during our childhood and even after we were already in high school. My mother always thought of them as if they were her own children. I still correspond with Bernie and Florence at least once a year during Rosh ha Shonah.

In the summer of 1978 Malvina and I took a trip to the west. After a stay at Santa Fe and the Grand Canyon we proceeded on to Los Angeles and San Francisco. While in Los Angeles we visited both Bernie and Florence and also my aunt Libeh who was then living in a retirement hotel. This was the first time I had seen them since they left for California in the early 1930s after my grandfather Shaiyeh died in 1931, well over forty years.

Louis was never a very healthy man and was always struggling to make a living for his family. He worked in a paper box factory in Brooklyn. Most of my memories of aunt Libeh's family are concentrated within a period of four or five years when we lived on Essex Street. It was during this time when Florence was born. I think it was about 1921 or 1922. Bernie was born about four years earlier, perhaps in 1918 or 1919. As in a dream I remember that Libeh gave Esther and me some candies when we came to see the new baby. I believe Libeh and Louis were living in a flat on Sutter Avenue not far from my grandparents a block or so away on Blake Avenue. At least it was a street that ran East-West and parallel to Blake Avenue.

Bernie was named for the same great grandfather, Shmeel Libeh's, as was I, and also for his father's father, Behr. In Yiddish he was always referred to as Shmeel Behr to distinguish him from me who was called by my first name only, Shmeel. I do not know what his first name, Shmeel, was in English, because he was always called Bernie, or Bernard on formal occasions. Florence was named for a member of her father's family. In Yiddish she was called Faygel and Florence or Flossy in English.

Libeh and her family moved to Los Angeles on two separate occasions. Life was extremely difficult for them. Louis' sister Vera Gordon who was living in Los Angeles at the time and pursuing her career in films, invited them to come and helped them make the move. I do not remember exactly remember the year they went away, but I do remember that we all went to Grand Central Station in New York to see them off. It was a sort of "deja vu" for my grandparents and recalled for them the time they left their parents behind and departed for America knowing they would never come back. It must have been not long before 1926 when we moved to Empire Boulevard from Essex Street that Libeh and her family were leaving us at Grand Central Station forever, so it seemed to all of us.

One incident, of less than a moment's duration, remains in my mind at the scene of leave taking. Also at the station was a distinguished looking man, a Mr. Makarenko, an actor on the Yiddish stage and a friend of Vera Gordon, who had come to see them off and give them some sort of moral encouragement for the almost week-long journey. He may have also been leaving on the same train; however, I am not certain. My grandfather, always an enthusiast of the theater and admirer of actors warmed up to Mr. Makarenko speaking Yiddish to him. He asked Makarenko where he was born. My grandfather was just naturally curious to know the whereabouts in the Ukraine Mr. Makarenko had been born and if he was possibly from some town near Nemirov. Apparently Makarenko, for reasons of his own, did

not care to reveal the secret where he was born. I still remember his curt reply, "In bet." In bed, as if to say mind your own business. I felt humiliated for my grandfather, a very proud and dignified man who had unwittingly laid himself open to being patronized and ridiculed by someone who turned out to be far less than a famous actor on the Yiddish stage and a total unknown in Hollywood.

Bernie and Florence were always thought of as our quasi-brother and sister. For me, Bernie was a surrogate younger brother. Now after the passage of so many years, it seems to me that I saw my aunt Libeh and Bernie and Florence almost every day on my way home from school – P. S. 158 on Belmont Avenue between Cleveland and Ashford Street, just a block away from where they lived on Cleveland Street just below Sutter Avenue.

They had a cat, a remarkable cat, actually it was Bernie's cat. He trained the cat to use the toilet bowl, or commode as it is now called in polite southern society. The cat used to mount to toilet seat and perform its necessary functions of evacuation.

Libeh and Louis rented out one of the rooms in their flat to a relative of Louis, an uncle I believe who had recently arrived from Ekaterinaslav. I remember he was always smoking cigarettes, probably the long Russian type with thin cardboard mouthpieces. He spoke Yiddish with a thick Russian accent. I once heard him telling my mother a story about his wife with whom he once went out for a walk and she lit up a cigarette. In those days in the United States women did not smoke, not even indoors let alone in public. He and his wife were followed by young children yelling, "Laydee smook, laydee smook."

Apparently life in Los Angeles and earning a living there were not any less difficult than in New York. So the family returned in 1928, if I am not mistaken. At that time we were living on Empire Boulevard. My mother and father went to Grand Central station to meet Libeh and her family. They were taken directly to our house to stay there until they had a place of their own after Louis found a job. Bernie stayed with me in my room and we shared the bed. Faygel moved into Esther's room and shared her bed too. Libeh and Louis were given the spare room. It is interesting that I have no remembrance at all of how long they lived with us. It may have been a year, perhaps slightly less. I was a student at Erasmus Hall High School at the time and Bernie was still in grade school. Florence was probably not yet six years old, and so did not go to school.

At that time my father was building about four or so very expensive and luxurious one-family homes on Country Life Road in Garden City, Long Island, an exclusive high-income community. Garden City was about twenty-five miles or about one hour's drive from Empire Boulevard. Since Louis had an education back in Russia, my father hired him to keep the books on the job during construction. Every day my father and Louis drove out to Garden City to the job where Louis kept the books in the shanty where the watchman slept and which also served as a sort of

office. So Louis and Libeh, having no rent or other living expenses were thus in a position to save his salary. Soon they were able to move into their own place.

Now in retrospect, I realize that my mother and father were living in a period of "deficit spending," except that they did not have the power to print money like the U. S. government has been doing now for decades. In previous years, when the real estate market was normal, my father had some measure of success in his building operations and no trouble selling the houses he built. When Libeh and her family came to live with us, my father had recently broken up partnership with Abe Schneider. They had been building on speculation since 1924 in various towns on Long Island: viz., Flushing, Corona, Middle Village. After the dissolution of the partnership and the Brod Developing Company, my father came away with about $10,000 which he invested in the operation in Garden City. I imagine that $10,000 in terms of buying power would be at least $100,000 to $150,000 today.

This was a critical time for my father. Though it was still a year before the 1929 Wall Street stock market crash, he already felt the first effects the oncoming Depression. It was impossible to sell those houses. They were priced about $20,000 and slightly more. My father said that there was no lack of "thousand dollar millionaires" who wanted to buy. They all had lofty ideas of their social and economic positions, but only paltry sums for down payments which did not cover the balance between the selling price and the bank mortgage.

Those were the days before the FHA and government insured mortgages. Buyers usually needed at least one third of the selling price by way of down payment. In the end, I believe it was in 1929, my father took the deeds to the houses with him and went to the mortgage company and gave them the houses. He walked away without a cent. He was either too naive or too decent to have declared himself bankrupt. Had he done so, he could have avoided paying his creditors and have taken what was owed them for himself.

All he got out of this operation was a weekly salary of $100 and another of $35 a week for Louis. In a sense, he had eaten up his investment by the time the houses were completed. However, had the houses been sold, he would have recouped the outlay and made a profit besides. But the real estate market was already dead in 1928. The mortgage company got them at a bargain for about one third less than the selling price, the one third representing my father's profit had the houses sold. The project was too small to have supported two families.

Soon after, it may have been 1929 and I was still in high school, Libeh and her family left and went to live in a place of their own. But matters did not improve for them though Louis worked. His wages provided only for a bare living for the family. The end result was that they returned to California not long after my grandfather Shaiyeh died in 1931.

The years passed and we all grew to adulthood and married and had children. Bernie became a physician, an ear-nose-throat specialist and married Bernice. They

have three children and a number of grandchildren. Florence became an accomplished musician. She married Jay Schwartzbine, a rarity indeed. He is a native of Los Angeles who used to go to school on horseback as a child. They have two children and a number of grandchildren. Louis died many years ago. He had been a frail and hardly a robust man all through the years. Libeh went to live in a retirement hotel where we visited her when we were in Los Angeles in 1978. She was delighted to see me and I her. The warm feeling I had for her and she for me during my childhood were kindled once again if only for a very brief moment. She died toward the end of the 1980s, a woman in her nineties.

BENNY

My mother's first brother, Benny, was about eleven or twelve years old when I was born in 1911. I was the first grandchild on my mother's side and also the first nephew of her sister's and brothers. Benny was a child himself when I was born. My memories of him are still very fond and loving because of the warmth and affection he always had for me, especially when I was still a small boy. My perception of him when I was a child and certainly until he married and had children of his own, was that I was favored by him and that everything I did or said always pleased him. I was certain that I occupied a very special and distinctive place in his life. He was the one uncle with whom I was most intimate and whom I loved and looked on with admiration and pride. I never was that close to my uncle Davey or to Julie who was only four or five years older than me.

My mother, born in 1890, and Libeh, probably born three or four years later in 1893 or 1894, were the first two children of my grandparents. There is a gap of six years or so between Libeh and Benny who was probably born in 1899 or even 1900. Large families of seven and even more children were not uncommon among the Jews of eastern Europe in the nineteenth century. It was not by the choosing of my grandparents that for a period of five or six years my mother and Libeh were their only children. I often heard my grandmother Sooreh Dintsyeh tell the story of how at last, after a number of years of anxiety over not having any more children, Benny was born, a miracle brought about by the intervention of Divine Providence.

After waiting a number of barren years, my grandmother decided to seek the help and advice of a "geeten eed," good Jew, khassidic rebbe. She went to the house of the rebbe and told him what was troubling her, that she already had two girls and wished to have a son. The rebbe consoled her saying she would soon conceive a son, and told her the name he should be given when he was born, "Zawlst eem a noomen geeben Bentsee'on, az dee zawlst vest eem gring ertsee'on." [You should give him the name Bentseeon so that you will raise him easily, without travail.] The rebbe used a play on words by rhyming the Hebrew name "Ben'tseeon" with the Yiddish word "er'tseeon, meaning to raise or bring up a child. And so when Benny was born in 1899, or perhaps early in 1900, he was named Bentsion in Hebrew. He was always

called Benyeh in Yiddish, a nickname for the Hebrew Bentsion. In America he was called Benny or Ben and on formal occasions, Bernard, but rarely. I always called him Benny, but my grandparents and his two older sisters always called him Benyeh. In school. and later on at work, he was known as Ben, Ben Marinsky which he shortened to Marin, especially when he was a "contender" in boxing matches. This was the original family name later changed to Bodie, an anglicized version of the Russian Ubogu (Oobawgoo).

The few details of his early childhood are known to me primarily from what my mother told me – first on the lower East Side for three or four years at most and then and in Brownsville where he grew to adulthood. As the oldest girl, until she married in 1909, my mother always helped her mother with the younger children, in addition to working full time in a clothing factory.

Benny must have been enrolled in grade school not long after his arrival in New York in 1905. My mother always related, not without some sadness and disappointment, that Benny had never been given a chance to develop his abilities as an artist or even to graduate from grade school. His was a lost talent. Benny reminds me of Oliver Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* and his lament over "....sweet Auburn ..... doomed to waste its sweetness on desert air..." This is a rough approximation of the lines that have remained with me ever since I read them for the first time in high school.

When Benny turned fourteen years and was still in grade school, my grandfather bought him a pair of long pants and sent him to work. The change from knee pants to long pants symbolized a change from carefree childhood to careworn adulthood. Benny, I believe, went to work in a candy factory where he was kept busy sweeping the floor.

Benny had a flair for the visual arts and should have been an artist. He used to draw and paint for his own pleasure as a child. Seeing that he had talent, my mother took him down to Cooper Union with the intention of enrolling him in art classes. To her chagrin, it was then discovered that Benny was color blind and not able to distinguish between red and green. Much later when I was already in college, I asked him how he distinguished between green and red traffic lights when he was driving his car. He told that green was usually the top light of the traffic signal. Also he distinguished between the two colors because one was a darker gray than the other. At any rate, he never went to art school, but he continued to draw and also painted watercolors.

When I was a student in P. S. 64 and probably in the sixth or seventh grade, he gave me a stack of his paintings with views done in the most improbable hues – purple cows on yellow grass with a green sky above, or some such palette. I thought these paintings were beautiful and I cherished them greatly.

A favorite scene of his was a headland made up of a number of a sloping irregular shoreline projecting into the sea. In the scene he placed a Dutch type of

windmill with its four sail-arms silhouetted against the sky. The horizon line was usually about half way up the sheet of paper. In the water to the left there was a single-masted sailboat, perhaps two, with a triangular foresail and a large spanker sail aft of the mast not unlike the type used on schooners. Flying overhead were a few sea gulls depicted by means of two small curved lines, the wings.

I often wondered where he had seen such a landscape. He may have seen the boats with spanker sails off Jamaica Bay or even off Coney Island, or even possibly in pictures in books of Dutch landscapes. Could it be that he saw schooners of this sort in the Hudson River which were still used for fishing in the late nineteenth early twentieth century when fish were still abundant and the water relatively unpolluted? I used to draw copies of this scene as a child, sometimes on the end papers of my school books, often alternating the composition with the land on the left or the right side of the picture plane.

When I was in the sixth or seventh grade in P. S. 64 on Belmont Avenue, some boys and I organized a club in the basement of a house directly across the street from the school where one of the boys lived. I hung Benny's pictures on the walls to decorate the place. The club did not exist very long it seems. I do not remember anything about it other than the paintings I contributed. At any rate, my uncle Benny's paintings disappeared along with the club and I have harbored a sense of disappointment over this loss ever since, even today when I recall how much I cherished them when I was a child.

Benny was a member of the Snedmore Club, an athletic club under whose banner he participated in boxing matches. It was located in a house a block or two away from where we lived on Alabama Avenue about the time I entered the first grade of P. S. 63 in the Fall of 1917. In other words, these first recollections of Benny and the club are from when I was five or six years old.

The name "The Snedmore Club" was concocted from the first half of the names of the streets where the clubrooms were located – Snediker Avenue near Glenmore Avenue in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. Benny who must have been sixteen or seventeen years old at the time (only just now as I am writing these lines have I made this calculation, for he was ageless for me as a child) and occasionally would take me with him when he went to the club. There was a player piano there. The music was on rolls of paper punched with holes, the notation, which revolved as one pushed on a pair of pedals forcing air through the holes which in turn caused the hammers to strike the strings and produce the music. I loved to play that piano though my legs were hardly long enough for my feet to push the pedals.

There was always a supply of candy in the club too, the type of candy that was for sale only in candy stores, one piece at a time, especially Hershey chocolate bars. I still remember the pleasant surprise when I saw that boxes of such candies, found only candy stores, were kept in the club and that Benny could give me one or two and that I did not need a penny or two to pay for them. These candies which my

uncle Benny would give me whenever he took me with him to the club were something extraordinary, a very special treat which made me very special indeed. I had no idea that candy-store candy could be had anywhere else but in a candy store.

The Snedmore Club was an athletic club and, as I have already said above, Benny represented the club in boxing matches. I believe he was a light heavyweight. I have no recollections of any of his boxing activities other than a photograph he gave us, and which I still have among the family pictures. He is wearing trunks and has boxing gloves on his hands and is crouching in the customary boxing stance ready to fight.

I also have a picture of Benny as an artist with a palette and brushes in his left hand. Both he and my mother were fair complexioned and favored my grandfather Shaiyeh. He was a good looking young man with blue-grey eyes like my mother and light brown hair which he lost as he grew older becoming almost bald. Though not too noticeable, his nose was a little widened or flattened in this photo, the reason being that it had been broken in a boxing match.

The story I heard how his nose was broken is that he came home one evening with his face swollen and bloodied. My grandmother was more than upset and berated him for fighting and was even angry because his nose had been broken. My uncle Davey, who apparently had been his second that evening, said to my grandmother to calm herself and handed her some loose teeth which he said Benny had knocked out of the mouth of his opponent. During the First World War he was still under draft age and worked at the Brooklyn Navy Yard as an electrician. He described the big guns on the battleships, so large that some of the men would crawl into the muzzle of barrel and take a nap instead of working at their jobs.

As the husband of his eldest sister, he treated my father with the respect due an older brother. He always had the highest regards for my father admiring him as a an experienced and very skilled craftsman. In fact, Benny was a very talented craftsman who had learned his trade by himself while on the job, without any one to teach him, probably while working in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. He also worked for a time in the Baltimore Navy Yard.

He loved the beach and each summer would rent a room in Coney Island so he could go swimming every day after work. We sometimes met him at the beach. If till this very day I am afraid to put my head under water while swimming, or afraid to dive into a swimming pool head first, it is because he used rough house with me in the water and duck me. He meant no harm and would laugh seeing me flounder about. I was ashamed to say that I was terrified, and have not lost my fear of having my head under water till today.

Benny married Julia Ashinsky about 1923 or 1924, about a year or so later than his younger brother Davey. His wedding took place in the house of Julia's parents in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn. I have no recollection of her parents who were Litvaks. My grand mother's sister Temah, a frail woman prone to heart

attacks it seems, suddenly fell ill while the dancing and the wedding music were in full swing. She was carried upstairs to a bedroom to rest. I remember her son Willy complaining that the noise was making his mother worse and asked to have it stopped. I do not remember the outcome or exactly what happened then. He must have taken his mother home. The joyous celebration continued downstairs, not a little dampened and marred somewhat.

Julia and Benny had three boys: Earl, the eldest was born about 1925 or so; Robert or Bobby, named for my aunt Becky, Brahnah, who died in 1926, was probably born in 1927; and a third son, Geoffrey, born when Benny and Julia were a already in their forties. And herein lies the tragedy of Ben and Julia's life – they outlived Earl and Bobby and were left with the one child born to them in their middle age.

Earl, who had been in navy during the Second World War, died of a heart attack when he was about forty years old. He had gone to Long Island University, I believe on a basketball scholarship. Like his father, he was athletically inclined. Right after the war he married a very talented girl who was an accomplished musician. They had two boys, one was named Scott and I do not recall the name of the other. Earl and his wife had a house out on Long Island, in Hicksville I believe. Once when I was visiting Ben and Julia in Brooklyn, not long after Earl's death, Julia related to me, and not without some anguish and bitterness, that Earl's wife had remarried. Her new husband and the boys' stepfather was not Jewish. But even more distressing to her was that the new husband not only went to live in Earl's house, but also slept in Earl's very bed with her. Benny was silent, but Julia lamented that Earl's widow was insensitive to the feelings of her boys nor did she have the decency or even the slightest reverence for Earl's memory, at least to have changed the furniture in the bedroom she once shared with Earl.

The second son, Bobby, like Earl died of a heart attack when he too was about forty or so years old. Like Earl he was also blonde as a child. I actually never saw him when he was a grown man, for by that time I had gone off to Panama and Guatemala coming back to the United States and to Durham in 1947 where we have resided ever since. Bobby became a New York policeman and married an Italian girl whose mother, according to my mother, was a bridge-playing friend of Julia's. I do not know how many children he had. But Benny told me that one his daughters had caused him a great deal of aggravation and was probably responsible in great part for his early death. He once had to take her to Puerto Rico to have an abortion.

Later on during a another visit long after Bobby's death, I learned that one of his daughters was about to be married. I do not know if it was the same girl he once had to take to Puerto Rico. The wedding was to take place in a Catholic church. Apparently Bobby's wife had remained a Catholic after they were married. Julia told me that she had a crucifix on the wall over her bed. Ben and Julia had been discussing, perhaps even debating, about attending the wedding of their

granddaughter. Julia was resigned that with Bobby dead she had to accept the fact that his children would not continue to be Jewish, and though she was reluctant, the bride, Jewish or not, was still her granddaughter and so she might possibly attend the wedding. Benny, sitting over to one side, kept muttering almost under his breath, "I ain't going to no wedding in a choich." And knowing Benny, he probably did not.

Benny and Julia's third son, Geoffrey, I saw only once or twice when he was still probably under five years old. I believe he also graduated from Long Island University and like his father was athletic. When we were in Los Angeles in 1978 I asked my two cousins, Bernie and Florence, about him and got rather vague and half-hearted answers which led me to believe that they were not warm to him or even estranged for some reason or other. I never inquired to find out. I had his telephone number and called him intending to see him and get to know him. Unfortunately, I had been influenced by Bernie and Florence's indifferent attitude and was overly formal with him. I knew from Julia that he had married a girl of Sephardic Jewish descent. Bernie and Florence told me that Geoffrey and his wife were separated or already divorced. Apparently they did not approve of the divorce or perhaps even his life style. Geoffrey was operating a children's day camp at the time. He was rather defensive when I sought to learn more about his work. It seemed to me that he did not have steady employment and that the day camp was a temporary activity. I never saw him and have lost track of him till today, much to my regret. I feel I owe him the kindness and love his father showered on me when I was child.

After Benny died, it must have been about ten years ago – 1984 or 1985 – Julia went to live in Los Angeles to be near her one surviving son. I believe she lived in the same retirement hotel as Libeh, my aunt and her sister-in-law. Before she moved to California, Julia sent me a framed pastel painting I had done while I was in Union College, the existence of which I had totally forgotten and that I had given it to Benny. I was moved almost to tears when I opened the package and saw this painting. Sorrowful memories of Benny and his tragic life, like Job's, came back to me and I was saddened. I wished she had not returned it. So I sent the pastel back to Geoffrey and urged him to accept it as a token of my feelings for his father whom I had loved so deeply during all my childhood years. He never acknowledged receiving it and I never heard from him at all.

About two or three years ago I made an effort to locate as many of my maternal cousins as I could, including Geoffrey. I wrote him to the last address I had. The letter was returned to me marked address unknown. In the New York telephone book I found a Scott Bodie listed and wrote him to find out if he was the son of Earl Bodie and the grandson of Julia and Ben Bodie. I did not get a reply. So there is no closure for me.

This is the destiny of many in this vast and alien world. Though tied together by a common source, my grandparents, their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren eventually are scattered about totally ignorant of the roots from which

they sprung. Though sharing the same genes, individual members of the family are totally disconnected and sometimes their existence even unknown to each other. They eventually have little in common with each other though they have sprung from the same source and once shared the same language, religion, social mores and culture in general. The differences between my two grandfathers, Shaiyeh and Yahnkel, and their fourth generation namesakes, my sons Alexander Jacob and Charles William, are such that one would never guess that the fourth chapter is part of the story that began in chapter one. Drastic discontinuities are the norm of twentieth-century life.

DAVEY

My uncle Davey would sometimes boastfully inform his brother Benny, "I came in with the century." Just how he was able to be so positive about when he was born is a reflection of his character and a measure the self-esteem in which he held himself. He decided that he was born in 1900 and so it was. Judging by the family picture in which he appears, taken probably in Nemirov in 1904, he does look about four years old. There is another picture of the whole family taken in 1906 or possibly 1907 in New York in which Julie, an infant and already born in America, is in my grandmother's arms. Next to her on the left side of the picture is Davey in knee pants holding a book in his hand and he does look about five or six years old. My uncle Benny is on the right side of the picture next to my grandfather. Next to my grandmother is Becky, a child of about three or four years old. Standing behind my grandmother is Libeh and behind my grandfather is my mother.

The truth is that the date of one's birth was never of much importance among Russian and other East European Jews who had a lot more to be concerned about than remembering the exact day and year when they or their children were born. Caring for the children and keeping them healthy, clothed, fed and educated in Judaism was of greater concern than the date of their birth, except for boys who had to serve Fawnyeh, the Tsar, beginning at age twenty-one. It was less than desireable to be very exact as to the year they were born and to record their dates of birth in the official government archives. This was sometimes impossible to avoid because every Jewish community had a Kahzyawner rahbeener, a secular "rabbi" or community official, not a religious office at all, appointed by civil authorities who was charged with keeping the official Jewish vital statistics.

If any interest in genealogy or family history was forthcoming among the Jews of Eastern Europe, it was because of the high status and the moral and spiritual quality of one's forebears. To merit any respect and be worthy of special attention, one's yeekhes, family tree, lineage, had to include scholars, men of learning, pious men and women, very charitable individuals and like. That is to say, one's antecedents had to have had certain qualities of character and have done deeds which were prized even more than wealth. Wealth was an asset. But wealth alone

was not enough. Piety, learning, charity, righteousness and the like were still the most important criteria for a claiming to have a lofty yeekhes.

I am absolutely certain that neither my grandfather or grandmother knew or were concerned with the date when Davey was born according to the civil calendar. References to the nearest Jewish holiday – the week before Pesach, during the interim days of Sukkos, during Shvuos, etc., were used to fix the time when one was born, but rarely was the year remembered. Life for Russian and East European Jews was transcendental, beginnings and ends were not as important as what went on in between birth and death. As a matter of fact, birthdays were not celebrated. I never had a birthday party as a child, only as a father and grandfather has my birthday been noted. Among traditional Jews of East European origin, even among their descendants now in the very late twentieth century, the date of one's departure from this beautiful world, the date of death, was and is celebrated by lighting a candle for the departed and saying the Kaddish, a prayer praising God and in which the individual being remembered is not mentioned at all.

The indifference to dates of birth is reflected in my father's case, for example. He was born during "khawlahmoid sikus" (chol ha moed Succoth) but he was never certain whether it was 1885 or 1886, probably 1885 because the miliary draft officials came looking for him in 1906 when, according to their records, he was twenty-one years old. Also, my mother's date of birth remains a mystery, other than she was born in the Spring about Pesach time. On my birth certificate her age is given as twenty-two which would imply that she was born in 1889 [1911 - 22 = 1889]. On the other hand, she came to America in 1903 in her thirteenth year, "doos drahtsiteh yoor," which would make the year of her birth 1890, somewhat corroborated by the fact that she and my father were married in 1909 when she was nineteen years old. In fine, what is a year or two as long as one is a mentsh?

The family photo I mention above where Davey appears with a book in is hand may be taken as a sign of the frustration in life he was to endure because he did not get an education beyond grade school. Like Benny, I doubt if he graduated, and like Benny he went to work at age fourteen or so. My father always joked about Davey's pretensions to culture. My father was a down to earth man who was satisfied with what he was and had little patience for those who wanted to be what they were not. Sometimes, especially when he went on vacation to the Catskill Mountains, Davey played the roll of a "college boy." At times, I sensed he was patronizing Benny who was a blue collar worker, an electrician, whereas he, Davey, was superior because he was in a genteel profession; namely, a salesman in a very prestigious men's clothing store, located at first on the lower East side and then on Fifth Avenue north of 42nd Street.

Davey always had high aspirations, cultural as well as social. For example, he called himself Dan or Daniel in English. His name in Yiddish was Doodyeh, a nickname for David in Hebrew but pronounced Doovid in Yiddish. Like Benny, he

was sent to work before he finished grade school. But unlike Benny who had manual skills and a talent for drawing and painting and so learned the trade of electrician, Davey, on the other hand, eschewed a mechanical trade. He preferred white collar work and became a clothing salesman, in a sense an offshoot of the tailor's craft practiced by his father and paternal grandfather Elyeh OObawgoo.

In America the sons of immigrant tailors did not become tailors, nor did the sons of immigrant carpenters become carpenters. Only the first generation immigrants worked as tailors or carpenters, that is pursued their traditional Old World crafts in the New World. When the sons of craftsmen did choose to take up one of the mechanical trades, they chose more modern ones, that is trades unknown in the old country, particulary plumbers and electricians. Neither did the sons of Italian masons and bricklayers follow their fathers' trades in America.

The different trades employed in any given building operation in Brooklyn during my childhood could be sorted out according to the national origin of the craftsmen. Carpenters, both framers and trimmers, were usually Jews from the Ukraine. Bricklayers and stone masons were usually Italians, mainly from southern Italy, all claiming to be from Naples, that is "vicina Napoli," in the vicinity of Naples and rarely if ever actually mentioning the village where they were from. None wanted to classed as peasants from villages, rather as craftsmen from a large and famous city like Naples. Diggers, that is those who excavated cellars or basements, were in the main Poles, pick and shovel men who sometimes used teams of horses with scoops to excavate the cellars. The ground below the top soil in Brooklyn, and all of Long Island, was more often than not sand, unlike the Bronx which is underlain with rock. Plasterers were almost always Italians. Lathers were usually American born children of immigrants of no specific national origin. Cement men were Italians. Foundations, those commonly built of huge undressed stones of granite or other local stones, were built by Italians, and a very special group of Italians from southern Italy. Not all stone masons had the skill to lay up the foundations of the large irregular undressed rocks. Day laborers, especially on jobs of brick construction, were also south Italians and Sicilians who had been farmers/peasants in Italy and were good at unskilled heavy manual work such as moving dirt in wheel barrows, screening sand and the like. Bricklayers' laborers or helpers were all Italians too, and their skill was mixing mortar and carrying it and bricks up the scaffolds to the work stations of the master bricklayers, a special skill for which they were paid more than common day laborers. Electricians and plumbers were all American born and for the most part sons of Jewish immigrants.

It was rare indeed for an American-born boy to become a tailor or a carpenter or, as a matter of fact, to follow his father's trade. So Benny became an electrician, a truly American trade. And Davey became a clothing salesman, an ancillary profession to tailoring, but of higher social status and possibly higher income than

working at a sewing machine. And he was proud of his profession and of the company he worked for, Witty Brothers on Fifth Avenue.

In appearance Davey took after my grandmother. He was olive skinned with black hair and deep grey-green speckled eyes. I recollect that when I saw my grandmother's brother Leepeh Pilch for the time, I was amazed that my uncle Davey looked so much like him. He was always impeccably dressed, as befitted a men's clothing salesman in a high class Fifth Avenue establishment.

Davey married before Benny, though he was a year or two younger. He married Rose, a blonde girl. I never knew her family name. Her parents were Litvaks, and her father, I believe, was a tailor who had his own shop in Brownsville. The year Davey married may have been 1921 or 1922. It was the first Jewish wedding I had ever attended. I was about ten or eleven years old at the time. The wedding took place in a "hall." In the Jewish neighborhoods in Brooklyn, and also on the Lower East Side and in the Bronx, there were a number of locales or banquet halls which could be rented for festivities such as weddings, reunions of lantsman societies, and other joyous occasions and social events. Davey and Rose were married in such a hall in Brownsville.

These "halls" were usually located on the second story of a building, preferably located on a corner so that there would be windows facing two streets. Sometimes there would be a restaurant on the first floor, where the daily menu would be prepared as well as the for for the banquets for the celebration in the big hall upstairs, usually on Saturday nights, especially weddings.

There was one such hall, Kotimsky's, near where we lived on Essex Street. It was located on the corner of Blake Avenue and Cleveland Street. In addition to the restaurant and banquet hall, Mr. Kotimsky also installed a Russian/Turkish bath downstairs where I went quite often with my father, usually on Saturday nights. After sweating and losing gallons of water in perspiration, one ate some salted herring to put the salt back in one's system and also make one thirsty enough to drink lots of water.

The "shvits bood," sweat bath, was really a delight in many ways. There was a room furnished with a three-tier wooden bench where one sat or lay down, the higher up the bench, the hotter it was. In one of the walls of the room there was an iron door of an oven where large rocks were heated. The pahrtshik, the one who rubbed you down, would throw a wooden bucket, it had to be wood, hot metal would cause a severe burn, of cold water on the hot stones. Whereupon, a thunderously loud blast of hot steam, "pahreh," would issue forth filling the "shvits" so that one could hardly see. The men would yell "pahreh, pahreh" for more heat so that sometimes I could hardly breathe. The more hardy men, my father among them, would clamber up on "di eybehrshtih bahnk," the topmost of the three levels of the bench, and be right under the ceiling where it was really hot. The temperature must have been at least 120 +/- degrees Fahrenheit, I imagine, but since it was a wet heat,

the temperature was considerably lower than in a sauna bath where the absolutely dry heat is probably even higher.

The attendant, called the pahrtchik, would take a bucket of soapy water and a bayzim, a small hand broom made of oak or birch leaves, and give you a "playtseh," a kind of rub down on your back. You usually wore a cone-shaped felt hat which the pahrtschik kept wet, otherwise you could not bear the heat, while he soaped you down with the bayzim. A good pahrtchik would fan small areas of your back with the bayzim being very careful not to touch you. The object was to bring the blood up to the surface of your skin, that is increase the circulation. If the pahrtchnik was not careful he could literally skin you alive with the bayzim.

After sweating, you either took a cold shower or plunged into a pool with unheated water. You were so hot that the cold water did not shock you. Then you went to the small restaurant, still wrapped in a sheet, ate something, preferably something salty like salted herring or corned beef or pastrami sandwiches, drank plenty of liquid, and then repaired to the sleeping room, usually a large dormitory with beds lined up as in a hospital ward. The svits operated only during the cold winter months. It was not recommended to go home right after the shvits because in winter it was very cold and you could get sick. Also you were so drained from sweating that you needed the immediate rest. I loved to go to the shvits with my father and I understood why my grandfather Yahnkel was always complaining that my father did not take him to a shvits once in a while.

To get back to my uncle Davey's wedding, the first Jewish wedding I had ever attended in my life, and probably the best too. The hall where Davey and Rose were married I think was on Hopkinson Avenue. I remember the place as in a dream, but a dream with many details still clear and unclouded in my memory. The ceremony took place in the large hall. In one corner there was a small orchestra, a klezmer group. After the ceremony, usually performed by a khazan, cantor, the guests, to the accompaniment of joyous music, were asked to be seated at the tables and were served "a kawpel sahper," couple supper, that is to say there were served a banquet dinner.

A "kawpel sahper" was not inexpensive. The price was calculated by the number of couples invited. Having a kawpel sahper was an indication that the bride's parents were well-off enough to afford the expense. A kawpel sahper was a lot more expensive and also of higher status than a "sweet table."

I do not remember exactly what the menu was at Davey's wedding, other than it was a traditional elaborate Jewish holiday meal. Usually there was a fawrshpahz, vorspeis, sometimes chopped lived with a slice of white radish, or even kholodyets, pickled and heavily spiced calf's feet, like a gelatin — I always shunned this dish as well as brains and sweetbreads. After this introductory course, the next would be "di geeldeneh yookh," the golden soup, chicken soup with fine egg noodles and "mawndlen," little puffs of crisp baked crusts, not croutons which are made by

heating cut up pieces of stale bread. The soup would be brought to the table by the waiters in individual portions in silver plated metal cups and then poured into the soup bowl on the table before each guest. After the soup, the next item would be gefilte fish, served with khrayn, grated horse radish, into which raw beets had also been grated.

Of course, the table was also laden with bread of various kinds, especially khallah and small dinner rolls made of the same dough more or less like the khallah. After the fish, the main dish was served. It was almost always brazed or baked chicken, garnished with a variety of dishes: slices of meat loaf in which hard boiled eggs had been added before baking or, instead of meat loaf, some "gedemteh flaysh," pot roast as a side dish to accompany the chicken; "kishke," baked stuffed tripe, the stuffing was delicious; browned potatoes baked along with the chicken and/or the meat loaf; sometimes carrots would be prepared in the same way as the potatoes. The table would also be occupied by bowls of green pickled tomatoes, a finely shredded sauerkraut that had been fermented and aged in oak barrels and not harsh to the taste.

Desert as we know it today was an unknown concept. Fresh fruit was commonly served after meals. But at a wedding banquet, some compote or tsimehss of dried fruit such as prunes, apricots, pears, raisins, and etcetera was always served accompanied by various pastries, shtroodel, strudel in the first place, also fluuden, a kind of fruit cake shaped like strudel and made of ordinary rather than "filo" dough, and many other cakes the names of which I no longer know, but the taste of which I still savor.

Also, I must mention that siphon bottles of seltzer water were always on he table, and sometimes some soft drinks like celery tonic. This, then, was the typical and almost traditional feast served at weddings and other joyous celebration in the "halls" in Brownsville and East New York. Davey and Rose's kawpel sahper was just about what I have described above, perhaps with minor differences I can hardly recall. I was only ten or eleven years old at the time.

After the wedding Davey and Rose went on their honeymoon to Niagara Falls. Honeymoon! Who ever thought of such things? Honigmoon, Shmonigmoon! But Davey strove to higher things in life, and so he was the first one in the family to go on a honeymoon. He sent us some pictures of himself and Rose in large raincoats and sou'wester hats on a boat right under the falls. I do not remember if Benny and Julia, or Julie and Harriet or Ida and Izzie went on honeymoons when they got married. I suppose they probably did, it was the thing to do.

Davey and Rose had two children, a girl, Lucy or Lucille, and a boy, Jackie. I knew them as small children only. I had no contact with them as adults. Lucy was blonde like her mother and Jackie, I believe, favored his father and had dark hair.

By the time I came back from Panama and Guatemala in 1947, I no longer had any contact with Davey or his family. The first time after a space of many years,

I saw Davey once again when my grandmother Sooreh Dintsyeh died in 1942. And I saw Davey for the last time in my sister Esther's apartment on West 97th Street in New York on the occasion of mother's funeral in January of 1960. He was living at that time in Franklin Square, Long Island. My father was always polite and somewhat formal in his relationship with Davey, quite unlike the one he had with Benny who had a great deal of respect and admiration for my father as if he were an older brother and also because of a common interest in building and construction.

I remember that meeting very well because of an incident between him and my sister Esther's son Michael. During some small talk, Davey said something about himself, only very mildly boastful and of no moment at all, something having to do with his income or some other insignificant financial matter. Davey's innocuous remarks about himself elicited a rather patronizing comment from Michael belittling him, his dead grandmother's brother and his great uncle whom he had never seen before in his life. Davey was visibly hurt. I was astonished that Michael could be so combative with someone old enough to be his grandfather and whom he had met only a few moments before. Davey's remarks were not meant, even by innuendo to impress Michael. Michael's disparaging comment was uncalled for and I was embarrassed and hurt for Davey who had needlessly been humiliated by his sister's unfeeling brash grandson. I never saw Davey again, not even at my father's funeral three years later in 1963.

My father was always amused by Davey who sometimes acted as if he were superior to the other members of his family. After we left Esther's house, my father told me that Davey had boasted that in his town, Franklin Square, on Long Island, where he and his family lived, "We are accepted by the goyim, gentiles." My father laughed about this, because as a builder for may years on Long Island, he knew that Franklin Square was a second rate lower middle class neighborhood and that being accepted by the gentiles there, who were far from being "high class" people, was hardly something to be proud of. In fact, he thought it ridiculous, to be dissatisfied and ashamed of what one was and pretend to be something else.

Davey never gave me any special attention when I was a child as had Benny. Nor as I as close to him as I was to Benny. After my grandfather died in 1931 and my grandmother went to live with my aunt Ida, Davey and Benny, the two older sons, agreed to give my grandmother a few dollars each month to help pay for her keep at Ida's house. Davey did so without any protest sending her the amount agreed upon each month. Benny on the other hand, was not as readily forthcoming, though he did send her the money each month. I imagine the reason for his tardiness was that he worked for himself as an electrical contractor and so his income was erratic and not a weekly salary like Davey's.

As I have already said before, except for the occasion of my mother's funeral, I had lost track of Davey and his family. A few years ago, probably 1990 or earlier, I had a letter from my cousin Florence in Los Angeles in which she included a

photocopy of a letter from Davey's daughter Lucy. Lucy gave some information about her mother and father.

Her mother, Rose, died in 1985, and her father, Davey died, in July of 1986. She says in the letter that she was glad to hear that Florence keeps in touch with me. She goes on to say that she and Jack have lost contact with the Bodie family. Lucy also gives more information: she is a widow, remarried to Albert Rosenthal and that she lives in Rockaway Beach, New York; her daughter Susan is 41 years old and has two grown children; her son Gary has three children; her brother Jack and his wife Harriet have two children. It is interesting that I wrote a letter to Jackie about three of four years ago to an address I found in the telephone directory for Franklin Square. But I got no reply, so I suppose the person I addressed the letter to was not my cousin, or if he was, he chose not to answer, or perhaps my letter or his reply were lost in the mail.

BECKY

The next of my mother's siblings was Becky, Brahneh in Yiddish. She was born in 1902 and came to America when she was about three years old. She was always called Becky, an English version of her Yiddish name. But in school and at work she was called Ray.

She died in 1926 at the age of twenty-four while undergoing surgery for the removal of a goiter. I already related the tragic circumstances of her life and death in the chapter dealing with my maternal grandfather Shaiyeh. We had moved to Empire Boulevard in February of 1926 and she died that Fall.

Becky was the first child of my grandparents to have completed all eight grades of primary or grade school. After her graduation, probably at age fourteen or so, I believe she went to a business school and became a bookkeeper. She worked in a ladies' hat or dress store somewhere in East New York or Cyprus Hills. The disfiguring goiter had a tragic effect on her state of mind. As far as I can recall, she never had any boy-friends, or suitors, or "kept company," as it was then called. Her social life was altogether barren. I do not know if she had much of a life of her own other than going to work each day and coming each evening. She contributed to the family budget along with Benny and Davey as was customary for working children who customarily lived at home with their parents until they married. Becky never married.

She saved her money in order to pay for the surgery to remove the goiter. It is not without some anguish that I recall how she made all her own arrangements with the unprincipled Dr. Goetch (I am not sure of the spelling, the name sounded like Getch, to have the goiter removed at Long Island College Hospital in Brooklyn. She expressed high hopes that once the unsightly growth was removed from her neck she might be able to meet someone and marry and have a family like everyone else. In anticipation for the new life she envisaged, she bought new clothes and even new shoes. Just prior to her funeral, her shoes were cut up, as is customary, and thrown

away. And as she was lowered into the grave, the person officiating at the funeral rites, in Yiddish, cried out your mother and father are now giving you in marriage. I was about fifteen years old at the time, and I am still moved to tears as I write this.

When Becky died, a whole world died with her. She never had children, grandchildren, nor are there any great grandchildren named for her. When Bobby, Benny and Julia's son, was born, he was named for her. The Yiddish name Brahneh was converted to Robert in English. I do not know the Hebrew equivalent of Brahneh. And when my aunt Ida's son Bobby was born, he too was named for Becky, and her name Brahneh converted to Robert.

I no longer remember where Becky is buried. Nor, as a matter of fact, do I know where my maternal grandparents are buried or any of my uncles and aunts. The cemetery belonged to the Independent Nemirover Benevolent Society located in Cyprus Hills in an area almost totally given over to cemeteries. When my grandfather Shaiyeh died in 1931, he was also buried there. I was away at school when he died, so I was not present at his funeral. But by the time my grandmother Sooreh died in 1941, the cemetery was already filled and so she was buried in the new Nemirover cemetery.

JULIE

My uncle Julie, Yeedl in Yiddish, was born in New York in 1906, perhaps 1907. In the family picture, which I assume was taken soon after he was born, he is an infant in my grandmother's arms. My grandmother and the other children – Libeh, Benny, Davey and Becky – who had remained in Nemirov in 1903 when my grandfather and mother left for America, joined them in 1905. This the reason that I conclude that Julie was born a year or so later, in 1906 or perhaps 1907.

Julie spoke Yiddish with his parents, but with his brothers and sisters, including his two older sisters, Libeh and my mother, he spoke English. He was brought up without the knowledge or living experience of the age-old models or paradigms of the traditional ways and mores of Jewish life in Nemirov which might have guided him both as a child and as an adult had he been born and raised in Russia. Nor was he raised and his character or point of view on life nurtured entirely by American models or paradigms of American mores and culture. He had no clear cut role models to follow: his parents were more attuned to the Old World whence they had come while he was growing up.

My mother had very little influence of him because she left her parent's house to marry when he was still an infant. And his other siblings, especially Benny and Davey, had little sway over Julie because they too had married and were involved with their own families. My mother and Libeh were weighted culturally more to the Old World. Benny and Davey were a little more attuned to the mores of the New World but still attached to the older traditions. But Becky, Julie and Ida, were almost entirely oriented to life in the New World.

But what New World? It was not the America of a small New England town with its Congregational church on the town square. Nor was it the America of a farming community in Iowa or Wisconsin or Minnesota peopled with the descendants of German or Scandinavian immigrants who had arrived and taken root there during the nineteenth century. Nor was it the America of the south with its tobacco farmers, cotton mill towns, and a caste system even worse than the one the Jews had left behind in Tsarist Russia. The new world of my grandparents and my mother's and father's siblings, was at first only a New World of place, of location. The Lower East Side was the delivery address, the terminus where Old World culture was deposited. Within a few years, Russian shteytl culture was transformed into a blend of the Old World and the New, a Jewish "mestizo" culture – part Jewish, part gentile, part Russian, part American – and a world of confusion to a child who spoke Yiddish at home and English at school and once out of the front door of his house found himself in a vast and sometimes frightening gentile world.

No wonder that my uncle Davey was so proud that the gentiles of Franklin Square accepted him and his family! Children of immigrants, especially Jewish immigrants, had to adjust to new holidays. There was no problem to accept George Washington's birthday or Abraham Lincoln's birthday, the man who had a Biblical name and who had freed the slaves, like Moses who freed the Jews from Egypt. Only a slight adjustment was needed to feel at home during Columbus Day celebrations or Thanksgiving Day which was not too far different from Succos, Succoth, the Feast of Tabernacles, and also came in the Fall. But Easter and Christmas celebrations in school were very trying, especially the singing of Christmas carols.

An adjustment in the language one spoke was required daily: at school, English; at home, Yiddish. The school world was governed by standards set by white Anglo-Saxon Protestants who had no notion of the high moral and ethical concepts the Jewish children were taught a home, despite the fact that they sometimes butchered the English language. Neither in grade school, nor in high school, did I ever have teacher who was bilingual as I was, or a tri-lingual as were my mother and father, or a teacher who kept a dead language – Hebrew – alive in one's daily prayers. It was only when I was a grown man and learned something about the Puritan's of colonial New England, that I realized that many Yiddish-Russian-speaking bearded old Jews had as high ethical and moral standards as Cotton Mather, as well as equally as high aspirations and respect for learning as the founders of Harvard University.

I now know how difficult it must have been for my uncle to live in home where the father worked in a sweat shop, where the family of seven, including five unmarried children, were all crammed into a four room flat in a tenement, and have to adjust every day to another totally different and foreign world, school. The majority of the teachers were prim and self-righteous who were certain they were superior to their pupils, if only because they spoke English correctly and without a Yiddish

accent. Many grade school teachers had no notion of the high moral and ethical precepts the children of Jewish immigrants learned at home. More frequently than not, school teachers openly patronized their pupils instilling in many a sense of inferiority, or in some a desire to raise themselves up to the lofty standards of the teacher. The end result of this type of treatment, as it was in thousands of cases of Jewish immigrant children, and also other ethnic groups such as Italians and Poles, was a sense of being an outsider, of being tolerated, of being inferior to the Anglo-Saxon White Protestant teacher.

Julie was less than a good student. At about the age of fourteen, he dropped out of school without completing the eight grades and went to work. But unlike Benny who became an electrician or Davey a clothing salesman, or Becky a bookkeeper, he was unable to turn his hand to anything permanent. Hardly remarkable for a fourteen-year old boy. But he found a solution to this problem. He joined the army.

An army recruiter believed Julie when he said he was eighteen years old and signed him on as an enlisted man. He was missing from home for a while and it was a tremendous shock to my grandmother and grandfather when they were officially informed that Julie had enlisted in the army. One of the most urgent reasons for fleeing Russia was to avoid serving Fawnyeh Gawnif, the Tsar, and be subject to the cruel and inhumane treatment the antisemitic officers and soldiers meted out to Jewish recruits. The army not only brutalized its recruits, but being in the army meant that, God forbid, one had to kill. My mother was so set against the concept of armies, in general, that she refused to allow me to join the Boy Scouts because they wore uniforms not unlike soldiers. Her cousin Nookhem, Etyah's son, whom I mentioned in the chapter dealing with my grandmother Sooreh Dintsyeh and her siblings, was drafted into the army during the First World War causing his mother and father great anxiety and fears that they would never see him again.

So there was Julie, a fourteen-year old boy, already a soldier in the U. S. Army. My grandparents and even my mother visualized how he would be beaten and sent into battle and killed even though he was still a child. My uncles Benny and Davey demurred, saying hat he should not be delivered from that hell and that he would be better off in the army than being idle at home. Furthermore, "the army would make a man of him." My grandfather did not agree. He asked my mother to help to rescue Julie who was about to be shipped off to Panama. God alone knew where Panama was, "ek velt," the end of the world.

I was about nine or ten years old when Julie joined the army. I heard my mother say that he was stationed in "fawrtslawkl," so the name sounded to me. I do not know when it dawned on me he was stationed in Fort Slocum. Just where Fort Slocum was or is located I never found out, nor did I ever have an interest in doing so. It must have been somewhere in New York or not far from the city, perhaps the Bronx.

Immediate action was necessary because Julie was about to be sent to Panama. My mother and grandfather arrived armed with Julie's birth certificate and pleaded with the commanding officer or whoever was in charge of such matters, that Julie be released from the army. It is interesting to note that Julie apparently was an enthusiastic recruit. The first thing he did was have a tatoo painted on his left arm — a dagger piercing his skin on one side and coming out of the other and also the word "mother" inscribed as part of the design. Also, it seems that Julie spent a good part of the time he was in the army in the guardhouse where he was imprisoned for what, he once told me, were quite minor infractions. When my mother and grandfather came to have him released from his enlistment, he was on a detail shoveling coal, covered with grime and truly miserable.

I do not know what he did when he left the army other than go back to live with my grandparents. He never learned a trade. He tried working with Benny to learn to be an electrician, but he felt that Benny was a perfectionist and too strict a taskmaster, which he undoubtedly was. So Julie did not become an electrician.

He had a number of amorous liaisons of short duration and even married a girl by the name of Sally, Sarah in Hebrew, to my grandmother's disquiet because they both had the same name. Julie and Sally were divorced after a brief marriage. Later on, it must have already been in the late 1930s or early 1940s that he married a rather handsome girl, Harriet, who worked as a beautician and came from a respectable family.

Her brothers were wholesalers of optical supplies selling lenses, frames and other necessaries to opticians along the eastern seaboard. Julie went to work for Harriet's brothers as an optical goods salesman visiting opticians and optometrists from as far south as Washington, D. C, to Providence, Rhode Island in the north. He was very successful at that. He once gave me the good advice to encourage my children to become optometrists or opticians, that it was a good and dignified profession.

Harriet and Julie had two children, Cynthia and Diana. I saw them only once when they were still little girls in 1946 when I came home from Guatemala for a short visit. One of the girls, I was told, when she grew up, was artistically inclined. I never had any further notice of them. I regret that I have no way of tracing their whereabouts. They are undoubtedly married and no longer use the family name Bodie.

The last time I saw Julie was when my mother died in 1960 and again in 1963 when my father died. Except for some news about him from my aunt Ida, I lost track of him completely. I had been away from Brooklyn and New York for so long, from 1941 to 1947 in Panama and Guatemala, and from 1947 till today (1994) in Durham, North Carolina. While my mother and father were still alive, we would visit them about once a year, but never long enough to visit all my uncles and aunts.

From Ida I learned that Julie had an unexpected and disastrous experience in his married life with Harriet. He was away from home on the road selling optical supplies a great deal of the time. I do not know the details, for I learned about this mishap in his marriage from Ida. Harriet left him and went to live with another man. According to Ida, this nearly destroyed Julie. He was not prone to show his emotions, yet Ida told me, that he came to her house and broke down and cried. I understand, that after a while, Harriet had a change of heart and came back to live with Julie and their children.

Julie died relatively young, at age sixty-eight. I do not remember how I learned about this, or when he died. It must have happened in 1974 or so. No one sent me any word about his death, for I would surely have gone to his funeral. I also do not know of the whereabouts of his two children who must now be women in their fifties. Nor do I know anything about Harriet either. If she is still alive, she must be in her eighties and about my age. So it is!

It seems that families are blown about and scattered like leaves from an oak in October and November just before the onset of winter. The unseen and unknown roots deep in the ground still support the trunk and the bare branches. The leaves of many trees intermingle and cover the ground so that it is impossible to know from which tree any particular leaf has fallen. For me to recall the past events of my family back to the fifth generation before me may be a vain attempt to rake our leaves together and arrange them around the trunk of our tree. Truly an exercise in futility, which breeds melancholy in my heart because it is impossible to recreate the past in order to remember and savor it all the more. What is remembered lives. What is forgotten no longer exists!

IDA

Ida, the youngest of my maternal grandparent's children, was born in 1909, the year my parents were married. Ida was named for my grandmother Sooreh Dintsyeh's mother Eedis, the wife of Shmeel Libeh's, my great grandfather for whom I am named. Only late in life did I realize that the name Eedis was the Podolian Yiddish pronunciation of the Hebrew Yudit, or Judith in English. I believe Ida herself never knew that her Jewish name had a ready equivalent in English. In sound, the name Ida was close to the Yiddish Eedis.

Ida and Becky were the only ones of my mother's siblings who actually completed grade school and were awarded diplomas attesting to that accomplishment. In the early decades of this century, very few children continued their education and went to high school. High school students were considered an elite group. High school boys could get choice jobs during the summer vacations, the choicest being in the neighborhood pharmacy or drug store, a first step toward a career in a liberal profession. Attendance at college was usually beyond the means of children of the working class, and not always considered a necessary even among

members of the middle class. At the time I went off to college in the Fall of 1930, I was told that only five percent of the high school graduates in the United States went on to college. This being the case, graduating from primary school was considered a noteworthy accomplishment, especially among recently arrived immigrant families..

I am not certain if Ida went to work after she graduated from elementary school, probably in 1923. She stayed at home and helped her mother until she got married in 1927 when she was about eighteen years old. However, it is possible that she may have gone to work, but I do not know.

My grandparents at that time lived on Blake Avenue near Hinsdale Street in Brownsville, Brooklyn. While still in grade school, Ida began to "keep company" with Izzie, Irving, Weinger. Keeping company meant that the boy and girl were going together and eventually would be married. They were courting, a southern version of keeping company. Izzie was about the same age as Ida and lived in the neighborhood.

After graduating from grade school, Izzie went to work for Widder Brothers in the garment district of New York. The company made sample swatches and other promotional materials for the clothing manufacturers' trade. He never worked for anybody else and remained with Widder Brothers for the rest of his life until he died by his own hand sometime in the 1970s.

Izzie and Ida had two children, Bobby, also named for my aunt Becky/Brahneh, and Sheila Marcia, named for her two grandfathers: Sheila for Ida's father, my grandfather Shaiyeh; and Marcia for Izzie's father, Moishe. Bobby was born in 1928 or 1929 and Sheila Marcia about four or so years later. My grandmother shared a room with Bobby in Ida's house when she went to live there after my grandfather died in 1931.

I remember Ida's and Izzie's wedding which was celebrated in a synagogue. I believe it may have been located on Pennsylvania Avenue near Dumont or New Lots Avenue in Brownsville-East New York. This was a bitter-sweet occasion, for Becky's death about a year or so before was still fresh in everyone's mind, and still lay heavily on my grandfather's heart. Becky should have been married before her younger sister, as is traditional. Instead, my grandfather Shaiyeh was still suffering the pain of having had to bury Becky rather than the joy of leading her to the "khupah," marriage canopy.

It was a very modest wedding and within my grandfather's means. He still went daily to work in a clothing factory in New York. After the ceremony in the synagogue proper, the guests were invited to partake of what was then called "a sweet table" comprising cakes, pastries, fruit and drinks including spirits, usually rye whiskey, as well as sweet red wine. This was hardly as sumptuous as my uncle Davey's wedding about five or six years before where a "kawpel sahper" was served.

Times were good for my mother and father. Recently, we had moved into a very nice one-family house on Empire Boulevard in the Crown Heights section

inhabited mainly by high income middle class Jewish families, the type which less affluent Jews called "awll/rait/niks." My father drove a Packard sedan which I remember cost $2,700 in 1927, perhaps equivalent to about $40,000 or more today. A Ford cost $600, and a Buick about $800. A first class carpenter earned $9 to $10 a day and a day laborer $6 a day. Rent for a two bedroom-one bath apartment in Brownsville was about $25 to $30 a month and in Crown Heights about $45 to $50.

My father was feeling jubilant and invited everyone to Brodsky's restaurant for steaks. Mr. Brodsky and his wife, Rumanian Jews probably from Bessarabia, operated a steak restaurant on the ground floor of their house in Brownsville. I do not remember the name of the street, if may have been Powell Street. It was directly opposite the Labor Lyceum where in 1913 my mother entered me in a contest in which I awarded Second Prize. I believe it was a health contest of some sort.

The Labor Lyceum was a cultural center sponsored by some political organization, possibly the Socialist Party, for the benefit of the working class people, especially Jewish immigrants from Russia. The object was to educate the young immigrant mothers in matters of health, nutrition, cleanliness and the like; in fine, Americanize them. My mother told me that I was twenty-two months old when I won second prize. The reason I was not awarded the first prize, was that some marks or slight blemishes from a recent case of chicken-pox had not completely healed. According to her, I sang the Marseillaise in Russian at the contest.

Those were the heady days when it was a common for members of the working class to be "verbal" political activists and speak out against the tyranny of the Tsar. Singing the Marseillaise was the first step to revolution and freedom from oppression. In Russia one would be sent to Siberia for singing the Marseillaise, but for an infant still marked by blemishes from chicken-pox singing it in the Labor Lyceum in Brownsville, was as if the torch of freedom had been taken up by the generations to follow.

My mother was always a Socialist and a great admirer of Eugene Debs. On the other hand, my father was apolitical and more practical. With the coming of the New Deal in 1932 and the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, my father would laconically say, "You don't have to have to be a Socialist if you are a Democrat," or something to that effect. He had the same opinion about higher education, "Me dahrf zikh nit shmawden vehern a dokter in Amerikeh," You don't have to be baptized a Christian, an apostate, to become a doctor in America – as one had to in Russia in order for a Jew to be admitted to the university.

At any rate, the prize for being a healthy baby was fifteen dollars. That was a considerable sum of money. First class carpenters earned $5 a day, and tailors laboring their lives away in the sweat shops of New York earned between ten to fifteen dollars a week. The flat my parents lived in at the time rented for $15 a month. So fifteen dollars was a handsome prize. My mother and father had a life size photograph taken of me. My father, who had a great appreciation for wood, had the

picture matted and framed in a custom-made mahogany frame. On the bottom border of the mat an inscription still attests to the fact the SIDNY MARKMAN (note the scribe left out the E in Sidney) won second prize at the Labor Lyceum in September of 1913.

Sarah has the picture now. Until my mother died, the picture hung in the living room over the bookcase as a constant embarrassment to me when my friends in high school saw it. But now, I look at the little boy in the picture with a nostalgia as I recall the high hopes and aspirations of my mother and father in their youth striving to achieve a better life for themselves and their children, hopes and aspirations which enabled me to become what I am.

How remarkable, they had been in America a scant ten years when that picture was taken. The little boy wears a white sailor suit, short pants and a shirt cut and sewn by my twenty-three old mother. Nirmala once jokingly remarked that I still wear the same type of pants as I did when I was an infant. She was referring to the voluminous boxer underwear shorts I wear.

Well, after this nostalgic digression, I return to Ida and Izzie's wedding and my father's invitation for all of the guests to come to Brodsky's for a Rumanian steak dinner. The Brodskys were actually from a region not too far west of Nemirov, Bessarabia, where Kishinev is located, a city which has the distinction of being the site of the 1903 pogrom where many Jews were massacred.

Mr. Brodsky was a heavy-set man who spoke Yiddish with the same pronunciation as my parents: viz., tawteh, mawmeh, kawleh, kawts. He would come out of the kitchen to welcome the guests, far more warmly than if they were merely customers, more like friends. Sometimes, one his sons, who was a student at Harvard Law School I was told, would also help out serving at table. Mrs. Brodsky, only a little less portly than her husband, did the cooking. She would only come out to greet the guests after the food was already on the table as if to see that they were enjoying her cooking.

Because it was a kosher restaurant, no sirloin, T-bone, round or porterhouse steaks were served, only those cuts from the forepart of the animal. These cuts from the hind quarter are not Kosher because they contain many veins with blood. It is forbidden to eat blood. Only if these veins are excised from the flesh first, may meat from the hind quarter be eaten. In Russia this was done by a specialist, a treyber, who was almost an anatomist who would dissect the meat removing the blood-filled veins. In America this would have been too costly a procedure. The meat packing houses sold the hind quarters, the choicest cuts so to speak, to the gentile or non-kosher butchers, and the less desireable cuts from the forequarters to the Jewish kosher butchers. But the steaks served by the Brodskys were delicious and kosher to boot.

Just as one entered the door, Mrs. Brodsky would immediately begin to peel potatoes and cut them into long thin slices for frying. She would get them ready as

the steaks were being ordered. Before the steaks were cooked and served, the table was soon filled with baskets of bread of various kinds, bowls of little hot-sweet pickled red peppers, pickled green tomatoes, pickled cucumbers cut in quarters lengthwise, sauerkraut cut into long thin strands like the egg noodles in the Sabbath chicken soup, not in indiscriminate chunks, but in strands, and pickled in oaken barrels with dill and garlic and salt, but no vinegar. And after the steaks and the accompaniments were consumed, Mrs. Brodsky served platters of unshelled almonds soaked in wine and baked in the oven, and lots of glasses of hot tea with lemon.

It was a wonderful party. Everyone was happy to celebrate Ida's and Izzie's wedding, the steak dinner being a sort of substitute for the traditional "kawpel sahper" in a banquet hall.

For a while Izzie and Ida lived in an apartment house just down the street from us on Empire Boulevard. I believe Bobby was already a two or three year old infant then. At least he was old enough to be fascinated by the grandfather clock that once stood on the lower landing of the staircase leading to the second floor of the house on Empire Boulevard. He could not keep his hands off the pendulum as it swung back and forth. Ultimately, the clock stopped working. This happened in the early 1930s while I was still in college.

The clock remained in a state of hibernation and was not repaired until my mother and father gave me the clock in 1953 or so after we moved into the house on Urban Avenue in Durham The Persian Sarouk rug on the living room floor arrived in the same shipment from St. Johns Place in Brooklyn where they were living at the time. Our next door neighbor, Sam Fink, who had a jewelry store on Main Street in Durham, recommended his watchmaker to me who came and repaired the clock. Its Westminster chimes had been silent from about 1932 to 1953, about thirty years. It has been working ever since till today, June of 1994, forty-one years, as I sit here recalling the history of the clock and hear the chimes tolling memories of my mother and father in my ears every quarter hour.

Eventually Izzie and Ida bought a house in East Flatbush. I do not remember the name of the street, but it was not far from Utica Avenue and south of Empire Boulevard. It was a nice one-family row house with a finished room as well as garage in the basement. My grandmother went to live with Ida in this house and died there in 1942.

Bobby did not go to college, but he soon had a good job that paid him well enough to support a wife and family. He married a girl, Gloria by name, and moved out to Long Island. I believe it was Huntington or somewhere in Suffolk County. Unfortunately, the marriage ended in divorce after a number of years. I do not know if he had any children, but he probably did.

About twenty years ago I had a letter from Bobby and I wrote him in return. And then I lost track of him. I wrote him to the last known address I had, but had no reply. I searched the Brooklyn telephone book on the chance that he might have

moved back there after his divorce. I found a family by the name of Weinger in the book and wrote inquiring after Bobby. I had a letter in return from a man saying he was a cousin of Irving Weinger but that he too did not know the whereabouts of Bobby nor of his sister Sheila Marcia.

Sheila Marcia was about four or five years younger than Bobby and a graduate of Adelphi College in Garden City, Long Island. I knew she had married and that her married family name was Propas. I also wrote her at the last known address I had, but never got a reply.

So, Bobby and Sheila Marcia Weinger, my aunt Ida's children; Cynthia and Diana Bodie, my uncle Julie's children;, Lucy and Jackie, my uncle Davey's children, (I had some notice of Lucy about seven years ago); Geoffrey Bodie, my uncle Benny's one remaining son, (Earl and Bobby have died); all cousins of whose existence or whereabouts I am completely ignorant. Only with my aunt Libeh's children, Bernie and Florence, do I still have ties. The original nuclear family of course no longer exists, but even the ties between the members of the third generation, the grandchildren of my grandparents, all cousins, have become totally unravelled, except for the tenuous paper connection between me and my cousins Bernie and Florence in California.

The final chapter on the history of Ida's family is one of bitter tragedy. Ida fell very ill some time during the 1970s. It seems that Izzie was also having mental problems. She was taken to Mount Sinai Hospital in New York where she was given a spinal tap, so I was informed, which went awry leaving her paralyzed. Izzie, who had been somewhat eccentric and deeply introverted, was stricken with some guilt feelings, I was told, blaming himself for Ida's condition. He was always distant and not prone to make much conversation. He must have gone into a deep depression while Ida was still in the hospital. I was told that he took his own life, but no details were given me. I believe it was Esther who told me about this, but even she had heard what had happened to Ida and Izzie at second or third hand. So I am altogether ignorant of what actually transpired.

Ida was totally incapacitated and bedridden. Her children, I assume, placed her in a nursing home in Greenpoint in Queens. I do not know exactly when this step was taken. I was in New York sometime in the 1970s, probably in connection with my research, when Esther and I went to visit Benny and Julia in Brooklyn. We planned to visit Ida in the nursing home. Benny was so upset in thinking of what had become of Ida when he last visited her, that he begged off saying he would break down if he went along with us. So Julia and Esther, who was driving, and I went to see Ida.

On entering we were immediately repelled by the smell of urine. It was a private facility, but in looking about the place, I concluded that the patients were indifferently cared for. There was Ida in bed, and happy to see us all, especially me after a lapse of so many years. I remember with anguish the helplessness I experienced when she kept repeating, "Take me home, tell Izzie I'll be good, take me

home." She did not know that Izzie was dead, that her house had been sold and that there was no home to go back to. Apparently her saying to tell Izzie she would be good, could only have meant that when he was in a state of depression he had probably been unkind to her. Ida had been brought up totally sheltered. I do not believe she ever went to New York on her own. She never went out into the world or worked at some job, but lived with her parents until she married at the age of eighteen. So when she cried out to tell Izzie to take her home and that she would be good, it was as if a child were pleading not to be punished for some misdeed. I will never know what really happened to have caused her to have to be placed in a nursing home and for Izzie to have taken his own life.

We left the nursing home, the three of us, with very heavy hearts. I was especially shaken and frustrated that I lived so far away and did not have the means to visit her at least once a week. I did not have the presence of mind to go to the office and inquire who was responsible for her bills, if her children came to see her, and if so, where they lived.

I never found out what finally happened to Ida. If she is still alive, she would be about eighty-four years old, or if not, when did she died.