Part IV
My Mother and Father

To write about my mother and father is not as straightforward a matter as reporting the stories I heard from my grandparents and other members of my family relating events and happenings from long before I was born. In recounting the remembrances of others, I fancy myself an objective reporter, though I know that I cannot be so altogether. My account is unwittingly colored by reactions to the stories when first I heard them.

I find it impossible to set myself aside and tell the stories of my mother and father as if their lives and mine were not intertwined. I cannot even pretend to be an objective reporter of facts, when I am one of the principal facts being reported. I find it almost impossible to abstain from injecting my feelings into the story of their lives, for I never was and still am not a bystander. I was not an onlooker while the drama of their lives unfolded before my eyes. The life of my mother and father is my life. I find it unnerving to be both playwright and actor having to bare my innermost feelings in relating the story of their lives.

Who and what I am cannot be excised from the fabric of my life and scrutinized as if it were distinct from, unrelated to and independent of who and what they were. In recounting my remembrances of my grandparents and the stories they passed on to me, my role was that of a chronicler who puts down the facts as he hears them. In dealing with my recollections of my aunts, uncles and cousins, I could also assume the role of a witness recalling events which took place during my childhood. Now as an old man 82 (83 at the time of copy editing, March 15, 1995) years old, I find it quite natural and easy to write about that child as if I had been an observer of that child's life and was not the child myself. The child I was no longer exists, only my memory of him exists, and only when I think of him. The aphorism of Heraclitus, "Panta re," all is change, change is the only reality I now fully comprehend.

The young man and the young woman who were my father and mother exist for me only when I think of them. I cannot speak of them without speaking of myself, and here lies the tale. It is not a bystander or a spectator who speaks of them. And I cannot relate the story of their lives without relating the story of my own, the process of becoming who and what I am.

There was never a time in the process of my life as I was changing, that was not colored or tempered by their presence. No matter how important or insignificant the activity – making the lacrosse team, taking part in plays, writing for the college newspaper, choosing my friends, working at my job far away from home, seeing a falling star, reading books, buying my first automobile – all were carried out against

the background of their presence in my mind. From my mother I learned to enjoy literature and the theater and to appreciate the rightness of even the most mundane things; that a table setting should be beautiful and proper, that neatness and order in one's behavior had an aesthetic as well as a practical purpose. It is to my father that I owe my interest in architecture, especially materials and methods of construction as one of the most important qualities to look for in the history of building. I always had the workman who constructed the building in mind when I looked at a Greek temple, a French gothic cathedral, the multiple family houses in ancient Roman Ostia or a little ramshackle church in a miserable Indian town in El Salvador. The hand of the workman and materials and the methods he employed to raise the structure on the ground was the way my father looked at a building, and I have so since my childhood and student days as well as all through my academic life.

Chapter 11
My Father: Early Years

In writing of my paternal grandparents I also told something of my father's early life. He was born in Nemirov in the Fall of 1885 or 1886 during the intermediate days, khawlawmoyd, of Succoth, the fourth child of Yahnkel Markman and Bahsyeh, neé Krahsnyahnsky. His siblings were: Nekhawmeh, Nekhamah, the first born; his older brother Eedel, Yehudah; followed by Maryam; my father, then Goldeh; his younger brother Moishe, Morris; and Rayzyeh, the youngest. Eight children in all including a boy, younger than my father, who died in infancy.

My father's name, that is the Hebrew name he was given at birth and the one by which he was called up to the Torah, was Netanel Bentsion, pronounced Nesanel Bentseeon in Yiddish. But all his life he was called Sahnyeh, a shortened version of Nesanel, and after the man who raised my orphaned grandfather. I have no idea who was the Bentsion after whom he was also named, very likely a member of my grandmother Bahsyeh's ancestors. But upon arrival in America, his name Sahnyeh was Anglicized to Sam, a very popular name frequently taken by Jewish immigrants with Yiddish names sometimes only remotely sounding like Sam regardless of what the original name was. My maternal grandfather whose Hebrew name was Avram Yeshaiyah, Abraham Isaiah, but who was always called Shaiyeh in Yiddish, was also dubbed Sam when he first arrived in this country. He changed it to Charles on the urging of his younger brother Sam Bodie when he arrived from England. Sam Bodie's Hebrew name was Shmuel, Samuel and so was properly called Sam in English. He insisted it was not proper for two brothers to bear the same given name and so my grandfather became Charles. My sister Esther's eldest was named for my grandfather —Yeshaiyah in Hebrew and Charles in English, as was my own son Charlie, thereby perpetuating the mistranslation. When Charlie was born in 1948 I had some thought of translating his name correctly and having his birth certificate read Isaiah. Malvina objected, and since it was only a passing thought on my part, we named him Charles in English. But when Charlie's son was born, he named him for my father, Netanel in Hebrew eschewing the incorrect English version (Janet's grandfather I believe was named Sam), and called him Nathaniel, an impressive three-syllable name. I rather wish that the name Sahyneh had been preserved, it is a more modest name and one less charged with responsibilities to live up to than a Nathaniel.

Very few details of my father's childhood in Nemirov have been passed on to me. The scant few, but meaningful, incidents were so deeply engraved in his memory that he recalled them from time to time.

A rather, drastic incident remained in my father's memory all his life continuing to engender feelings of grief and even some unforgiving anger whenever

he would tell the story. Thinking my father had failed to do something he had been told to do or had not done some task exactly as instructed, which my father says was absolutely not so, my grandfather became enraged and in his fury picked up a stick that still had a nail sticking out at one end and beat him with it. My father must have still been a child, perhaps about ten or eleven years old, yet even in his old age he remembered and lamented that his father's treatment of him had been unjust. I cannot believe that my grandfather was sadistic and purposely beat him with a stick with a nail sticking out of it. Be that as it may, my father's perception was that the punishment was unjust and he never forgot it.

I will not venture to say with any measure of certainty that my father bore his father any resentment. My father was not a demonstrative man or one who "wore his heart on his sleeve." If not with overt expressions of love and filial devotion, which would have been unthinkable for my father, he always treated my grandfather with and respect and even deference, though at times he did display some impatience with my grandfather's persistent and nagging questioning about details of building construction.

I still remember my grandfather complaining that my father never took him to a "shvits," a Russian sweat bath. My father would hardly acknowledge this complaint and never explain saying nothing at all. The fact is, my father had little time to indulge in such pleasures, and when he went to a "shvits," usually Kotimsky's Baths on the corner of Cleveland Street and Blake Avenue, he went on the spur of the moment some Saturday nights and took me along with him.

It was in the decade of the 1920s that my father "graduated" from general contractor to builder or developer. He began to build houses on speculation, that is houses financed and constructed on speculation to be sold after completion and already standing. My grandfather, during his weekly visits besides telling us stories, some in many installments, would ply my father with what seemed like endless questions about the building business and particularly about construction matters. Answers would only lead to further questions to which my father would sometimes respond with some display of impatience.

In the 1920s my grandfather was already a man in his seventies whose last construction experience and "know-how" dated to the end of the nineteenth century in Russia and usually in the construction of houses for rich landowners and even in some cases small village churches. Many of his questions were not relevant at all to building practices in America, especially speculative building operations. He had always built on contract for an individual owner. He apparently was ill at ease with the risky speculative builder's practice of constructing numbers of houses all at once, the development, with the prospect of selling them on completion to still unidentified buyers. Here in America, and specifically on Long Island where my father was operating, houses were built on speculation as if they were men's pants for sale in retail stores. My father, ever respectful, but sometimes deaf of ear, did not always

take the time to explain the American methods and materials of construction, let alone the financing and selling of houses built on speculation. My grandfather always built for an *owner* rather than a *buyer.*

My father, who by nature never talked just hear himself, though respectful, would show his impatience by his laconic answers. It seemed to me that he did not patently enjoy his father's questioning because it was so difficult for him to articulate the new American construction methods, especially since he himself had little or no romantic nostalgia at all for the back-breaking, archaic building methods of construction in nineteenth-century Russia.

When he was old enough, perhaps four or five years old, my father, as was the custom, was sent to "kheyder," primary Hebrew school would be the nearest translation. The little boys were first taught the Hebrew alphabet and the diacritical marks, the vowel signs, placed under each letter and eventually learned to read.

I do not know if my father was sent to kheyder before he was able to go there on his own or had to be taken there every day. It was the custom, especially in winter when it was fiercely cold and the ground was covered with snow, for a belfer, an adult man and the melamed's assistant, to carry the little boys to kheyder in the melamed's house. The social status of the belfer was extremely low, and more often than not he was hardly literate. All that was required of him was a strong back and strength enough to carry two or three unwilling little boys at a time to kheyder. There is a folk song that goes thus, "Ikh vil nit geyn in kheyder, vail der rebbeh shmahst kiseyder." [I do not want to go to (Hebrew) school because the teacher always whips you.] Eventually after the boys had learned to read, the first text given them was the Khumash, the Pentateuch or the Five Books of Moses, that is the Torah. I went through this discipline myself but in a slightly altered form.

My parents engaged a melamed who came to the house every afternoon after I came home from school, except Friday and the Sabbath. I still remember him telling me that a dot at the end of a phrase or sentence was a stop, like a stop on a trolley car line or a railroad, in other words like a period in a English sentence. But I did not know that yet, for I was in the first grade and just about learning the English alphabet and hardly knew anything about punctuation. My mother, ever the Socialist, decided that my melamed must have been a bahlhagooleh,a drayman, coachman or a wagoner who drove horses for a living in the Old Country. In America, an illiterate can become a teacher. I also remember when I was studying Khumash, specifically Bereshis, the Book of Genesis, and came home with the story of Moses being saved by Pharaoh's daughter. My mother gave me a very special interpretation of that story, saying that Moses was actually Pharaoh's daughter's illegitimate son. As a ruse to deceive her father, she had Moses set afloat in the river so that she could find him and bring him home as a foundling.

How many years my father went to kheyder I do not know. He did not like kheyder at all. I doubt if he ever went beyond the age of thirteen, the time of Bar

Mitzvah. He never spoke of bar mitzvah which was hardly considered a momentous occasion as it is nowadays in America.

When a boy reached the age of thirteen he was given his first aliyah,his Torah portion, and was called up to the Torah where he was expected to say the blessings. If given maftir, reading from the prophets and other books beyond the Pentateuch, he was expected read, really chant, that portion too. It was rare indeed if a young boy was expected to read directly from the Torah scroll. This is extremely difficult because the diacritical marks or vowel signs are not indicated in the Torah scroll read during services.

I doubt if my father remained in kheyder longer than the age of nine or ten. All he remembered of his childhood was that he went to work so far back that he did not remember ever having a childhood. He always said, "Ikh gedeynk nit ven ikh bin geveyn a kind." [I do not remember when I was a child.] At the time he was set to straightening used bent nails, he may have been no more than six or seven years old and already strong enough to hold a hammer.

He was not exploited or victimized as a child laborer, though he felt this to have been the case. This was the traditional way of teaching a boy a trade, having him do some very simple tasks at first. When my father said he did not remember every being a child, he meant was that very early on he was given responsibilities working for his father and did not spend his days as a child in play or in idleness. He remembered his first jobs was to straighten used nails so that they could be used again. Iron nails were costly in late nineteenth-century Russia. The labor required to straighten out old ones was of small account if the task were given to a child.

Before he went to work for his father and learned carpentry, he was apprenticed to a shoemaker. I do not know at what age this was, probably by the age of ten or so or in his early teens, the age when it was customary for boys to be apprenticed to craftsmen in order to learn a trade and eventually earn a living. My father always related this interlude in his life with some amusement. I do not remember if he ever told me the name of the shoemaker to whom he was apprenticed.

It was customary for apprentices to live in the house of the master craftsman to whom they were formally indentured by their parents, usually the father who sometimes even paid the master a fee for teaching his son the craft. The master in turn not only agreed to teach the boy the trade, but also to house and feed him during the term of the apprenticeship. I do not now if my father went to live in the shoemaker's house, probably not. The apprentice was also expected to help the housewife. Frequently apprentices were engaged more in household chores helping the housewife than in working side by side with the master craftsman and learning the trade. Apparently the shoemaker's wife had my father take care of the babies, rock the cradle with a yowling infant until it fell asleep, as well as work around the house, an activity which my father objected to. But even less to his taste was a practice he could not stomach, the shoemakers' use of beef tallow to coat the thread

with which shoes were sewn. He could not stand the sight or the smell of the khaylef, beef fat, the tallow, let alone handle it in greasing the thread required for sewing the leather shoes.

My father complained to his mother and father, and the end result was that my grandfather broke the apprenticeship agreement with the shoemaker and my father remained at home where he learned the trade of carpenter. But apparently my grandfather took little time to teach him the trade and expected him to learn by observing and by doing. His reasoning was (and I conclude this to be so because my father certainly had the same attitude toward learning) that if a person had smekahlkeh, [a Russian or Ukrainian word meaning intelligence of common sense], he would learn by watching and not by asking stupid questions. As a matter of fact my father always repeated the same story that "Keyner hawht meer nit gelehrent stawlyarai, ikh hawb zikh fin meer aleyn gehlehrent." [No one taught me carpentry, I learned from myself alone.]

I believe this to have actually to have been true. Where did my father learn to read plans, to estimate labor and material for jobs? Carpentry estimates were natural for him it is true, but where did he get the experience to estimate brickwork, plumbing, electrical work, roofing, foundation construction? The truth is that nobody taught him, he taught by himself. He rarely asked his sub-contractors for advice as to how much their jobs would be. He estimated plumbing and brickwork and electrical work on his own. And I can say without reserve, that even in the worst of times when construction jobs were hard to find, when he did land a contract, he never lost money. He had none to lose! The problem was that construction, especially small home construction, was almost at a standstill during the 1930s and jobs were far and in between. When he did get one, he made a fair profit. Sometimes he was reduced to taking a general contract and run the whole operation for just the carpentry labor.

I still remember seeing him sitting at the kitchen table with a set of blue prints and calling me to sit down beside him and help his calculate the job. "Sidney," he would say, for example, "how much is 20 by 30." I would take a pencil and paper and multiply and tell him 600. Then he would say, "How much is 600 times 8?" And I would make the calculation and tell him the result. He would write down all the figures I added or multiplied or divided for him never knowing exactly what he was doing other than looking at the plan and measuring it with a foot ruler in his hand.

It was only in later years, when I began to understand something of building construction, did I realize that he was using me as a calculator in getting his estimates together. Beginning as a carpenter by trade, a trade which he learned in Nemirov by himself, by the 1920s as a young man in his thirties without prior training, he knew how to estimate masonry. plumbing, and all the other trades that go into constructing a building. He never learned this from his father. His older brother Eedl, also a carpenter, but a trimmer, never knew how to estimate general

contract jobs. As a matter of fact, my father and Eedl were partners for a while and my father did the estimating. The partnership did not last very long because my uncle had little interest in anything else but carpentry, certainly not framing a building which was heavy work and required a knowledge of how to read plans. He preferred trim work only. Once I actually heard him say to my father, they were doing an alteration job in store, how pleased he was that most of the work was trim which he enjoyed so much. My father had a different point of view and frequently said, "The carpenter is the first man on the job and the last man on the job." Of course he was talking about home construction and not office buildings or hospitals or schools, just about building houses for people to live in.

Returning to my father's childhood in Nemirov. In order to have some spending money he would frequently make some useful article, a taburet for example, from scrap lumber. He would carry it to the marketplace to sell. My grandfather's house was not very far from the main market of Nemirov, apparently on a street leading to the market square. The peasants who brought farm products to sell would tie up their horses along that street. My mother always ribbed my father saying that on market days the horses would drop manure all day long while standing in front of the house.

When he was older and already strong enough for heavier work, my father would go to a lumber merchant's yard and saw logs into planks or boards by hand at the rate of "finif kopkes a shnit," five kopeks a cut. I never learned if he handled the saw by himself or whether he was on one end of a two-man saw. This was before the days of power sawmills in Nemirov.

It was probably soon after that terrible whipping his father gave him with a flat stick with a nail in it, that he ran away from home to Vinitsa to the house of some distant female relative. Vinitsa is at some distance from Nemirov and so I suspect he went there by train, possibly hiding under a seat in the passenger car so that the conductor would not find him. This is an assumption on my part because he never told me how he got to Vinitsa.

Also, I never verified exactly whose house he took refuge in. He did mention a aunt. The aunt could not have been his father's sister, because my grandfather was a orphan probably without brothers and sisters and was raised by an uncle. The aunt could not have been his mother's only sister, di meemeh Toobeh, because she lived in Nemirov, the one who was left an ageeneh, straw widow, by my father's uncle Froikeh who went to America and became a union organizer and finally went off to live somewhere in Virginia. Also, the aunt could not have been the wife of my grandmother's brother Avroom Yeetskhok, Avraham Itskhak, Isaac, who lived in Nemirov and I do not believe ever went to live in Vinitsa. It is quite possible that the aunt in whose house my teen-age father took refuge, I assume, may possibly have been one of my father's great uncle's children, a daughter of Sahnyeh sawldawht. Or

could it possibly be that my orphaned grandfather also had a sister raised by Sahnyeh Sawldawt?

At any rate, my father did not stay way in Vinitsa very long. My grandmother Bahsyeh was very upset and worried about him, which caused my father no little anguish. The determining reason why he finally came back home to Nemirov was that he did not like his aunt's cooking, nor did she give him enough to eat to satisfy his very healthy appetite.

My father also went to Odessa once. Whether he ran away from home or not I do not know. Odessa was the nearest metropolis to Nemirov and was not too distant. Few if any Nemirover had occasion to go to Odessa, even those who emigrated to London and New York. It was, however, the port from which one departed for the Holy Land, to Palestine as it was then known. It was principally a commercial center where goods were frequently bought for resale in Nemirov.

There is a story frequently told by father of a very pushy and domineering woman, one Khahntsyeh, to whose name was appended "mit'n knahk," Khahntsyeh mit'n knahk, after a disastrous buying trip to Odessa. The word knahk" meant completing a transaction or a sale. It was customary when bargaining with a merchant for some merchandise, be it a minor item like a pair of pants or even for larger and more costly transactions such as the wholesale of wheat or lumber, for the buyer to accompany each offer with a blow with his hand on the palm of the seller's hand. The seller would make counter offers lowering the original price by returning the blow on the buyer's hand. Thus the buyer would offer a little more with each blow and the buyer would lower the price in the same manner. When the seller agreed with the price offered, he would demonstrate that by a final and harder blow on the buyer's hand. Thus they had "oisgeknahked," a deal. Thus the word "oisknahk'n" meant consummating a profitable transaction. Malvina's father (Asher Noodleman-Gedaliah Man-Gerardo Man-Gedale Man as he was called in Poland, on his false passport, in Guatemala, and in the United Sates) had very large hands and could exchange blow for blow with the peasants in oisknahnk'n the sale of a pair of pants and or coat which his father, Malvina's grandfather Sender, Alexander, sewed and sold on market days in the different villages surrounding Opole in Lyubeener gubernyeh, closed to the Vistula River in Poland.

Khahntsyeh was a shrew who berated her husband who had been fleeced in Odessa by some crafty and unscrupulous merchants, Jews of course, from whom he bought some goods at exceedingly high prices. These were later sold at a loss in Nemirov. Khahnstyeh boasted that she herself would go to Odessa and "vet oisknahk'n," that is to say she will make a favorable deal and bring home the goods at low prices and make a profit in Nemirov. Well, she went to Odessa certain that she would outmaneuver the merchants there and would "oisknahk'n" better deals than her shlemiel of a husband. Apparently the Odessa merchants were cleverer than

Khahntsyeh and she was "oisgeknaked" instead. For her bravado she earned the identifying epithet "mit'n knahk" appended to her name.

At any rate, my father was in Odessa while still in his mid- or early teens. In his late teens he left Nemirov forever going first to London and soon after to New York and America. He told me very few stories about his experiences in Odessa, other than the apocryphal comment of the peasant who on arrival in Odessa was bewildered by the many storied buildings there, observing "Khata na khata, nyeh boodis s'khata." A house on top of a house and no place to shit.

Some of the stories he told me of Odessa made those of Isaac Babel which I read many years later as a grown man in Durham seem as if I had already read them in my childhood, as for example the experiences of Khahntsyeh mit'n knahk. Babel was a Russian Jewish author who was liquidated by Stalin. *Benya Krik the Gangster*, a collection of stories about Jewish life in Odessa, was published by Schocken Books in New York. When I read Babel it was like once more hearing my father's tales of the Jews of Odessa, of life on the Moldavahnka Gaws, Moldavia Street, where one could not walk by without being pulled into a clothing shop and become the unwilling buyer of a pair of pants, or into a barber shop for a haircut though one was almost bald. My father said it was not uncommon to see a man running from a clothing shop without his pants or a customer from a barber shop with half a beard shaved off. The Jews there was tough and drove hard bargains actually threatening dire harm if one did not buy. And many of Isaac Babel's stories deal with Jewish life, really "low-life" on the Moldavahnka during the first decade of this century, just about the time my father left Russia for good.

I have been told that many of the recent Russian Jewish immigrants from Odessa have congregated in Brighton Beach in Brooklyn and have recreated a Little Odessa there, including a Jewish "Mafia." It is as least sixty years that I have been in Brighton Beach. One day, I may go and see for myself the New Odessa. It will be good to hear the Yiddish of my childhood again.

Nemirov, though a small town, had some sort of cultural life, especially with regard to amateur theatricals. My grandfather Shaiyeh, I had been told, took part in such activities as an actor, a "lyoobeetnik," amateur. Just what my father did in the amateur theatricals, I do not know. He spoke of being a "sooflyawr." The word sooflyawr sounded like a Russified version of a French word. In the Yiddish theatre in New York the sooflyawr was the prompter, a very important position especially in a repertory theatre where a number of plays where given on alternate days so that the actors had to memorize a number of the different roles. They depended on a prompter to help them remember their lines. The sooflyawr was seated half below stage level at the footlights and hidden by a hood shaped like a quarter-dome. My father could have been a prompter in Yiddish language plays which were very popular when he was a boy, especially those written by Goldfaden. One in particular I remember seeing as a child in New York, *Di bawbeh Yakhneh* with Sam Kastyin in

the title role. However, I doubt if my father's was a sooflyawr. He probably was more active backstage.

Other than attending the usual and traditional kheyder my father had no formal schooling. He learned to read the Hebrew prayer book and, as by-product of that training, to read Yiddish. But he was never taught to translate Hebrew other than the usual texts in the Khumash, the Five Books of Moses, the Pentateuch. He was never taught to write, not Yiddish, let alone Hebrew. Nor was he fortunate enough to have been sent to a Russian secular school, to the shkola, where my grandfather Shaiyeh attended for a short while. Like the vast majority of the Jews, and the even greater majority of peasants and laborers, he was not taught to read and write Russian or to do arithmetic. There was a gymnasium, high school, in Nemirov, but it was not open to Jews at all. I have already told the story of Zawlmahn Pahnitch who used to wear a gymnasium student's coat and so earned the nickname "pahnitch," little mister or little sir, señorito in Spanish.

But the amazing thing about my father, he did write. He invented his own alphabet based on his observation of the Russian and Latin alphabets, and wrote phonetically. But one had to hear him speak and know his pronunciation of English to discover the clue to his writing. For years while I was at college we corresponded. And even when I was in Panama teaching at the university of Panama we had no difficulty corresponding. His alphabet was all in square or capital letters and so I used the same in answering his letters, usually on the typewriter.

With the outbreak of war, that is after Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, we had difficulty in communicating by mail because the censor could not read his writing and would return his letters to him. It was a most frustrating experience and even demeaning to have to ask a third party to write his letters for him. The letters lost their flavor for me because I no longer heard my father's voice and his inimitable spoken language. I believe my sister Esther was also able to read his script. The censor, unfortunately did not have enough smekahlka, common sense, to see that my father was not writing in some secret code! I regret that I did not keep his letters and shall have to look among my papers to see if I cannot find some examples for you to read. It is interesting, as I have already related before, that my father's father, my grandfather Yahnkel Balaboos, invented a system of arithmetic notation for his own use – little crosses, circles and other signs with which he kept accounts for his building construction activities.

In short, my father had brains! He had an amazing memory for details depending entirely on the spoken word. He dictated specifications for construction jobs, and even dictated contracts, with his own remarkable legalese which probably would not have been acceptable to lawyers in a court of law, but served as a guide to the lawyers in writing up the documents in acceptable legal jargon. He remembered details as if he had the written page before him which he was reading.

I often lament that he did not come to America in 1895 when he was about ten instead of 1905 when he was already almost twenty years old. Had he come at the age of ten he would have gone to school instead of to work beginning with straightening nails and earning spending money sawing logs into boards. He might have become an architect or even a civil engineer which, in practice, he actually was though lacking the intellectual tools of those professions. Who taught my father how many bricks go into the construction of an eight-inch-thick wall? How many board feet of lumber are needed to frame a house of a given size? How to lay out stairs in a given opening between floors of a given height? How to calculate the size of steel I-beams to span an opening of forty feet? No one! He taught himself!

After he became crippled with rheumatoid arthritis and could hardly walk, especially during the last three years of his life here in Durham, his pastime was to lay out plans for small homes. He set himself the task of designing a house of no more than 1,000 square feet of space yet with all the conveniences and appliances of a house twice the size including two or three bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen, living room, dining room, ample closets. The object was, in those days, to build a house for about $10 a square foot or $10,000 for a livable house for a family. During the Depression years in the 1930s such houses could be built for $4 to $5 per square foot.

Some of his plans were marvels of compactness with every square inch of space fully and efficiently utilized. He designed his layouts using stock sizes for framing lumber so that not single board foot was wasted, water and waste pipes ran up a single partition wall serving for both bathrooms and kitchens located back to back. He would draw these plans on the sheets of cardboard which the laundry inserted into his dress shirts after washing and ironing. There he would sit in his recliner, the automatic type which he called an "electric chair," with a ruler and a pencil and create plan after plan on a 1/4 inch scale ready for the builder.

My heart aches even today when I remember how unfair life had been to him and the depths of disappointment he experienced in the latter years of his life because of a luckless destiny that left him crippled and reduced to building houses on paper rather than on land. How cruel a fate not to have been able to recover his loses of the 1930s because he became disabled in the 1940s. He was not been able to take advantage of the burgeoning good times during and after the war. Instead, he had to go to Arizona, on a sleeper train, as he often remarked, seeking relief from the pain of the arthritis which was destroying the joints in his legs and arms. He was so proud of the fact that he got some relief in Arizona so that he was able to return home sitting up in an ordinary passenger car rather than in a sleeping car.

To get back to his boyhood in Nemirov. It is interesting that my mother and father knew of each other in Nemirov. They were not in direct contact, it is true, because of the difference in their ages, about four or five years. When he was a boy of 15 she was still about 10 or 11 years old. But my father and her uncle Elkooneh,

Elkanah in Hebrew, were more or contemporaries and good friends. Elkooneh worked in my grandfather Shaiye's rabawtsheh, workshop. Saturday afternoons Elkooneh and his cronies, my father among them, would gather in the workshop and play cards. Ohkeh, the game was called. My father it seems had no interest in card playing and would take a nap while the others were gambling. My mother was usually present in the house. She remembered that my father wore a cap with a shiny bill, "mit a glintsidiken dahshik," a sign of a "voiler yeeng." [Regular guy, big spender, high liver, sport etc. In modern parlance the absolute direct opposite of a nerd.] Boys who wore hats with shiny bills were considered as being probably less than punctual and serious in religious observance than those who wore hats with a smaller bills which were not shiny. A "glintsidiken dahshik" [Russian cap with a shiny, patent leather, bill] meant that the young man probably played with pigeons, might even have eaten kawlbis [kolbassa, a sausage with pig meat] on the sly. So my mother as a child remembered my father as hardly as a "goody-goody," yet one who had little interest in gambling and who preferred taking a nap while his friends played cards.