Chapter 20
My Mother: Rising Fortunes, 1909 - 1917

My mother and father married in July of 1909. I do not know where they went to live at first. I doubt if their first home was on the Lower East side and I am inclined to conclude that they started married life in Brownsville where I was born there two years later, 10 October 1911. By that time, all my mother's and father's family no longer lived on the lower East Side in Manhattan and were already in Brownsville.

Brownsville was a wholly Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn remaining so at least until the 1940s. Beginning in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and reaching flood proportions in the first decade of the twentieth. Brownsville was settled by thousands of Jews moving away from the Lower East Side, their first stop in America.

Near the end of the nineteenth century, Brownsville was developed on some farmland. The area was laid out into streets and divided into parcels or building lots which were sold mainly to immigrant Russian Jews anxious to flee the noise and turmoil of the crowded streets and squalor of the antiquated unsanitary tenement flats of Lower East Side. At the turn of the century, especially during the first decade of the twentieth, Brownswville witnessed a building boom during which time countless private houses and as well as multi-family tenement houses were built. These were immeasurably more comfortable and "up-to-date" than the miserable flats on the Lower East Side some which even antedated the Civil War.

By 1925 the Jewish population of Brownsville was said to number about 400,000 people and was the largest Jewish enclave in the United States. A vibrant Jewish life developed in Brownsville with institutions and organizations supported and paid for entirely by the Jewish community. There were synagogues on almost very block and Hebrew schools for young children, yeshivas of higher Judaic learning, libraries, bookstores, special halls for parties and banquets and celebrations. There were cultural centers where one could attend lectures on diverse subjects from health to philosophy to history to politics or attend classes in many subjects. One in particular, was the Labor Lyceum, a Socialist Party oriented establishment which my mother frequented to hear lectures.

In 1913, my mother entered me in a baby contest at the Labor Lyceum in which I was awarded second prize amounting to $15. She used the prize money to have a life size photograph taken of me which my father had framed in a magnificent solid mahogany frame. My mother would always inform first-time visitors to the house that this life-size photograph taken when I was twenty-two months old. Except for speck left over from a recent infection of chicken pox, I would have been awarded first prize. She would also add that I astounded all the judges when I sang the

Marseilles in Russian, the anti-Tsarist, proletarian song which the Socialist Party favored, as was to be expected since the majority of the members of the Socialist Party in Brownsville were Russian Jews.

This life-size photograph of me, dressed in a sailor blouse and short pants sewn by mother, hung in the living room over the bookcase all the years of my childhood and youth and even after I was married. It now sits on the floor propped against the wall of the entrance hall in Sarah's house in Raleigh, North Carolina, a long, long way from Brownsville in time and space and culture. Who could have foretold or even dreamed that an artefact, the photo of the little boy in a sailor suit, revealing his mother's aspirations and goals for a more cultured life would still be tangibly palpable some eighty years later, so far distant from its source? My recent immigrant, Russian-Jewish, Socialist, Yiddish-speaking mother in Brownsville in 1913 could never have imagined that the photograph of her infant son would some eighty years later find its way to another foreign and exotic world, North Carolina, which she surely did not know even existed at that time.

In Brownsville there were also night schools where one could learn English, hospitals where one would be attended by Jewish doctors, homes for the aged, a home for people with incurable diseases which my aunt Nekhawmeh, my father's older sister, was instrumental in founding. There were Jewish orphan asylums, one such was actually built around the corner from where we lived on Essex Street, the Pride of Judaea Orphan Home on Dumont Avenue between Linwood and Cleveland Streets. (I am not absolutely certain if these are the names of the streets but can verify them if I had a map of Brooklyn as a guide.) Services for Rosh ha Shonah and Yom Kippur were held there while the building was still in construction and the interior not completely finished. The money from the sale of the admission tickets was used to pay for the construction. A Mr. Blumberg who had a sash and trim factory, according to my father, contributed all the trim and the windows and doors for the building.

The Jews of Brownsville also had banks and even special co-operative loan societies called "aktsyehs," where members bought shares, "aktsyehs," and then shared in the profits, if any. But most of all, they could get loans without too much delay or "red tape." My father belonged to one which met weekly in a house on Linwood Street. It was as much a social organization as a lending institution. There were also Jewish theatres in Brownsville and, of course, commercial establishments including men's and women's clothing stores, some of very high quality such as Abe Stark's men's store on the corner of Pitkin and Stone Avenues, or Sarnoff's a very fancy ladies' clothing store on Pitkin Avenue where my mother sometimes bought dresses. On Rockaway Avenue near Pitkin were furniture stores, the most exclusive being Smerling's where my mother bought all the furniture for our new house on Empire Boulevard when we moved there in 1926.

And by far the most numerous were the food stores: groceries, green stores, bakeries, dairy stores that specialized in butter, sour cream and sweet cream, eggs and cheese, mostly farmer and cottage cheese. And then the appetizer stores, food to whet your appetite, an appetizer before getting down to the main dishes of the meal. In the appetizer store one found all sorts of smoked fish, especially smoked sturgeon, "kawbtshawnkeh," which had to be translucent to be considered of good quality. And also herring: pickled, "ahgemahnyeert" herring, schmaltz herring and Matjes (pronounced mahtches) herring. Also lox (smoked salmon), smoked carp, and smoked white fish.

There were even open air markets lining the curbs of sections of Blake Avenue and Belmont Avenue where all sorts of merchandise, foodstuffs in the main, could be bought. Prices were lower in the open-air markets. There was a very busy and popular street market in front of the tenement house where my mother's parents lived on Blake Avenue. The pushcarts were lined up at the curb on the south side of the street extending from Hinsdale Street to Pennsylvania Avenue. The open air market on Belmont Avenue extending from Stone Avenue to Rockaway Avenue was said to have been a market where inferior quality, and thus lower-priced food and other cheap merchandise were sold there.

There were also perambulating vendors of baked sweet potatoes and to a lesser degree white potatoes. The carts were constructed of sheet metal divided into a number of drawers where the potatoes were baked and then kept warm. The bottom drawer was where the fire was located and from which a tin pipe or chimney carried off the smoke. The sweet potato vendors were usually middle-aged or older, sometimes bearded, Russian Jews dressed in a number of overcoats and wearing the typical Russian boots with felt uppers to protect themselves from the biting cold during the winter months when sweet potatoes were popular.

There also sellers of roasted chestnuts, also sold from ambulatory ovens. The sale of roasted chestnuts was an absolute monopoly of Italians. These were usually sold only during the winter months.

There were also ambulatory vendors of frankfurters, also a monopoly of non-Jews because the frankfurters were not kosher. Their carts were equipped with a deep pot of hot water in which the frankfurters were cooked and which also gave off steam to keep the buns warms. These frankfurter vendors usually stood near the entrance to elevated railway stations in the evening when people were returning home from work. They also used station themselves with their carts, always covered with a gaily colored umbrella, or at a convenient corner near the public elementary schools during lunchtime when children would buy a frankfurter as a snack after having had their lunch at home.

It may be of interest for you to look at the two books I cite immediately below to get some idea of Jewish life during the first third of this century in Brownsville where I was born and in part also of East New York where I lived until I was about

fourteen years old. Both are shelved in the middle section of the book case on the east wall of the living room among the books on Jewish subjects.

Alter F. Landesman, *Brownsville: The Birth, Development and Passing of a Jewish Community in New York*. New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1969.

Alfred Kazin, *A Walker in the City*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951.

The Landesman book is a history. The Kazin book is a personal evocation and remembrance of the author's boyhood and of Jewish life in Brownsville. Many of the places he describes and the experiences he relates, I seem to have shared with him.

My mother loved the theatre and knew the lives of many of the actors. I often heard her discussing the theatre as far back as when I was still in elementary school. She herself was not stage struck, that is, she never even remotely entertained ideas of being an actress. She loved the theatre because it was mirror of life expressed in direct and uncomplicated terms: good triumphed over evil, but not without a valiant struggle; life was full of injustices; children could be ungrateful to parents, especially mothers, for the sacrifices they made for them. The Yiddish theatre could be rather unsophisticated, and actors tended to overact and be even more sententious in the delivery of their lines than frequently indicated in the meaning of the text itself.

My mother was a theatre fan in the same sense that many men and boys are baseball fans, fans who are able to cite scores of games played in past seasons as well as statistics of hits-runs-errors and batting averages of players. She always kept abreast of the plays of the current season on Second Avenue in Manhattan, where the principal Yiddish theatres were located. The theater in Brownsville, The Liberty, was of secondary importance. As a child I remember going to see plays in Yiddish at the Liberty Theatre located on Liberty Avenue somewhere in the neighborhood of Stone Avenue. This, in addition to attending the theatre on the Lower East Side. The theater season traditionally opened on the night after Yom Kippur. It seems that my mother and father would not only break the Yom Kippur fast with food for the body, but also with food for the soul. All the Yiddish theatres started their season "mawtzeh yom kipper af der nakht."

Later on, in the 1920s another Yiddish theatre was built in Brownsville. It was a brand new up-to-date building and soon replaced the old Liberty. I have forgotten the name of the new theatre, though it may have be "The Parkway," I am not sure. It was located on East New York Avenue just where it joins Pitkin Avenue.

In fine, Brownsville was one hundred percent Jewish, that is Yiddish speaking Jews mainly from Tsarist Russia which at that time also included Poland, and also to a lesser degree Yiddish-speaking Jews from Austria (Galitsia) and Hungary. It is as if a microcosm, the small Russian shteytel had been enlarged a thousand times over in size and activities and became a macrocosm, Brownsville.

At the time my mother and father married, my father was still a carpenter working for boss carpenters, but he was earning what were considered extremely high wages, $5 a day. Tailors working in clothing factories were earning an average of between $12 and $15 a week. Although I never heard this discussed, nor did it ever come to mind until this moment, the furnishings of our house in Essex Street were really of high quality and which, I assume, were purchased when my mother and father married in 1909. In other words, when they moved to Essex Street in 1917, my parents had been married of all of eight years at the time. It is most likely that the furniture I remember when I was a child in Essex Street had been acquired in 1909. That being the case, it is remarkable, indeed, that my father, still in his early twenties, already had enough disposable income even to furnish their first home with expensive furniture and in good taste too.

I still remember the parlor furniture. It consisted of a number of massive arm chairs and a sofa. The wood frames were exposed and only the seats and backs were upholstered. Overstuffed living room furniture became popular after the end of the First World War in the mid-1920s. The wood was stained dark and probably was mahogany. The upholstered parts were covered in a smooth, slick cloth akin to fabric used for raincoats. If I remember correctly, the upholstery material was also dark, probably a deep maroon or even purplish color. The dining room furniture was oak. How well do I remember the circular table around which my mother used to chase me armed with her long "kahtshelkeh," wooden rolling pin, shaped like cudgel with which she was sometimes able to strike home. The table was supported on a thick pedestal from which four claw feet emerged to give the table stability. The dining room chairs were made of oak and had upholstered seats and very high backs.

I still remember how I sometime would sit under the table hidden from view by the tablecloth draped over the sides almost touching the floor and day dream that I was in some far off land. I had just learned Eugene Field's (1850-1895) poem "Wynken and Blynken and Nod." I would imagine myself in a boat sailing off to a far off world as I recited the lines of the poem to myself.

I only vaguely remember my parents bedroom furniture. There was a large bed and a dresser. I also have some recollection of a chifferobe too. I slept in a brass bed in the back bedroom facing the yard. My father planted a poplar tree right under my window. It grew tall finally reaching my window on the second floor by 1926 when we moved to Empire Boulevard.

The apartment house, or tenement house, where I was born was located on the west side of Stone Avenue near Pitkin Avenue. This was one of the most fashionable blocks in the whole of Brownsville. Just a few steps away on the same side of the street there was a public elementary school, P. S. 84, I believe, but I am not sure. Across the street there were a number of large private houses, most of which were occupied by physicians, including that of Dr. Maurice Dattlebaum who attended my mother when I was born.

All my life I always heard his name pronounced Dawkter Tait'lboim. Only as a grown man when I went to him for a medical consultation and read his name on the brass plate affixed to the wall of the building where he had his office, did I learn that his name was Dattlebaum, Dr. Datetree

On the northeast corner of Stone and Pitkin Avenues there was a bank. I vaguely remember that it may have been called the Public Bank, or the Public National Bank. The northwest corner of Stone and Pitkin Avenues was the venue of the traditional Sunday morning gathering of carpenters and some other building trade craftsmen. By the 1930s not only builders and craftsmen met on "The Corner," but also real estate brokers and individual buyers and sellers of property.

In view of the fact that my father's earning high wages as a journeyman carpenter, he and my mother were able to take the flat on Stone Avenue and pay what was then considered extremely high priced rent, $15 a month and considerably more expensive than flats in less fancy neighborhoods. According to my mother's story, my grandmother Bahsyeh, my father's mother, expressed her uncertain disapproval of such extravagance. The relationship between e daughter-in-law and mother-in-law were less than cordial due to the unfortunate circumstance that both had the same name, Bahsyeh being my mother's middle name, and the unseemly altercation that took place at the wedding celebration of which I wrote before in a previous chapter.

I have no personal memories of Stone Avenue where I was born because we moved when I was still an infant. We probably lived there until just before my sister Esther was born 27 January 1914 on Snediker Avenue, just a few blocks east of Stone Avenue.

My earliest memories date from when we lived on Snediker Avenue. I have already related how I fell from a window in the first floor flat landing in a sitting position and how I remember my father, in stocking feet, coming through the door to the small court to pick me up. Also another early memory is that of a little boy, me, sitting in a corner on the floor of the entrance vestibule and a woman going by pointing a finger at me and saying something like "bad boy," because I had thrown my infant sister out of her baby carriage, an act of which I have no recollection at all but was told many times later on as I grew older. I may have pulled on the handle unbalancing the carriage, or I may have climbed over a side to see inside bringing the carriage down.

In short, all I remember is that the finger-pointing woman instilled in me a sense of guilt which was reinforced every time my mother related the tale how I threw my infant sister out of her baby carriage. It is my personal perception, though this evaluation of my character may not be concurred in by others, that to this day I am overly sensitive to any comment, criticism or accusation that I may have done or said something unjust either by omission or commission. I grew up feeling that I was

more often wrong than right. I do not believe that I wished to throw my sister out of the carriage, but the fact is that I did.

Ever since that woman pointed her finger at me and said I was a bad boy, and ever since my mother repeated the story, I rarely, if ever, give myself the benefit of the doubt when accused of some impropriety, unacceptable behavior, misdeed, or other negative act regardless of whether I am culpable or not. My first reaction is to believe that the accusation is justified and that my guilt requires no proof. As a result, my defense is rather weak and lacking even the faintest sense of outrage against the false accusation. So it seems to me, though you who are reading this and know me will doubtlessly think otherwise.

The flat in the apartment house on Snediker Avenue was probably of more recent and up-to-date construction than the one where I was born on Stone Avenue just a few blocks west. My mother said that the new flat represented an "upward mobility" move because the halls of the new house were steam heated. I do not know how long we lived in the flat where Esther was born. The next move was a few blocks further east to Alabama Avenue where in the Fall of 1917 my mother enrolled me in the first grade in P. S. 63 which I believe was located on Hinsdale Street near Glenmore Avenue. We may have lived elsewhere before moving to Alabama Avenue. I vaguely remember my father making wooden interior shutters for windows in a different flat where he also made me a wood rocking horse. I still have a memory of myself sitting astride the horse and rocking back and forth. Where this flat was located, I have no idea or even any recollection.

On the other hand, I do have vivid memories of Alabama Avenue. It was while we living there that my Uncle Benny used to take me to the Snedmore Club, a social and athletic club, where he was a member and where he once produced a box of Hershey chocolate bars and gave me one. I was impressed by the fact that the box was the type found only in candy stores and the Hershey bars were sold one at a time. Here was whole box full of them and my Uncle Benny gave me one.

My mother apparently liked living on Alabama Avenue because the apartment was larger and part of a three-family house rather than a tenement house. Also, there was a back yard. I remember my father built a swing with seats in the backyard, It was not a see-saw type, rather a swinging platform with seats on opposite sides suspended from bars supported on a wooden frame . It was here on Alabama Avenue that my mother gave up our front room to store my Aunt Libeh's furniture and household goods while my uncle Louie was in a sanitarium or hospital recuperating from what I think may have been tuberculosis. He came down with this illness almost immediately when they were first married.

My father still continued working for boss carpenters, but little by little he began to take jobs on his own account mostly in East New York and Cyprus Hills further east of Brownsvile. Alabama Avenue was really in a sort of "no man's land" between Brownsville and East New York. Brownsville and East New York melded into

each other little by little as one went further east beginning at Stone Avenue. So when my father, with about $100 in his pocket, bought his first house at 638 Essex Street between Dumont and New Lots Avenue in East New York, it was without a doubt a departure from 100% Brownsville to a neighborhood where small enclaves of Jews lived among larger groups of gentiles.

My mother felt she had been sent into exile, an exile only slightly less forbidding than "Kahterke," dreaded Siberia. To say that she had negative feelings about the move to Essex Street is an understatement. However, I do imagine, though she never actually said so, she was happy to own her own house. On the other hand, my father's all consuming ambition all through the young years of his life, and to his disappointment in his old age, was to own his own home. When the opportunity unexpectedly arose, he ventured to buy the house on a "shoestring," so to speak, feeling confident he would be able to pay off the debt he incurred more on bravado than on any ready cash. I am still moved, and I feel his pain too, when I remember him repeatedly saying, this when he no longer owned his own home and was crippled with arthritis, "I was born in my own house and I want to die in my own house." In Nemirov my grandfather owned two houses, one of which he built with his own hands and which my grandmother helped by kneading the "vahlkyes," a story I have already related in a previous chapter.

My parents had been moving in a easterly direction since coming to America: from the Lower East Side to Brownsville, Stone Avenue; to Snediker Avenue; to Alabama Avenue; and now to Essex Street. My mother would have rather moved in a westerly direction to "President Street," that is to Crown Heights and the most fashionable and highest income Jewish neighborhood, really a "western colony" spawned from Brownsville. But Crown Heights was far beyond their means. Yet it was still her heart's desire. She yearned to reside in the "President Street" section with the same fervor and zeal as observant Jews, have yearned for Zion, for Jerusalem, for the Holy Land of Israel. She was to wait another nine years, during her "days of glory" before she was to have her heart's desire, the house at 625 Empire Boulevard.

I doubt if my mother appreciated my father's daring in buying a house with almost no down payment, perhaps $100 and the burden of three mortgages. He paid off the third mortgage almost immediately. I have already related how the elder Mr. James came to my father's rescue lending him the money to pay off the second mortgage. The unscrupulous mortgagor called in the loan without warning wishing to foreclose the property and benefit from all the improvements my father had made in the mean time.

I still remember my mother complaining bitterly that she was living "ek velt," at the end of the earth, far away from her parents and her brothers and sisters. I still hear her accusing my father, "Vee hawst'eh meer fahrshlehpt?" [Where have you dragged me off to?] In 1917 the only communication with Brownsville was the little

"Toonerville" trolley on New Lots Avenue, or the Liberty Avenue trolley which was a little distant from the house and not very convenient. It was only much later that buses began to run on Blake Avenue to Sutter Avenue and on to the heart of Brownsville. The Interborough subway line had not yet been extended to East New York. After we had been living there a few years, did the IRT open up the New Lots line which terminated a few blocks west from where we lived.

There was also an elevated railroad line on Pitkin Avenue and another on Fulton Street, the "City Line" which went to the northern reaches of Brownsville, but were used mainly to travel to Manhattan. This was the first time in my mother's life, in America, that she had to use public transportation to visit her family, or an automobile after my father bought his first car in 1920 or so. Her perception was that she was living far away in a "farfawfen veenkel," a remote corner of the earth.

In actuality, Essex Street in East New York was at most two miles or even less from Pitkin Avenue, the main street of Brownsville. My mother's parents, my grandfather Shaiyeh and grandmother Sooreh Dintsyeh, lived on Blake Avenue on the corner of Hinsdale Street, perhaps a mile away, that is some fifteen or so blocks west of Essex Street. But East New York was a foreign country for my mother, foreign because non-Jews lived there too and, except for those streets nearer Brownsville, Jews were in the minority. Distance was not only a matter of space, but also one of culture.

My uncle Benny once told me that twenty blocks on the avenues equalled one mile, that is the shorter sides of the rectangular blocks into which the city plan was laid out were about 200 feet long. City building lots were uniformly laid out 20' wide by 100' deep. Street rights-of-way were about 60' wide. Therefore, twenty blocks of about 260' each equalled a mile, according to my uncle Benny. I imagine he was right since 260 feet multiplied by 20 equals 5,200 feet, or a mile. This is the first time I ever checked out Benny's information. It is a matter of no small satisfaction to me that he was right! He told me this when I was about ten years old or so, and not until the age of 83 did I think of verifying his figures, not that I ever doubted that Benny was right.

So Essex Street was in a foreign country though less than a mile from my grandparents' house on Blake Avenue and Hinsdale Street. It is interesting that to this day I look upon Essex Street as a frontier between a Jewish world and a gentile world. Except for the fact that I attended P. S. 64 on Belmont Avenue between Berriman and Atkins Street, about three blocks east and three blocks north of Essex Street, I rarely if ever had reason or need to walk through that neighborhood. Nor did I have any friends there.

I used to avoid going up Essex Street to Blake Avenue, the next block north of where we lived. There was an Italian boy living there older and bigger than me who would assault me every time I dared go through when I was sent with some shoes needing repair to theshoemaker whose shop was near Sutter Avenue. I still remember

how the Italian boy punched me in the belly, the solar plexus, saying "You killed my god," or some such false accusation commonly used by the Catholic boys to justify beating up Jewish boys. I walked away totally out of breath not daring or even wishing to strike him back. My mother forbid me to fight, and if I did, I could expect a licking. The truth is I never really wanted to fight other boys, not only because I was afraid of being beaten, which I certainly would have been, but I really had no stomach for fisticuffs. So I walked away actually believing that the roughneck was from a world of which I wished no part including the right to walk through his street.

My mother's world, and consequently my own world too, ranged westward toward Brownsville and was populated almost wholly by Jews. I hardly remember the names of the streets to the east beyond those where P. S. 64 was located: Shepherd, Berriman, Atkins and then a number of nameless street before coming to Fountain Avenue where some Italian bricklayers lived and with whom my father dealt, including Joe Randazzo and another man whose name I have just recalled, Scudaro or Scudari, the one who went to jail for tapping in on the gas company pipeline to heat his house.

In contrast, I still remember the names of the streets to the west of Essex Street and of which I also have a visual recollection. Proceeding in a westerly direction from Essex Street, the streets that follow are: Linwood Street, Cleveland Street, Ashford Street, and finally Warwick Street beyond which as I child I rarely ventured. However, though I do remember the street names, I do not remember the order they followed: Hendrix Street, Miller Avenue, Van Sicklen Avenue, Wyona Street, Pennsylvania Avenue, then a gap until Hinsdale street where my maternal grandparents lived.

Essex Street for my mother, despite the fact that we now lived in a comfortable two-family steam-heated house with a front and a back yard, it was still "oiveleh welt," beyond the world. This is a figure of speech to signify the land on the other side of the Jordan River in ancient Israel, "ayver ha Yahrden," beyond the Jordan. The Hebrew words "eyver" and "ha" are transformed in Podolian Yiddish to "oiveleh."

My mother's feeling of isolation bordering on exile was exacerbated by the fact that for the first time in her life she was living among non-Jews. It is true that her grandfather, Shmeel Libes for whom I am named, lived on the outskirts of Nemirov in a "goyish shteebel" surrounded by many non-Jews whose pigs foraged freely in the streets. The fact that all the houses on the block of Essex Street between New Lots Avenue and Dumont Avenue were all occupied by Jewish families did not ameliorate her feeling of discomfort of living in a strange land, for a few yards away from our house on the southwest corner of New Lots Avenue there was a Catholic church and a life size statue of the Virgin in the churchyard. The church was a wooden structure and had probably been there for decades before the houses on the block were built

just about the beginning of the First World War by Max and Pinyeh Kosanoffsky and sold to Jewish families from Brownsville.

The next block immediately to the north was occupied by non-Jews: Italians, Germans and families of other European origins. There was an Italian shoe repairer on Essex Street near Sutter Avenue. There were also a number of Italian families living in nondescript houses, more like shacks, south of New Lots Avenue. But except for Tony Benedetto and Shpahranteh with his long black stockings draped around his ankles, I had no contact with other Italian boys at all. There was a Polish family that had a small farm in the area south of New Lots Avenue. The wife, whom we always referred to a "dee panyeh," something like "doña" in Spanish, kept cows and sold milk.

South of New Lots Avenue was mostly open country all the way down to Jamaica Bay. Though the streets had been cut through, all were still unpaved and occupied with a scattering of small houses here and there. To the east of Essex Street, because so few Jews lived there, was really a no-man's-land for me even though had to walk through the neighborhood on my way to school four times a day. Strangely enough for me, there was a synagogue with a Hebrew teacher located just down the block from P. S. 64 on Berriman Street just below Belmont Avenue where I used to go each afternoon right after school. There must have been some Jews living in the immediate vicinity, yet neither I nor my parents ever knew any of them except those that they may have met at services on the rare occasions they went to synagogue. My father used to go their daily to say kaddish for his mother, my grandmother Bahsyeh, during the traditional year of mourning after she died in 1922. The shamas, beadle, of the synagogue was a Mr. Wiener who was also a Hebrew teacher. He prepared me for my Bar Mitzvah. In that synagogue I was called up to the Torah, for the first time in my life.

In East New York Jews and gentiles generally lived interspersed yet, as far as I can remember, hardly socialized. The neighborhood was thus a patchwork of gentiles and Jews. But it was rare when a single Jewish family lived alone among non-Jews. There were clusters of Jews and clusters of non-Jews almost like islands, a neighborhood akin to a patchwork quilt. Though there were only Jews living on our block, most of the other blocks to the east of us were almost wholly gentile. To the west of us toward Brownsville, some gentiles and Jews lived on the same block. However, as one went further and further westward fewer and fewer gentiles lived there and as one came nearer and nearer to the border with Brownsville, none at all.

My mother would have preferred to live in a wholly Jewish neighborhood. It would be anachronistic now to say she would have preferred segregation of Jews rather than integration with gentiles. It was not a question of integration or civil rights. It was more a question of preserving one's tradition and living in peace with those people, non-Jews, of different traditions. As the Guatemalan proverb has it, "Juntos pero no revueltos" together by not mixed up.

The intermixing of Jews and gentiles was not unknown in Nemirov where the conversion of Jews to Christianity had been part and parcel of Tsarist policy from as far back as the time of Nicholas I. The impact of this policy was not a matter of ancient history for my mother and the Jews of Nemirov. My father was named for Sahnyeh Sawldawt, Netanel, Nathaniel the Soldier, the uncle who raised my orphaned grandfather Yahnkel Bahlaboos, Jacob Markman. Sahnyeh had probably been kidnapped as a child, turned over to a peasant to raise him and then at the age of twenty-one was conscripted into the Russian army where he served for twenty-five years. Yet he did not convert to Christianity, but came home as a bird comes home to its nest.

In Nemirov there were also some cases of intermarriage. The Jews considered this to be a great tragedy, not only for the individual family whose child married a non-Jew, but for all of Israel as well because it meant the loss of a whole world, the generations to come which would no longer bear the yoke of Judaism. The common perception was that intermarriage was akin to treason and an act of giving comfort to the enemy, a betrayal of the Jewish people whose only defense against oblivion was to remain steadfast, even dying for Kiddush Ha Shem, the sanctification of the Name, and pass on the tradition to the generations that follow.

Apparently there was one such case in which a Jewish girl, Khahntsyeh by name, fell in love with and married a Ukrainian peasant. A ballad or folk song in Yiddish and in Ukrainian retelling the story became popular. I believe I learned it from my maternal grandmother Sooreh Dintsyeh:

The parents plead (in Yiddish):

"Khantsyeh, Khantsyeh, kim ah heym.
"Ikh vel dyeer geeben voos dee vilst nawr aleyn.
"Ikh vel deer geeben kleyder mit a dawm
"Abee zawlst'nisht nehmen dem sheygets fahr a mawn."

Khantsyeh says to the priest who is about to convert her (In Russian/Ukrainian. I am repeating like a parrot) :

"Bahtyuska Bahtyuskya,
"Ya vaws proshyook
"Vee genyaityee zhidee
"Teer ee peet nye magoo."

Translation of the Yiddish:

Khantsyeh, Khantsyeh come home.
I will give you whatever you want.
I will give you clothes and a house (dawm, house in Russian)
If you will not take that gentile boy as your husband.

Translation of the Russian:

Little father, little father (priest),

I say to you,
Chase out the Jews.
I can't stand them.

It is no wonder then, that my mother who came to this country at the age of thirteen, and who had lived wholly among Jews all her life, and who had experienced the effects of Jewish liabilities, the constant threat of only thinly veiled conversion on the part of the church along with the exclusion of Jews from both primary and secondary schools as well as universities, the mistreatment of Jews at the hands of the civil authorities and the anti-Semitism of the average Russian and Ukrainian, including the recent pogrom in Kishinev the same year she and my grandfather left for America, it is no wonder then that she should have viewed the non-Jewish world in such a negative fashion when she found herself thrown for the first time in her life in a non-Jewish and foreign environment.

Other than the gentry for whom my grandfather sewed, the only gentiles my mother had ever known in Nemirov were Ukrainian peasants, an unfortunate exploited, subjected and suppressed people. Her view of the peasantry was that they were uncouth and given to drunkenness, violence, beating their wives. Her extremely negative view of the non-Jewish world changed in the course of time as she came into contact with middle class Anglo-Saxon Protestant gentiles, people of good will and culture, like Mr. James and his two sons who came to visit us often. The highest complement she could give gentiles was to say that they were like Jews, that is, they had the same morality, the same ideals of justice and mercy, the same respect for learning and culture. Many years later when she and my father went to New Hampshire to see if they could not relocate there, she came away enthralled with the people she met there, especially the editor of the local newspaper who she said looked like a Jewish scholar, because he was refined and wore a short beard, and even more so because he was a learned and educated man who had a large collection of books, including some Hebrew tomes.

Chapter 21.
My Mother: Good Times
1917 - 1930

The years from 1917 when we moved to Essex Street to 1926 when I entered Erasmus Hall High School and we moved to Empire Boulevard and continuing to 1930 when I went off to college were bountiful years for my mother. She was still a very young woman, in her twenties and thirties and, as I remember, very handsome. She always dressed in extremely good taste in a "high class Fifth Avenue Style," frequently designing and sewing her dresses and coats, as well as my clothes as well as Esther's.

She had long tresses of very light brown hair and a rather fair complexion. Her eyes were also light, I believe a blue-grey in contrast my father's dark brown eyes which Esther and I have both inherited. Never in her life had she cut her hair. She resisted the new "flapper" style of the early 1920"s when women "bobbed" their hair, wore short skirts and silk stockings with the tops rolled up just above the knee. The "Charleston" was the dance of the day and the "speakeasy" where ersatz whiskey and "bathtub gin" was illegally dispensed to the "sporting" crowd of habitues, sometimes along with dance music from a piano or a three-piece band.

Needless to say, neither my mother or father ever went into a speakeasy, it was totally outside their cultural milieu. Though of the same age as members of F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Lost Generation," they were as far removed from it as they were from medieval China. My parents, as were most Jewish immigrants in the 1920s, members of the "Found Generation," that is the generation who found political, social, economic, and educational freedom as well as its true self-worth in America after having fled the iniquities of Tsarist Russia. Who needed speakeasies? Who wanted to be "shiker vee a goy" (drunk like a gentile), or "drinking," that is getting drunk, was repellant for my parents.

They were not rebelling against their past. They were striving to achieve a future only possible in America, a future unheard of and impossible in the old country, "in der heym." They did not have to "drink" in secret and hidden from view. Their way of life and their general behavior did not have any overtones implying rebellion against Victorian hypocrisy. There was always whiskey in the house which was used to "makhen a l'khayim" before dinner, or offered to guests along with tea and cake and preserves and fruit artfully arranged on the dining room table. Guests were entertained in the dining room. And my mother baked not only khalla's each Friday in honor of the Sabbath, but also all sorts of cakes.

But my mother succumbed once to the mores of the flapper generation. Her brothers, particularly Benny, were always nagging her about her long hair which was out of keeping, not only with current style, but was also not compatible with her age,

perhaps 30 or 32 years old, or her good looks. She was a very handsome woman, as you will note if you look through some of the old photographs in the bottom section of the bookcase on the left side of the back wall of the living room or at the engagement picture when she was about seventeen or eighteen years old and which hangs on the wall in front of my desk in the study as I write these words. I do not remember the exact words, but there must have been references saying that with her long hair tied up in a bun she looked like an "awlte bawbe," an old grandmother.

One afternoon, I do not recall the exact circumstances, but she had her hair bobbed right in the kitchen in the house on Essex Street. I may have been about ten years old at the time, and I still remember my astonishment to see my mother with short hair, in fact with hair that was more or less like the Buster Brown haircut I was plagued with and persecuted for in the first and second grades.

My father was earning more than enough for a very comfortable life style having risen from a journeyman carpenter working for daily wages, to boss carpenter, to carpenter contractor, to general contractor and finally to builder and developer. During the "Corona operation" when my father and his partner Abe Schneider were building fifty four-family houses, and had a more than ample "cash flow," (this was an unknown word in the business world of the 1920s, in fact I heard it for the first time only a few years ago and I still have no understanding of what it means) he was able to take $10,000 out of the business (and Abe took an equal amount) and use it as a down payment on the house on Empire Boulevard, the total price of which was $18,500, and thereby fulfill my mother's ambitions. I was going to say "fulfill her dreams," but my mother did not dream of living in Crown Heights, she strove to live there in order to provide a more refined and a better cultural and social environment for the family as a whole, as well as better educational opportunities for me and sister. She knew that our horizons would be broadened if we left the working class neighborhood on Essex Street in East New York.

My father could just as easily have paid cash for the house, but it was not advisable to own a house without a mortgage, so it was believed in those Pre-Depression days, because it would be difficult to sell it later on. Mortgages were not amortized. They were known as "standing mortgages" on which six percent interest was paid for a renewable period of time, but subject to being called in if the value of the property fell in value.

I had been enrolled in the first grade in P. S. 63, when we were still living on Alabama Avenue. It was during my very first term that my father bought the house on Essex Street and I was transferred to P. S. 64 on Belmont Avenue between Berriman and Atkins. My first two years in school I still vaguely remember were a sort of martyrdom for me, largely because of the clothes my mother dressed me in to go to school. There is a picture of my mother with Esther, about three or so years old, and me, about four or five years old, which Malvina found among the family photographs and placed on my desk where I am now writing this, There I am dressed

in clothes which she sewed herself, and a type which I wore until I was at least six or seven years old: – a Buster Brown haircut, a long white shirt, short white pants, long white ribbed cotton stockings, high lace up shoes, a high stiff color with a large flowing silk necktie tied in a bow. The necktie was always red.

She insisted in dressing me that way to indicate to the world in general and in particular to some of our neighbors whom she considered, not without good reason, uncouth and vulgar, that she was cultured, refined and had upper class tastes. There was no doubt that she felt she was superior to the other young women on the block who, she soon realized from conversations with them, had no understanding or appreciation of the higher things in life like literature, theatre and music. They also lacked refined tastes in clothes and household furnishings. I must say that her snobbery was well founded when I remember some of the roughneck children or their rather uncouth parents.

My mother was totally out of her element in that working class neighborhood and dressed me accordingly. That the boys called me sissy and even beat me with regularity, or rarely if ever "chose me" when they were "choosing up sides" to play punch ball or one-o-cat or other games like "ring-a-leave-ee-o," "cops and robbers" or "fox and geese" was no concern of hers because I never knew how to verbalize my unhappiness at being made to look different from all the other boys.

After one of my frequent bouts with colds, fevers, grippe, sore throat, today known as a streptococcus infection, and after consultation with a doctor, she decided I had a "weak heart." To have a "weak heart" in those days was almost as grave as having cancer today. The teachers at school were informed of my precarious condition, and so I was required to stand or sit off to one side while, all the other children played games during recess. Now in retrospect, I think the teachers must have had their doubts that such a nice looking, well dressed little boy with rosy cheeks had a weak heart.

During the years we lived on Essex Street and while I was still in elementary school, my mother organized and supervised my every activity from when I got up in the morning to when I went to bed at night. This is quite normal of course, for parents to set the patterns of life for the children to follow. But more frequently than not, the supervision of the children's activities is tacit, understood, unspoken and not made manifest in constant expressions of disapproval. Only infrequently was approval forthcoming. As a child, I never really thought that my mother's rules of behavior were other than what they had to be. I never questioned the severity of her reactions to behavior she considered unseemly and, in fact, never felt rebellious though I did live in constant fear of being physically punished without ever being sure of what I had done wrong.

My daily routine was as follows: 1) school from about 8 o'clock in the morning to about 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon with a break of one hour for lunch at home; 2) right after the close of the school day, going immediately to Hebrew school which

met Monday through Thursday and on Sunday and lasted about one hour;; 3) back home by about 4 or 5 in the afternoon and homework; 4) practice the violin for one hour; 5) supper; 6) to bed. Sometimes violin practice came right after supper, and sometime during the day on Saturday and Sunday.

There was little time indeed for "mindless play" with the other children of the neighborhood outside in the street or on the "lots," the fields that stretched away on the other side of New Lots Avenue as far as Jamaica Bay. I always had some apprehensions and even anxieties about incurring my mother's strong censure, which seemed more like wrath to me at times, if I soiled my clothes and become generally disheveled while playing outdoors. You may get the impression that I was what today is considered an "abused child." Not then nor now did I think that. But I did believe that she was inordinately strict with me and I wished that she would relent, not demand that I conform to such a strict code of proper conduct. I was very frequently unable to comply with what she expected of me. None of the other boys on the block were subject to such strict discipline, so it seemed to me. They had an easy life of no Hebrew school, no music lessons, no worries about getting dirty and, in general, they were free to run about the street and go home for supper when it pleased them.

I was always submissive and never dared rebel because I actually believed that in the end she was right about what she expected of me, expectations which I knew were impossible for me to fulfill and far beyond my talents and capabilities despite her opinion to the contrary. And so, between the ages of about seven or eight to about fourteen, from soon after we moved to Essex Street to about the time I entered high school after we moved to Empire Boulevard, I lived with the certainty that I would be guilty of some infraction, either by commission or omission, and would be given a "good licking" during the day.

I never knew exactly what I did wrong, except when I brought home a bad report card, especially if one of the "C"s was in EFFORT. A "C" in effort meant that I was not trying to do the work required by teacher. I dreaded coming home with my report card each month and lived in constant anxiety from month to month while waiting for it to be handed to me. I believe I lived in greater anxiety of the physical punishment my mother would mete out for a bad report card than I do today while waiting for the report of my tri-monthly urological examination for evidence of bladder cancer.

As a child, I seemed to be in a dream world most of the time, experiencing imaginary events and places in my mind as being close, immediate and palpable so that I was far away in space and time from where I was physically at the moment. I frequently became unaware and oblivious of my immediate surroundings, especially the classroom where the pupils were required to sit upright, pay attention to the teacher no matter how boring she was, not even whisper to other children, raise one's hand if one wanted to go the toilet and wait for the teacher's word or nod of assent

before you wet or soiled your pants, answer the teacher's questions while standing erect and enunciating each word clearly. Sometimes for not paying attention or making some mistake in arithmetic or spelling, you had place your hand on the desk palm down so the teacher could whack you on your knuckles with the flat side of a wood ruler.

I dawdled on my way to and from school being distracted by what I was seeing in the street which induced a stream of thoughts, really day dreams (or in modern psychological jargon, a stream of consciousness) leading my mind from away the object at hand, getting to school on time. I was sleepwalker in the street engrossed in dreams induced by a bricklayer laying bricks on a new construction site, by the vegetable peddler's wagon and his horse, by the blacksmith in his shop on Cleveland Street near Blake Avenue shoeing a mighty draft horse, hypnotized by the forge and the sound of the hammer on the anvil as the blacksmith with bare arms and wearing a leather apron down to his shoes shaped the iron horseshoe, taking it red hot from the forge and plunging it into a tub of water before testing it for size on the horse's hoof which sizzled setting of a smell like that of burning finger nails or a hair comb.

My classmates in my eighth grade class nicknamed me "Speedboy" because I was always a few minutes late for school both in the morning and on my return from lunch at midday. It is no wonder then that the teacher would give me a C in effort on my monthly report. And it is no wonder that I caused my mother a great deal of shame. Her greatest humiliation was when I handed her a note from the teacher requesting that she come to school. Even before she knew what was wrong, and there was no doubt in her mind that I was wrong about something, I was given an immediate licking which was followed by another when she heard what the teacher had to say about me. I was punished for the shame and humiliation I had caused her by not being a good and obedient student.

I add this autobiographical material to illustrate the strict principles my mother lived by and not to complain, now at the age of eighty-three, that she had been unfair and cruel and unfeeling. She had high expectations not only for me, but for my sister and father and all her family for whom she wanted the best. She never expected nor took any rewards for what she felt was her responsibility as a mother. She had no notion, nor did anyone else in those days, of the new double-talk commonly used today with regard to both verbal and physical violence against children. The modern generic term "child abuse" at the hands of a parent was unthinkable. By and large the mores of the day precluded that sort of treatment of children. If it did occur that children were mistreated, beaten in anger or exposed to severe punishment for misbehavior, the community was quick to remedy the situation. The traditional patterns of behavior for parents and children were not relative, but were absolute. There was no grey area. All knew what was right and wrong even if they chose to do otherwise.

I was not abused, yet I cannot say that I was happy to live in constant fear of physical punishment because I was always doing something wrong. Having to face my mother's disapproval as a child for aberrant behavior was a constant in my life. I was transferred to P. S. 158 for a few years where attendance at daily assembly was required each school morning. Part of the program included hearing someone make a short speech after which the music teacher would lead the children in singing some songs. I would sit there mouthing the words, but emitting no sound at all. I had heard of a superstition, and which I came to believe in with all my heart, that if you sang in the morning you would cry at night. And since I was always in danger of doing something my mother disapproved of, I played it safe and did not sing in order to make sure that I would not be punished that evening. To this day, I have inhibitions about singing in the morning, and I doubt if I ever do.

The end result of all her efforts in my behalf to do the right thing was that I graduated from grade school winning the Haney Medal for Fine Craftsmanship (note! not scholarship but for manual dexterity with a hammer and saw); got as far as Berehsis, Book of Genesis, in Hebrew studies; was a Bar Mitzvah; graduated third in my class from Brooklyn Academy where I was sent because I was such a poor student at Erasmus Hall High School; graduated from Union College winning three prizes at commencement; and where I had played lacrosse and freshman football; wrote a column for the college newspaper; acted in the college theatre where I also designed and built stage sets. But I did not continue with the violin. I rather wish she had beat me into continuing, but I was already too old for that. I gave up playing the violin as the only act of rebellion I was capable of, and that was when I was already fourteen years old.

The last time she vented her disapproval of what I had done in the Spring of 1926. I had been enrolled in a summer camp, Camp Roosevelt, in the Catskill Mountains, and been given a list of clothing and supplies to buy at Alex Taylor's Sporting goods store on 42nd Street near Fifth Avenue in New York prior to the opening of the session in July. After making the necessary purchases, my mother thought it would be pleasant to ride downtown on the upper deck of a Fifth Avenue bus before going back to Brooklyn by subway. We sat down and I noticed her staring at my face. In ominous tones she asked me if I had shaved. The truth is that I was beginning to get some fuzz on my upper lip and on my chin and so had recently used ny fathers razor, without soap, to shave. I still remember the look of utter dismay on her face which soon turned to anger. All the way down Fifth Avenue to Washington Square, she slapped me on the face every time she looked at me to my utter embarrassment when the other passengers saw what was happening.

Now I think I know what may have been troubling her. She realized that I was no longer a child and was becoming an adult, and recognized that she was becoming redundant. The fuzz on my face was a sign to her that she was soon to be free of the obligations and responsibilities she had borne all the years of my childhood to shape

me into a worthwhile person. It was painful for her to realize that she was becoming obsolete in making decisions for me and that I was reaching the stage in life when I would decide for myself and that she would no longer be held responsible my deeds as she was when the teacher wrote her a note to come to school.

Many people in looking back on their childhood find that they have ingrained in their minds certain perceptions resulting from deeds, words, acts and remembered impressions of their parents which they feel were admirable or despicable, just or unjust, kind or cruel, fair or unfair, intelligent or stupid, and so on. Mark Twain is reported to have said that when he was a young man he used to be embarrassed by his father who was so stupid but, later on when he was older, he was surprised to see how intelligent the old man had become in the meantime.

The actual facts on which some perceptions of the past are based may or may not be accurate; and even more likely, when the children reveal these perceptions in later years, the parents are sometimes utterly surprised and even astonished to learn that they had been admirable or despicable, just or unjust, kind or cruel, fair or unfair, intelligent or stupid, and so on. So what I am revealing are my subjective reactions to what may or may not have happened, merely my remembrances of what occurred in the past and how I viewed what happened; i.e., my perceptions of what occurred rather than what did in fact. And there is no doubt in my mind, that the three of you – Sarah, Alexander and Charles –- likewise retain more unflattering and negative perceptions, than flattering and positive ones of my words, deeds and acts.

To get back to the great change that occurred in my mother's life when the family moved at most a couple of miles east of Brownsville to the "frontier" neighborhood of East New York. After a while she resigned herself to living so far away from her family. Compensating for this imagined isolation, the years in Essex Street were ones of increasing prosperity and financial well being. I already related how my father prospered as a carpenter contractor, general contractor and finally a builder and developer.

As far back as I can remember, all the time I was in elementary school, we would go to the Catskill Mountains for the entire summer school vacation during the two months of July and August. So for two months every year my mother was relieved of the burden of cooking, cleaning and all household chores and was waited upon instead of her waiting on us.

We used to go to Brodsky's farm in Ellenville in Orange country in the Catskill Mountains about one hundred or so miles from the city. The farmhouse was located high up on a hill on the Greenfield Road alongside of which a brook or small stream ran and where we would go swimming. The road was unpaved, dusty when dry and a rutted quagmire of mud when it rained. I still remember once seeing a thick almost opaque cloud of dust in the distance raised by an automobile approaching the barn next to the road where I and a number of boarders who had been sitting in rocking

chairs on the farmhouse porch had come running down the hill to see what was causing this billowing cloud of dust approaching. In a moment we all saw Mr. Brodsky's son Nathan driving an open automobile with the top down covered with dust and coming to a sudden dramatic halt right at the barn door. The Brodskys also had a another son named Harry and a daughter named Katie who was married to a Mr. Arkin, as well as a one-armed nephew named Charlie who played the piano to entertain the boarders with his one hand the music sounding as complete in tone and volume as if he had both hands.

Nathan's mother, whom we called Bawbeh, grandma, and who did the cooking for the boarders, was also there with all the startled and amazed onlookers who had gathered in front of the open barn door. I still see her standing there in a long cotton dress down to her ankles and her head covered with a white kerchief, Russian peasant style, holding her hands up to the sides of her face and shaking her head from side to side and staring in wonder and amazement at Nathan as he drove the automobile right up to the barn door. This momentous event, a self-propelled vehicle, must have taken place in the summer of 1918 when I was about to enter second grade in P. S. 64. I did a small oil painting of the farmhouse on the hill and the barn below from memory which I gave to Esther and which I believe still hangs in her living room in Cincinnati.

It was on this farm, probably a year or two later, that I read my first book. I found a copy of Horatio Alger's *Rags to Riches* (I am not too certain of the exact title) either in the barn or somewhere else on the farm, and a whole world opened up to me – reading, an activity which is still the chief source of great enjoyment, a doorway opening to an inner life lived in my mind's eye. Enjoyment is not the right word, but I can think of no other at the moment.

I also found an old rifle, not in working condition by far, somewhere on the property. I had a picture taken with it by the itinerant photographer who made his rounds among all the boarding houses in the vicinity. The gun was so heavy and about as long as I was tall, so I could hardly hold it up while pressing the stock against my right shoulder. The picture is somewhere among all the old pictures in the bottom section of the left hand bookcase in the living room. The gun must have been from the time of the Civil War or perhaps even earlier. There was a semicircular tube that pivoted like the hammer of a gun on the right side of the barrel right above where it joined the stock. It sprung forcefully forward when I pulled the trigger and struck another a small projection shaped like a small cone with a hole in the top. I have no idea of when this gun was made. It may have been a flintlock going as far back as the eighteenth century or it could have been the type of rifle used in the Civil War. It must have been left behind by the people from whom Mr. Brodsky had bought the farm perhaps as far back as 1910 or even earlier.

My mother did not allow me to keep that old gun and take it home with me when we left at the end of August. I still remember how sad this made me. I still feel

that there is something I had left unfinished by not having that gun with me to keep in the basement along with many of the other things I had collected while we lived in Essex Street – principally Horatio Alger books as well as Nick Carter detective stories, Tom Swift books and some prohibited Wild West cowboy magazines with pictures of cowboys with Colt six-shooters blazing away on the covers. These I kept hidden from my mother who would have torn them up and thrown them in the garbage had she ever found them.

But I am still sad when I think of the rifle I found on Brodsky's farm and am still nostalgic for it as an artefact of the past to which I had no direct connection. I cherished it more for its shape and beauty and its history. I never really thought of it as an instrument designed too kill people or any other living thing. The reality of its purpose was totally outside my experience. For me it was a wonderful exotic object I had never seen before. For my mother it was a gun, and a gun was meant to kill, and something no Jewish boy should own, even as a harmless toy. In her opinion even broken and ancient guns were not harmless because they had been used to kill. Guns were not make-believe toys and so she adamantly refused to let me bring the gun home to Essex Street. Thus there is a gap, an unfilled void, in my life because of that.

I still am grieved and long, not so much for the rifle, as I long for closure, a fit ending with that ancient rifle at home with me at the end of that wonderful summer at Brodksy's farm when I saw Nathan at the wheel of his automobile on the Greenfield road, when I read my first book and when I found the old rifle which had carried me back to a time and place before I was born and before my parents and grandparents had set foot in America. The rifle could have been a physical link, a symbolic tie to a past I did not have. I am as disappointed now not to have it as I was when I was eight or nine years old and my mother would not let me take it home.

My mother had no idea of the symbolic meaning I had given the rifle. For her it had been used in a war where men had been killed by guns. My mother was against war, against armies especially the Tsar's army where Jewish boys were persecuted. She was against violence, against uniforms. The basic reason why I was never allowed to join the Boy Scouts was because she recoiled at the thought of seeing me in a uniform. The Boy Scouts were too militaristic. She was probably right about that. The memories of the First World War and the horrors of trench warfare were still fresh. At any rate, I feel certain that if Boy Scouts did not have to wear uniforms, she might have allowed me to join a troop.

In spite of never joining, I still had some vicarious Boy Scout experiences. I obtained a copy of the Boy Scout Handbook or Manual and learned how to make knots, how to build a fire by rubbing sticks, how to build a lean-to, how to whittle small and useful objects from wood, and many other important skills needed by boys living in the city but preparing for life in the wild, skills such as Morse code and the alphabet using signal flags, how to pitch a tent and sundry technical information

which has stood me in good stead all the years of my life. I remember once when Charlie and Alexander were Boy Scouts and their troop invited fathers to come along on a camping trip to Nags Head right on the beach. The two of them were surprised, and said so, that I was one of the few fathers there who could set up tent. This was no easy matter for the stakes had to be a yard or so long and be driven into the sand so the tent would not be blown away. I still remember their laconic few words of approval which I took to be praise and which I appreciate to this very day.

After a few years or so, Mr. Brodsky sold the farm in Ellenville and bought another, The Cranberry Lake House, in Mountaindale in Sullivan County. In addition to the usual farmhouse and the fields of oats and hay and the herd of milk cows and the apple orchards, the farm also had a large building built from the very first as a boarding house. His children now ran the hotel operation and dealt with the summer boarders, but old Mr. Brodsky, whom we called Zaydeh, grandfather, and who I remember holding a long thin twig like a switch chasing some of the boarder's boys who had just shaken an apple tree to bring the apples down to the ground and yelling "Ah reekh in aiyer tawtehns, tawtehns tawteh arahn," [may the devil take your father's father's father's father]. He was careful not to utter maledictions against any living member of the boys' families always making certain to go back at least three or four generations. But his wife continued to cook for the boarders while his sons managed the summer hotel operation. They did not work the farm with him. To help him, especially during the harvest season in the Fall, he employed "hired hands," usually young men, non-Jews, from the vicinity

I spent some of the happiest days of my childhood on that farm in Mountaindale, especially late in August when Mr. Brodsky began cutting hay. I used to go out to the fields with the farm workers and watch them cut the hay with a mower drawn by a horse. The cut hay was left on the ground to dry where it fell. When it was completely dry, it was raked together with a large wheeled rake consisting of large semicircular tines attached to a beam with a seat for the driver and pulled by a horse. The hay was gathered together into small stacks at convenient intervals in the field and thus made ready for loading on the flat-bed hay wagon. It was then carried to the barn and hoisted up and pitched into the hay loft.

The hired hands showed me a delicious way of preparing huckleberries to eat right out in the field. The huckleberry bushes grew near the stone fences bordering the fields. The berries were mashed in a small tin bucket with sugar and then eaten with bread and spring water for lunch.

Later on when Mr. Brodsky and Mrs. Brodsky were too old to work the farm, and after the children got married, they no longer worked the farm and concentrated only on taking in summer boarders. Then the farm became a hotel in fact. The sons then opened a new hotel in Ellenville, I believe, but I no longer remember the name. In 1926 both I and Esther were sent to summer camp, and the days of the old fashioned summer boarding house in the country went out of vogue.

It was during those good days right after the First World War that my father bought his first automobile, a five passenger, open Model-T Ford. Also, about the same time, I began to take violin lessons on a three-quarter size instrument my father bought from a violin teacher for whom he did a job in Staten Island. When I outgrew that fiddle, my mother took me to Carl Fischer's music store in downtown New York and brought me the violin I still have to this day. It is the one Alexander played, and rightfully is still his. I hope he will agree it should go to Nathaniel when he is grown enough to use it, provided he is still playing the violin.

I believe I may have already related the vicissitudes suffered by my first violin, the three-quarter size one my father brought home from Staten Island and which I played until I was about twelve years old. My mother gave it to Esther when Michael, her second son, began taking violin lessons. Many years later, when I was in graduate school and working betimes as an educational adviser in a CCC camp upstate New York and long after Michael had outgrown it, I recovered it. Or shall I say I salvaged it in a ruinous condition. It had been used to bat balls. I suppose they were soft tennis balls. The rim of the top face of the instrument had been whittled away with a knife in a number of places. I was heartbroken when I saw the condition it was in. I had it repaired by a luthier on 57th Street and brought it home. I still have it here in Durham.

Alexander started taking lessons on this little fiddle and Karuna too. It is too bad that she did not continue. I was sorry to have it come back to me. It is stored in the hall closet upstairs where it now awaits Nathaniel and hopefully Eliot later on when both are big enough to play it.

Not long after I began to play the violin, perhaps in 1922 or 1923, my mother decided the Esther should take piano lessons, and so she bought a baby grand Knabe piano. I still remember its price, $1200, which was about as much as a carpenter earned in about thirty weeks more or less at the rate of about $6 a day The house on Essex Street which my father bought in 1917 cost $4,500. You will thus have an idea not only of how my father's work was prospering, but also have an insight into my mother's standards regarding what was important in life. If Esther was to take piano lessons, she should have the best instrument we could afford. My mother could have bought an upright piano for perhaps one-fourth the price of the baby grand. But she wanted a fine sounding instrument so Esther would be encouraged to learn.

My first violin teacher was a Mr. Frankel of whom I have already said something. It was my second violin teacher, Mr. Weinstein, who advised my mother about purchasing a full size instrument for me at Carl Fischer's. It is significant to realize now, in retrospect, that it was possible to earn a living for a family by giving music lessons. Music teachers earned not appreciably less than elementary school teachers. In the 1920s violin lessons were about $2 each, perhaps a little more. Miss Mook, or Muck, who was Esther's piano teacher, and who came from a musical

family, her brother I believe was the conductor of the Boston Symphony, charged about $5 per lesson, but this was already in the mid-1920s.

It is interesting that none of my cousins, except for my mother's sister Libeh's daughter Florence who lives now in Los Angeles, ever took music lessons. Her brother, my cousin Bernie may have taken violin lessons. I am not sure. My father's younger brother Moishe's sons sang in the synagogue choir with him and I had heard that the younger boy, Hershel, played the saxophone. None of my other cousins on both my father's and mother's side took music lessons. My paternal grandfather, Yahnkel Bahlaboos, used to sing songs of which he composed both the words and music, sometimes even improvising as he sang. As far as I could tell, none of the neighbor's children on Essex Street took music lessons. I and Esther were the only ones! After we moved to Empire Boulevard in a "high class" neighborhood, it was not uncommon for families to have pianos in the house and for children to be given music lessons. It is no wonder than that at last my mother felt she was living among people of her own kind.

While we still living on Essex Street, my mother was still a young woman in her late twenties and early thirties. She prided herself on her refined taste with regard to the clothes she and the rest of us wore, and also the furnishings and decor of the house. It is remarkable that though she did not read or write English, we were the only children on the block who had a set of the *Book of Knowledge*. I do not know how my mother learned about these wonderful books, but she knew how important it was to have them in the house just as she knew that a Knabe piano was better than a Krakauer upright piano, and knew how to select a violin. My violin has a beautiful mellow voice, but lacks the full bodied volume required of an instrument used for concertizing.

The very basic foundation of my education from elementary school, right through college and graduate school was what I learned from reading the *Book of Knowledge*. The basis of what I know of literature, of poetry, of world history, of arts and crafts, of the solar system, of geography and of far off places in the world, are all in those marvelous books I read as a child.

My mother gave my set of the *Book of Knowledge* to Esther when her boys began elementary school. Along with my little fiddle, I also salvaged the set which was in most deplorable condition with loose pages, worn covers and generally disheveled. I wished to repair these books, so dear to me,and keep the original binding. But somehow or other I did not, largely because there are no bookbinders here in Durham. I gave the set to Alexander for Nirmala and Karuna to read, and by pure chance, found a later edition, in excellent condition, and was so happy to find them. I bought the set of books and gave it to Sarah for Eva to read. I am resigned, though saddened, when I realize that the *Book of Knowledge* no longer has the appeal for my grandchildren that it had for me. The world has progressed and these books are now considered obsolete.

At the time my mother bought the *Book of Knowledge* I was perhaps in the third grade. It is still remarkable to me that she herself could not read those books. Her knowledge of literature was based on plays she had seen in the Yiddish theatre, including translations and adaptations of Shakespeare and a number of Russian playwrights, as well as books which had been translated into Yiddish, among whom were most of the great Russian nineteenth-century authors. These included Tolstoy, whose visage still looks down on me from the top of the bookcase here in my study as I write this, Dostoyevky, Chekhov, Artsebashev, Gorky, Gogol, of whom and their works I heard about for the first time from her.

My mother had never had any formal education, not even Hebrew school in Nemirov. Hebrew school was reserved almost exclusively for boys. She had been taught to read Yiddish when she was a young child. It should be borne in mind that she came to America when she had just turned thirteen. In another time and in another place she would have already had at least six or seven years of elementary schooling. But in Russia, attendance at school was the exception not the rule, a privilege and not a right. And the tragedy of my mother's life was that, though she arrived here still of school age, she was sent to work at an age which today would be clearly considered that of a child.

And when her mother, my grandmother Sooreh Dintsyeh, came to America with the rest of the children in 1905, she was all of fifteen years old. She was then encumbered with even heavier burdens and responsibilities and had even less time for herself than before. She had a full time job in a ladies' dress factory. After a long day of ten or so hours in the shop, she had to help her mother with the care of the smaller children and other household duties. In fact, she became a quasi-surrogate mother for her younger sisters and brothers and the worldly intermediary for them in matters outside the home. It was natural that when problems arose in the family, my grandparents would turn to her to help solve them. When Julie had whooping cough she took him for rides on the Staten Island ferry to relieve his coughing. When Benny showed he had a talent for art, she took him to Cooper Union to enroll him in art classes. When Julie joined the army at age fourteen it was she who went with my grandfather to have him released. When my grandmother was taken deathly sick, my mother took her, along with Ida who was still a child, to live with us while she was convalescing. When members of the family ran a fever or had a bronchial cough, it was Eva who came and set cups on their backs. When someone had a sore throat, she was the one who had the skill to brush the inflamed areas way down their gullets with argyrol. My mother served us and her family in the capacity of a "primary care health provider." The providing of this type of health care was a well known occupation in Russia, that of a "feldsher" who gave more than first aid until the doctor arrived.

How well I remember her expertise in giving sponge baths to help reduce a fever and of "penciling" my throat with argyrol. The brush she used was not unlike

a good watercolor brush, a #10 or #12. The shaft was a long wire with a double loop at the end to provide a steady grip for the fingers. The argyrol was the color of iodine and the only effective method available to treat throat infections before the discovery of penicillin or sulfa drugs.. She also was an expert at administering "prawshkes," quinine in powder form mixed in a tablespoon with some water and then swallowed to relieve a fever. She certainly had a knack for taking care of the sick and I have no idea where she learned this skill.

In some ways my mother was like her father. She had his fair skin coloring and also the same light colored eyes and facial features. My grandfather Shaiyeh was a dreamer in many ways and such practical things as setting cups or pencilling throats with argyrol and would have been totally outside his competence. My mother too was a dreamer, but a dreamer who refused to accept the hard reality of the moment and strove instead to make her dreams a reality, to make palpable and real the vaporous, intangible substance of her hopes, her ambitions. Is this a national Russian character trait? Is this like the yearning of each of the three sisters in Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*, who hope for something attainable only in their dreams; or like Fyodor Pavlovitch Karamazov always "playing the clown" in a make-believe world of his own, in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*?

Like my mother, my grandfather also had an artistic bent. I remember him as a man of great personal dignity who seemed to have a deep inner life in which no one but he participated. I still see him sitting in his chair at the table in the kitchen next to the dresser after eating his supper talking to no one, just sitting there deep in thought and oblivious to the activities in the small flat full of people. Unlike my mother, he was more an observer than a participant in the mundane matters of daily life. He loved music and had a collection of phonograph records, mostly cantorial and Jewish and Russian folk music. He also loved the theater. In Nemirov as a young man he participated in amateur theatricals in both Ukrainian and/or Russian plays. I was told that he also used to go ice skating. And he always had a dog in the house. He was probably the only Jew in the neighborhood who loved dogs. I have already written about his dog Belly, the shaggy, black, long haired dog that he kept tied under the washtub in the kitchen whenever I visited because she did not like me and would strain at her leash and snarl, growl and bark at me just I opened the door and stepped into the kitchen. Now that I think of it, she was probably jealous of the attention my grandfather and my uncle Benny gave me.

Unlike my father's father, Yahnkel Balaboos, born in the mid-nineteenth century and who remembered when the serfs were freed, and who had a reddish beard streaked with grey, my mother's father was clean shaven, had stark white hair even when he was young and had light blue-grey eyes. He dressed immaculately including spats, a black Derby hat, a black coat with a velvet collar, a silk muffler on cold days and sometimes even carried a cane. Coming home from a long day in the shop, he would walk past the "yentas," gossipy women, gathered at the entrance to

the tenement house on Blake Avenue as if they were not there, He would nod a formal greeting as he went by, but never stopped to chat, let alone talk to any of them. It was not that he was a snob or felt he was superior, it was simply that he had nothing in common with them to talk about. What was he to say to them? He was too proud and had little or no interest to make public the misery of his hard life in the sweat shop and the long tiresome journey twice each day on the overcrowded subway each day, and the monotonous round of his daily life of toil with no hope for better days. He never talked about this with anyone. I never heard his complain, let alone bemoan his lot. If he did, he kept it to himself.

My mother was quite different from her own mother. My grandmother had lived a very sheltered life in Nemirov. My mother said that my grandmother never learned to speak "goyish", that is Ukrainian, let alone Russian. Her one and only language was Yiddish. And I believe she never learned to speak English because of the circumscribed life she lived in Brownsville, a one-hundred-percent Jewish, Yiddish-speaking community. She had no need of English. But she was an extremely frail and sickly woman. I remember her time and time again moaning with pain and with a cold compress wrapped around her head to relieve her almost constant headache. It turned out that she had been suffering from high-blood pressure all her adult life. This malady was only discovered or diagnosed many years later. There were no drugs available then to lower her blood pressure. The most direct cause of her death at the age of seventy-two in 1942 was high blood pressure.

In short, I do not know where my mother learned how to care for the sick just as I have no notion where she learned that the *Book of Knowledge* was essential for the education of her children. I do not know how she where she learned how to judge the quality of the tone of a piano or a violin. Nevertheless, she selected an excellent piano which Esther kept until about ten or so years ago donating it to some music school. And she was a "mayven" in picking the violin which I and Alexander played and which now awaits Nathaniel and possibly Eliot. And even of greater wonder to me, is that when I was in the seventh grade, my mother bought a set of the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* on the advice of our tenant, Mrs. Finger, a high school graduate I believe, who had two little girls named Lila and Dinah, and who occupied the downstairs apartment of the house on Essex Street.

I remember her telling my mother that I was probably outgrowing the *Book of Knowledge* and was reaching the age when I should have the *Britannica*. My mother bought the books including a little bookcase made especially for them. I still have the Britannica and still refer to it from time to time. The bookcase with the books are in the upstairs hall. The bookcase also serves as a telephone table.

In January of 1926 we moved to 625 Empire Boulevard between Kingston and Albany Avenues and I entered Erasmus Hall High School. My mother went about furnishing the new house before we occupied it and also for some time after we were already settled there. I do not remember the exact details in this regard, probably

because at the age of fourteen I was naturally not too interested in matters dealing with my mother's project to furnish the house located in "the land of her dreams," so to speak, the President Street neighborhood, or Crown Heights.

It was at this time that my mother bought the grandfather clock which now stands in the southwest corner of the living room. Most of the major pieces of furniture including an overstuffed "kidney" living room set, the dining room set, the set for the breakfast room, the convertible day bed for the spare room, the wicker set for the back porch and sundry other pieces she bought at Smerling's, a very high quality furniture store located on Rockaway Avenue near Pitkin Avenue in Brownsville. In a store just a few door away from Smerling's, she bought the wrought iron console table and the little mushroom light with the elfs (my uncle Benny once repaired it) that rest on the marble ledge of the wrought iron and marble console table now standing at the head of the stairs right next to my study where I am writing this account. She also bought the brass cloisonne Chinese vase, in the living room now, as well as a crystal chandelier for the dining room which was left hanging there when we moved out in 1935. She also bought the mirror with the wrought iron frame which now hangs in the vestibule. It used to hang over the telephone table in the breakfast room on Empire Boulevard.

I do not where my mother learned about Persian rugs, though I do remember her telling me that she when she was a child she had seen such rugs in Nemirov in the house of one of a rich landowner for whose wife my grandfather sewed tailored suits and riding habits. My grandfather sometimes took her along with him when he had to take measurements. At any rate, I vaguely remember going with her to a rug dealer in Manhattan whose name I now recall, a Mr. Romer, from whom she bought two Sarouk rugs, one of which is now in our living room and the other Esther has. Esther also has the small Sarouk rug which my mother bought later on and which once lay in the doorway between the living and dining rooms in Empire Boulevard. She also bought an Indian rug which was used in the breakfast room. It was considerably less expensive. My mother gave it to Esther when she lived in Schenectady. This rug has since disappeared. My mother told me that Esther cut it in order to make it fit the room in her house. I have already related the story about that magnificent walnut dining room set which my father admired because of the beautiful grain of the wood. The massive table was supported on even more mammoth bulbous legs decorated with pointed half-leaves that projected. My father used to quip that one needed to be protected by a workman's compensation insurance policy before having any one do the job of dusting and polishing them.

This dining room set remained in their possession until my mother died January 1, 1960 in St. John's Place, Brooklyn, and my father moved from the apartment soon after. He left it there because he was unable to sell it and had no place for it where he was going to live, in a multi- story apartment house on Second Avenue on the lower East Side arranged for by Esther who was living at the time on

West 98th Street and Central Park West. He did, however, take the large baroque tripartite mirror that hung over the buffet of the dining room set. He even brought it here to Durham when he came to live here in 1961.

I believe he either gave it or sold it to Mr. Stem, a man whom my father encouraged and taught to be a general contractor. He was a good person who, along with his wife and children, used to visit my father when he lived on Gregson Street. Mr. Stem, whose first name I do not remember, was actually from Stem, a small town near Oxford, North Carolina. He had been a milkman before he came to work as a carpenter on the construction of our house here on Urban Avenue in 1952.

Well, my mother spent a great deal of time, energy and money to furnish the house on Empire Boulevard. And as far as I can remember, the first years we lived in that house she was as happy as she had ever been during my childhood years. It was during this time that she learned to drive a car. She drove the Packard while my father drove a Buick coupe to the job each day.

For a couple of years or so after me moved into the house on Empire Boulevard, my father was able to maintain the high standard of living he and my mother had set for themselves. He continued prospering as a builder and developer until the breakup of his partnership with Abe Schneider. I have already related how after the dissolution of the Brod Developing Company my father found a parcel in Garden City and began an operation building a few high-priced houses in Garden City, Long Island, which ended in financial disaster, and how he had to turn these houses over to mortgage company because not a single one was sold, not before or after the New York stock market crash of 1929.

Now, assuming the objectivity, khutzpah more correctly termed, with the hindsight of an historian, I can now postulate what my father should have done and conclude what would have transpired had he had the perspicacity to have understood that burgeoning economic prosperity in America was at an end, that is, have known what I know now almost seventy years later. Should he have known what I know now, that it was time to retrench, or "downsize" to use the catchword so common today? How could he have known that bad times were coming and would continue till the outbreak of the Second World War? How could he know that he had unwittingly over extended himself and would no longer be able to discharge the liabilities he had undertaken on the basis of economic conditions which had changed for the worse. How was he to know that the world had changed almost overnight?

Even if he had known what I know now, that it was time to "tighten one's belt," so to speak, I doubt if my mother would have agreed. It was impossible for her to entertain such alternatives for the reason that she could not understand that retrenching was a means of saving what one had and not an admission of failure, that it was not a humiliation to live on a more restricted budget. My mother, and my father too, did not know what a budget was, nor did they fully understand that money could be used for more than conspicuous consumption, for investments

earning interest. But the only investments my father understood was real estate. The real estate market had fallen. Rental property was a poor investment. It was common for two families to double up and rent a single apartment. Private houses were being foreclosed all over the country. Even commercial property went begging for tenants. For speculators who had surplus cash, real estate was an excellent, but very long term, investment. They could then acquire property for a fraction of what it was worth. But who had money? My father certainly did not!

Along with most people, he had no notion of the stock market. It is just as well he did not, for he would have certainly lost everything all at once in the crash of 1929 rather than piecemeal little by little over he course of a few years. Matters of high or even low finance were as foreign to my mother as astrophysics. Instead of retrenching by selling the house and the Packard, she undertook even greater expenses when her sister Libeh and her family returned from California and came to live with us in 1928. I still remember how we all went to Grand Central station to meet the train. Without further word, my mother took the four of them directly home with us where they lived for what I believe was the better part of a year.

I have already related how my father gave Louie the job of keeping the books on the Garden City job. This was the time when my father had just won the case against Abe Schneider and the Brod Developing Company for the money due him after the dissolution of the partnership. My father took the $10,000 he was awarded and started the disastrous Garden City operation. During the year that Libeh and her family lived with us, the capital invested in the Garden City job was eaten up and not replaced because the houses did not sell, let alone bring in a profit.

My mother had no idea what it meant to retrench. Nor could she imagine that it might possibly be necessary to conceive of adopting a less expensive standard of living. To do so meant equating as empty vanities her ambitions and goal for the "good life" as she had conceived it and which she had finally achieved after so many years of "climbing up the ladder." When someone offered to buy the house for $16,000, it had cost $18,500 in 1926 not counting the improvements made later, she was against such a move. She considered the offer humiliating, and that she would be shamed if she had to move to cheaper house in a less desireable neighborhood. She just could not bear to even think of the suggestion that selling the house and moving into one more within our current means would make life easier, materially at least. Such a practical move did not take into consideration the "spiritual" qualities of life that transcended material needs, her amor propio, her pride. She would have felt a failure if we left the President Street neighborhood and moved to a less "high class" environment or, G-d forbid, go back to East New York.

Now, almost seventy years later when I have become "a wise old man," I insist that if my mother had agreed to sell the house for $16,000, it would have meant a loss of only about $2,000. She and my father would still have come way from the deal with about $8,000 in cash. My father reluctantly accepted the inevitability of having

to sell the house. From his point of view, it was not a bad idea. However, it was just as difficult for him as it was for her, except that he was a pragmatist and more inclined to concede to necessity and not take refuge in wishful thinking.

The residue of $8,000 from the sale would have been enough to buy a less expensive, but equally good one-family house in a less "exclusive" neighborhood; for example, Flatbush, or even a better one with some land around it out on Long Island, in Flushing, perhaps, where my father had built about twenty-four houses in the $8,000 to $12,000 range in 1924. To my mother, living on Long Island in a community where Jews were in the minority, was unthinkable. Besides, to move away from President Street-Crown Heights would have been step down the social ladder resulting in being humiliated and shamed.

She also made a similar negative decision when someone offered to buy the Packard. I recall how I went with my father to the Packard agency on Atlantic Avenue when he bought the car for $2,700 in 1927. A year or so later, word had gotten out that my father's business was not doing too well. A Mr. Summer, whom we knew when we were still living in Essex Street and who was in the trucking business, offered to buy the Packard. Mr. Summer had giant sized teams of horses which hauled the wooden moving vans. Later on, he left off using draft horses and bought a Mack truck with solid rubber tires, as was common on trucks then.

At any rate, he must have heard that times were on the downgrade for my father and offered to buy the Packard. For my mother this offer was a brazen insult, for it implied that it was already being rumored about that we were having a difficult time and so Mr. Summer wished to take advantage of our straitened circumstances which were none of their business. Thus, once again my mother refused to accept a practical solution because she could not brook "losing face." It was less hurtful to her to turn down practical solutions to material problems than that of being shamed into selling the house and the Packard and moving to a less expensive house in a neighborhood not as "high class"as she believed Crown Heights to be.

Sitting here now in 1995 (it is January 3) and recalling those difficult times for my mother, it is quite simple for me to offer solutions in the abstract, practical steps she should have taken to solve practical problems and not believed that to have done so would have turned her goals in life into empty illusions, fabrications of her fantasy. To have accepted the inevitable was not simply a matter of practical economic expedients for my mother. It was a sense of pride and self-respect coupled with a tenacious unwillingness to embrace practical realities which for her were of lesser importance than the transcendental abstractions of her goals and aims in life. To have sold the house and the car would have been tantamount to confessing that her aspirations for a more ample and broader life had been mere vanities. My mother never thought of her ideals for the betterment of the human experience as something impractical, visionary or unattainable. My father was of another opinion concerning her ideals and aspirations which he sometimes characterized in a few succinct but

painful words to her, "Es shtehlt zich eer fawr dee fahntahzyeh," she is fantasizing. She was not realistic in her assessment of the facts as they were, rather she saw them as she wished or hoped them to be. Hopes were facts of life for my mother. And eventually in the 1940's when she gave up hope, she just existed from day to day until the day of her death January 1, 1960.

My father was not altogether blameless in overextending himself financially, of undertaking a high-priced quality of life which very soon was beyond his means. He could very easily have paid cash for the house on Empire Boulevard without leaving a standing mortgage of $8,500 to plague him later on when times became very bad, especially during the Depression. It was not customary then to buy a house without a mortgage, for it would have been difficult to sell it later on. And as I already noted before, he never imagined that the day would soon come when he would not be able to carry the interest, about $500 a year, on that mortgage. Perhaps he was conceited about his business continuing to prosper. But who was not absolutely certain that prosperity was the norm of life before the awful years of the Depression? People with more modest business goals fared better because they did not have the means to speculate on the future as those with greater capital. Speculation was in the air, good times were permanent! Or is it nearer the fact to say that my parents, like many immigrants who came to America in the first decade of this century, had never known an America of hard times, an America without hope for a better and better future. My father always acquiesced to my mother's plans and desires, and in truth did not think he would ever run short within a couple of years after undertaking the new life in Crown Heights. His brother-in-law, Zahnvil Jarmulnik, Yahrmoolnyik, from Berditshev not far from Nemirov, the husband of my aunt Goldeh, my father's younger sister, who operated a ladies hat factory, observed, perhaps out of jealousy about my father's business activities and his extravagant standard of living, "Ehr loift nookh dee livooneh in kehn zee nit khawpen." [He is chasing the moon and can't catch her.] Now in retrospect, I have to admit that Zahnvil was right despite the fact that he may have envied my father.

Neither my father nor my mother had ever experienced an economic downturn in their lives, not in Nemirov nor, in my mothers case, after the few difficult years as a child and alone with her father and the trauma of adjusting to the new life, in America. My father began to earn high wages almost from the day he arrived in 1905. He was able to pay for the passage of almost all his brothers and sisters from Nemirov to New York. Since 1909 when they married, America had been a land of ever increasing opportunity and prosperity for them.

When times began to be hard for my mother and father, especially after the New York stock market crash in October of 1929 ushering in an unexpected and unheard of era of constricted economic opportunities, my father was about forty-three years old and my mother about thirty-nine, younger than the three of you right now. Neither of them could imagine that America could be other than prosperous.

It is, therefore, understandable why they considered taking measures to curtail their expenditures a step back to previous times and a lowering of their standard of living which had been on the rise all the years of their married life. To sell the house and the Packard was to be humbled, to be brought down low after having been so high, to be shamed and humiliated.

It seems unbelievable now that these were the feelings my mother and father had when they finally sold the house in 1935 being literally forced to do so in order not to lose it through foreclosure. They came away with nothing, not even their pride. My mother never recovered emotionally afterwards. She had been forced to put aside her ideals and aspirations and, perhaps, secretly recognized that she had spent her life pursuing vanities, fantasies as my father often characterized them.