Chapter 22
My Mother: Hard Times, Loss of Nerve

During the decade 1930 to 1940 my mother's spirit was beaten down so that she was no longer the person I had known all through my childhood up to the time I entered high school in 1926. Though she feigned the opposite, she no longer took for granted the comfortable quality of life, always upward and fuller since the day she and my father enjoyed since 1909, the year they married, would be permanent and continue in the future.

Day by day she realized that the sure and certain life of the past was now no longer a model of the future. In truth, deep in her heart she was full fear and insecurity about what the future boded, a life full of uncertainties, the sort she had never before experienced. But hopes ruled her reason and she refused to accept the reality that straitened circumstances would be the norm in the foreseeable future. Though she still put up a front of fortitude and demonstrated a positive view that all was well, deep down, little by little, she realized she was avoiding a reality which she could not accept, let alone admit existed.

But by the end of the decade, about a year before I left home to teach at the University of Panama, she was a beaten person. She had "lost her nerve." She was no longer sure of herself and was afflicted with a conviction that she had lost her place in the world and, therefore, had been shamed. This negative view was further exacerbated by the loss of her health.

The change in her mood was totally out of character, though I ruefully understood what had caused this change. In the past she had been unbending in her convictions, always steadfast in holding on to her beliefs, habits and points of view. By 1940 she became submissive and felt humbled by circumstances beyond her will to control – loss of health and loss of a certain income. Her positive view of life in general, held for more than thirty or forty years, that each passing day would be better than the one before, as it had certainly been to about 1930 or so, she realized no longer had an basis in fact.

In the light of the circumstances that overtook her, and the rest of us all right after 1930, maintaining this absolute and positive view became absurd and a sham because she turned a blind eye to the realities she found impossible to accept. And when she gave up acting out the sham and accepted the realities of her new situation, it was a sign that she was totally defeated and had lost her sense of self-worth, her nerve, as well as the certainty of her place, her status.

A symptom of the mental and emotional malaise she suffered was that she no longer had the will, or even the desire, to keep up appearances of her former affluence. She did not know exactly who she was any longer or where she belonged.

During this parlous decade, 1930 - 1940, I saw my mother change from a woman, strong both in mind and body; saw her change from a person who could take on the care of and other responsibilities of her siblings and her parents; saw her change from a person who set the standards of behavior for her family; saw her altered into a defeated soul who no longer had the courage or the will to carry on as she had in the past.

She suffered from lack of status, lack of a place where she felt she belonged. The root cause of the transformations in her personality and character, her very being so to speak, was the loss of "parnooseh," sustenance, income, wherewithal for making a living, which in turn led her to conclude that she was losing her place, the goals which had motivated her life and toward which she had striven since she was a young immigrant girl living in tenement on the Lower East Side and working ten to twelve hours a day in a ladies' garment factory. The final blow to her sense of personal worth, came when, in addition to loss of income, she lost her good health and became ill with one malady or another for the rest of her life.

I saw my mother change from a women of strong and resolute character to one who suffered more from a sense of shame from being in want than from the physical effects of want. She suffered more from the loss of the goals she had attained than from the effects of the straitened economic circumstances such as the difficulty in paying the interest on the mortgage, of having to skimp on groceries, of not having enough money on hand in the dead of winter to buy a ton or two of coal to heat the large house.

In a sense my mother was like the protagonist in Gogol's *Inspector General*, Rehveezawr, who suffered more from the thought that he might have to pawn his fancy St. Petersburg suit of clothes to buy something to eat than from the hunger which he and his man servant suffered because they had not eaten for days. But it could also be said that she was truly in tune with the times, that is true to the model described by Thorsten Veblen in his *Theory of the Leisure Class*, that of conspicuous consumption as a sign of social superiority. But consumption to my mother for itself's sake and "just for show" does not literally describe her over riding zeal for the good life which also consisted of spiritual or non-material, transcendental goals.

It was not uncommon for Americans during the good years after the First World War and before the "Depression" to over reach themselves extending their financial commitments beyond their means. The object was to put up a front of luxurious living, that is like the fancy suit of St. Petersburg clothes which Gogol's starving "inspector general" refused to pawn in order to eat.

To shop in such low-priced stores like Klein's on Union Square was not something the average woman with aspirations of even modest proportions to being "high-class" would admit to. The high-class-luxury-expensive cachet of the most fashionable ladies' stores such as Saks Fifth Avenue, Bergdoff Goodman and Lord and Taylor appealed to the women of upper class tastes though they may have had

restricted pocketbooks. During the depths of the Depression, Macy's, a department store of non-conspicuous consumption category, began an advertising campaign the object of which was to draw in the ladies who had tended to spend conspicuously before hard times curtailed this activity.

The slogan they trumpeted in the daily newspapers and the radio was "It's Smart to be Thrifty," that it is socially acceptable to buy clothes and everything else at bargain prices. Nicolo Ercoli, whom I first met on the steamship De Grasse in October 1939 on my way back from France and who subsequently became one of my closest and dearest friends, was astonished when I explained this phenomenon to him before arrival in New York while we were still at sea. It was difficult for him to conceive that Americans had to be cajoled by advertising that it was socially acceptable to buy for less, that it was smart to be thirty.

For my mother the question of the price of an item for sale never took precedence over its quality and good taste. Spending for the sake of spending alone hardly entered her mind. She furnished the house on Empire Boulevard in good taste, some of those purchases are still extant today: the *Book of Knowledge*, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the cut-glass bowls, the girandolas, the china, the Persian rugs, the grandfather clock, the console table with the mushroom lamp.

The four years that I was in college were perhaps the worst. It was during this time that she was forced into the unthinkable realization that the difficulties in making even a modest living, just enough to hold on and keep up appearances of economic well-being, were permanent and not a passing phase. Her ascent to the good life for the past thirty or more years had reached its zenith down from which the future was on an inexorable descending course. When I entered college in the Fall of 1930, though my father was no longer building houses on speculation, he was doing moderately well in general contracting. But by 1932, in the very depths of the Depression, even small jobs could hardly be found and he spent more time looking for contracts than in working on them.

It is true, however, that when he did land a job, he always made a good profit. In fact, he often took general contracts just to get the sub-contract carpentry work eschewing the profit he would normally expect for running the whole job as general contractor. Times were so bad while I was in my senior year at Union College, that Esther came down with a nervous breakdown as a result of the anxiety and insecurity the family was experiencing and from which I was shielded in great part because I was away from home.

By this time, even if they had wanted to sell the house, there were no offers at all, let alone any buyers willing to pay $16,000 as they had a few years before. I do not know what happened to the Packard. My father probably wore it out, as was his habit, like a pair of shoes. When I graduated in the Spring of 1934, he no longer had an automobile. My Uncle Moishe lent my mother and father his large yellow open touring car to drive to Schenectady to attend my graduation and take me home.

I was twenty-two years old at the time and totally unprepared to go out into "the real world." I had no skills to do anything practical, that is find a job, if there were any to be found, for which my college education would qualify me. There were no jobs at all. Many college graduates considered themselves fortunate to have been accepted by Macy's as haberdashery or shoe salesmen. In fact, most department stores required applicants for jobs to be college graduates.

I was totally unprepared and without any skills even for the most menial types of jobs. I was as beaten emotionally as was my mother, and also my father who did not know where to turn. His skills were almost entirely redundant, as redundant as those of his brother-in-law Hershel Herman, his sister Maryam's husband, who had been a cooper, barrel maker, in Nemirov, and was left without a livelihood when the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages became illegal due to the passage of the Volstead Act, Prohibition.

Only a year later, after I had the M. A. degree from Columbia University, did I find a job, as an educational adviser in the CCC camps, and able to do something to help my mother and father. I earned $167 a month of which I sent them $25, used $67 to live on and saved $75 for the purpose of going back to graduate school and study for the Ph. D. The few dollars I sent home hardly solved their problems which would have not been totally alleviated even if I sent them all my salary. The house on Empire Boulevard needed more than the $167 a month I was earning. It had been was saved from foreclosure when the mortgage was refinanced by the HOLC (Home Owners Loan Corporation) an agency created by Roosevelt as part of the New Deal program. The monthly payments, which now included both principal and interest and taxes, amounted to about $100 a month and far beyond what they could afford.

Eventually she gave up her hold on the house. Or shall I say she gave up her hopes of ever keeping the house? It was finally sold, an incident I related in the chapters dealing with my father's life. They came away with just about $500 or so, I now remember, which by absolutely unexpected circumstances, my father paid down on a much nicer, but smaller, house in East Meadow, Long Island, four miles east of Hempstead and just off the Hempstead Turnpike.

Despite increasing insecurities regarding my father's business during the first half the decade of the 1930s, not even the faintest glimmer of the notion ever crossed my mother's mind that the Empire Boulevard house should be sold and that they should move to a less expensive one in a less than exclusive neighborhood. After Esther married in 1934, and while I was still working toward the M. A. at Columbia University, my mother decided to let a room, the bedroom she and my father occupied, in order to help pay the monthly mortgage payments. She was determined not to lose the house even it meant having strangers living there with us. But this turned out to be an ineffectual expedient. The income produced by renting out the room, $25 a month, was still not enough to make up the difference needed for the payments on the mortgage.

The sale of the house was a disastrously traumatic experience for her. She found it impossible to be resigned to what my father, and I to, deemed the only course of action, though not the desired one, forced on us by circumstances over which neither he nor my mother had any control. Her state of mind I realized was anguished. She was deeply depressed because she believed she had fallen into a pit from which there was no escape, something she had never before experienced in her life, shame! She felt belittled and shamed in the world. She was traumatized not so much by the actual sale of the house as by the realization that she now found herself for the first time in her life in a permanent state of want with no hope of betterment. This was the first time in her life, even going back to those days when she was an immigrant child on the Lower East Side, that her future seemed dark and uncertain to her. This state of economic uncertainty, of not having "parnooseh," a living, was a new and even an alien experience hardly conceived of even in the worst of times past. Even back in Nemirov, neither she nor my father had known want. They left Nemirov seeking a better life, including economic betterment it is true, but also seeking a better life in an open environment as human beings free of the backwardness of Russian small-town life and free of the unjust treatment and onerous liabilities visited upon Jews there. Even while living in very restricted economic circumstances during the early immigrant days while adjusting to life In America, both my mother and father always earned enough to maintain a dignified stance coupled with a well-founded and certain pride of what they were and, at the same time, harboring aspirations for a still better life.

But the great difference in the 1930's was that she and my father not only suffered a loss of income for the first time in their lives but also, especially in my mother's case, a loss of their sense of self-worth and personal dignity. "A person without parnooseh is not unlike a corpse." "Eyn lekhem, eyn Torah; loy lekhem, loy Torah." Without bread there is no learning, study of the Torah; with bread, there is learning, study of the Torah. All my mother was left with were superficial appearances of her place in the world, a sham hiding the truth that the house was just a false front masking the great realities of the dire need and insecurity inside its walls.

She began to fear the future, not have hopes for the future as she had for more than a quarter century or so. The good times and the fulfillment of ever rising expectations were long gone. She no longer had any hopes for a better life in the future, hoping rather that conditions would not get worse.

In 1935 when the house was sold, my mother was about forty-five years of age and, now in retrospect, I realize she became an old, frustrated and disappointed woman, remaining so till the end of her life twenty-five years later. She never recovered her sanguine high spirits and her positive views full of hopes. Hopes had been certainties for her, but now she reluctantly admitted to herself at least, if not to the world, that her hopes had only been fantasies, as my father sometimes

accused her of harboring. Yet she still tried to keep up the appearance of her former fortitude and strength of character, sometimes saying, but without positive conviction, "Ikh hawb nokh nit mahn betookhen farlawren." [I have not yet lost my hope.] But in fact, she had.

After a couple of years or so at the new house in East Meadow, my father tried to sell it. My mother was very unhappy there, and I believe with good reason. There she was for the first time in her life living out in the country, not in a town or city with streets and people nearby. Living in East Meadow was not like living on Empire Boulevard with shopping near at hand and public transportation, trolley cars and the subway, a few steps away. Many an evening just before sitting down to supper my mother would remember there was no bread in the house. She would send me to the bakery on Kingston Avenue and I would be back with a loaf of bread before the table had been set.

But there in East Meadow, the bakery was four miles away. It was a new way of life for her, and for my father too a new experience, to be absolutely dependent on the automobile for even the most minor needs. On Long Island one could not improvise at the last moment. One had to make out lists and plan ahead before going to the grocery store. It meant driving eight miles for a loaf of bread, provided the bakery was still open in the evening before one sat down to supper.

So there she was, dependent on automobile transportation for even the most insignificant need. And my father, just could not keep a car running. For a good part the time they lived in East Meadow, they did not have a car, or even a telephone. She was alone all day while my father was away either looking for jobs or working when he was lucky enough to land one. Part of the time while we lived in East Meadow, I was away upstate New York working as an educational adviser in the CCC.

In general, my mother never adjusted to life on Long Island though the house was brand new, more up-to-date as well, and almost the same size as the one on Empire Boulevard. But it was not located in Crown Heights. She just could not adjust to life in the suburbs, and my father was of little help. They decided to sell the house and move away. But it was impossible to sell the house. There were no buyers, at least none that my father could find. So he did something which I have regretted till today. He decided to stop making payments on the mortgage, all of about $32 a month, and waited for the bank to foreclose the house since he could not sell it.

My mother just followed my father's lead in this decision because she was so unhappy and lonely living there, in addition to having the daily aggravation of not having a dependable income, frequently no income at all. They moved to Schenectady to be near Esther and her family. My father thought he could establish himself there and do general contracting. This turned out to be a vain dream for the economic situation in the building business in Schenectady was even worse than on Long Island and in Brooklyn.

After a few months, I believe less than six, they moved back to Brooklyn. I was also without a job at the time because I had resigned to go back to graduate school. My father found an apartment in Brooklyn in a house that belonged to one of his sub-contractors. It was located in East Flatbush and just south of Kings County Hospital. Not a very high class neighborhood, but entirely Jewish. You knew you were living among Jews because every Friday afternoon just before nightfall, the whole neighborhood was filled with a Sabbath aroma, the smell of chicken soup, gefilte fish still on the fire cooking and of khallas, braided Sabbath loaves, baking in the oven.

My mother, though beaten and still without a roof over her head, still held on to her self-respect and dignity and refused to move into that apartment in a six-family house in a working-class neighborhood. My father and I remained in the apartment for a while amid the stacks of unpacked boxes and the randomly placed furniture. I too began to despair suffering great anguish fearing that we were in grave danger because we had no permanent roof over our heads, only one from one month to next if the rent was paid. The insecurity we felt because of not having a house of our own was frightening both to me and my father, a situation he, nor I either, had ever experienced. In later years, when he was already crippled with arthritis and physically impossible to do work of any kind to earn a living, he would bemoan that he was not living in his own house. He used to say with deep sadness in his voice, "I was born in my own house and I want to die in my own house." But he never again had his own house and he died in a little two-and-one-half room flat a couple of blocks away on Gregson Street the 17th of January 1963, three years almost to day after my mother.

I do not remember the details any longer, but my mother finally came back to Brooklyn after I found a very small apartment, two-and-one-half rooms, on Fenimore Street near Nostrand Avenue. The neighborhood was mixed, but mostly non-Jewish. It was both on the periphery of Crown Heights and Flatbush at least. While we were living there I was awarded a scholarship for study at the Institut d'Art et d'Archeologie of the Sorbonne in Paris. I spent the summer of 1939 in Paris just before the outbreak of the Second World War, and also travelled to Italy and Greece.

I do not remember how long we lived on Fenimore Street. After my return from Europe in October of 1939 I went back to Columbia to finish up my work on the Ph. D. which I received in 1941. By that time we were living in an apartment on Saint John's Place which my mother found. It was in a much nicer neighborhood and located between Underhill Avenue and Plaza Street with a small park. The area was most convenient and had the proper cachet my mother required. She was a step away from the Grand Army Plaza with its monumental triumphal arch crowned with a quadriga in ancient Roman fashion, the main entrance to Prospect Park where twenty years before my father used to take us for rides in his Ford. Also around the corner was the Brooklyn Museum where I used to go frequently when we lived on

Empire Boulevard. Adjacent to the museum was the Brooklyn Botanical Garden with its wrought iron gate with the map dividing the world into soft grain and hard grain eaters, that is the parts of the world where soft grain like rice and hard grain like wheat is grown. Within the Botanical Garden, the lovely formal Japanese garden, was a quiet other-worldly retreat from the mundane world outside. And continuing along Eastern Parkway on the very corner with Grand Army Plaza was the Brooklyn Public Library. Just opposite the library and also on Eastern Parkway was Union Temple, a Reformed Jewish congregation headed by a renowned rabbi, Dr. Tedesche, whose sermons my mother and father enjoyed hearing though neither were particulary "Reformed" in their religious leanings or practices.

Saint John's Place was a paradise for my mother. There she was as content as she had ever been in her life, probably even more so than when we lived on Empire Boulevard where their good fortune evaporated. She enjoyed the gardens and the museum and the library. She would go out to Plaza street which was separated from Grand Army Plaza by bit of park and meet friends with whom she enjoyed discussing events of the day, the theater and other subjects.

Though, content at last with the tiny apartment where the Persian rugs were too big for the living and dinning rooms, she still felt humbled suffering a loss in dignity and pride because she and my father were dependent on remittances from their children. My father, who in 1941 was stricken with arthritis, from which he never recovered, found a job running the elevator in Turner Towers, an apartment house around the corner on Eastern Parkway. Though he never complained or said a word about this, it must have been sad indeed for him because in the 1920s when he was a builder he had known Mr. Turner himself with whom he once had some business dealings. Mr. Turner built the multistory apartment house where my father now operated the elevator. My mother also took a job in a pearl factory. Together they earned a pittance and barely enough to fill the gap between what they needed and what they received each month from me and Esther.

While we were still living on Empire Boulevard, my mother's health began to deteriorate and continued to decline even after we moved into Saint Johns Place. At first, she had ovarian troubles during the menopause. To alleviate this condition she took a series of short wave treatments. This was in lieu of surgery. Not long after, she also began to suffer from the malfunctioning of the thyroid. This malady was treated with radiation. But worst of all, she began to have heart trouble.

I believe that her ill health which began to plague her when she was just about fifty years old or less, was the result of all those years of privation during the 1930s, not so much material privation as privation of a dignified life which all but vanished during the Depression. The constant anxiety of living from hand to mouth, of having to be dependent on her children for a scant few dollars which were hardly enough to meet basic needs, all exacted a toll on her health. Though I sent part of my every ever since I first went to work in 1935 until 1963, except when I was in

graduate school, it was always frustrating and disheartening because it was such a meager sum, yet all that I was capable of.

And an even more telling cause of the decline in my mother's health, was emotional or psychological in nature – the shame she suffered to be dependent and to receive rather than to give. All her life, since childhood, she was the "pillar of strength" in her father's house and continued in this role after she married. Now she was helpless and needed help herself, but was too proud to ask those who depended on her when they were children and, in the case of Libeh, after she married and had children of her own.

My mother could not accept the reality that she who had been so strong was now weak.

She suffered a deep sense of humilation because she was no longer in control of her destiny.

Chapter 23
My Mother: Resigned, Loss Health

After I left for Panama in 1941, I never again lived at home and, understandably. I was married in 1945 and went to live in Durham. Daily contact with my mother and father, though intermittent in the past when I was away at college and later at work, was no longer possible. During the last twenty years of her life, I had little direct face to face contact with my mother, or my father as well. Though I had come back to the United States after 1947, I was able to manage visits with Malvina and the three of you (Sarah, Alexander and Charlie) only about once a year during the summer. You children hardly ever had much of a opportunity to know my mother other than during these short visits, the memory of which doubtlessly dimmed during the intervening intervals. Sarah, just fourteen years old when my mother died, commented rather sadly that she had hardly known her grandmother. Contact with my parents was largely by means of letters, written by my father in his invented alphabet, and less frequently by telephone.

As I have already related in the chapters dealing with my father, when war broke out I reasoned that it was a propitious time to make some investment in real property because prices would rise and rise just a they had risen right after the First World War. My father bought the house in Essex Street for about $4,500 in 1917 and sold it for $9,000 in 1925, double in price within eight years.

I arrived in Panama in July of 1941 and by the summer of 1942 had saved about $1000 or so, perhaps a bit more, I do not remember exactly. And so, I planned to use this money as a down payment on a piece of property. I wrote my father and told him my plan and asked him to look for a farm somewhere upstate New York. He found a farm on the outskirts of Germantown near the city of Hudson, New York. There was a good house on the property, about fourteen and one-half acres, as well as many apple and quince trees and a number of hen houses with space for a few thousand chickens. I believe I described the property before. It was located on a hill high up above the banks of the Hudson River and the New York Central Railroad tracks.

My reasoning was that since I was sending money home every month which my parents used to pay the rent on the apartment on Saint John's Place, I thought here was a chance to own a house again and pay off the mortgage with the money I was sending them instead of giving it to the landlord each month. From the very first when she heard of my scheme, my mother objected rather strongly, seconded by Esther. She did not agree with the idea of moving to Germantown and living on a farm. She had enough of quasi-country life out on Long Island in East Meadow.

I was disconsolate about the rejection of my plan. I should have been more realistic and have recognized and accepted the inevitable, based in past experience,

that my mother could only be happy living in Brooklyn, and not just anywhere in Brooklyn, only in Crown Heights where, at long last, she was then living contentedly. It was difficult for me to comprehend her reasoning for she saw with her own eyes her economic condition and could not have forgotten the privations she had suffered since we lost the house in Empire Boulevard and later when we abandoned the house in East Meadow.

Now, after so many years, I realize that it was her indomitable and inflexible character that made it impossible for her to acquiesce to changes in her life; that is to take measures for her own material good if those measures did not also bolster her sense of her own worth and satisfy her transcendental needs. I should have known from the very first that she would never agree to move upstate New York even if it had been a paradise, any more than she acquiesced to live in that apartment in East Flatbush, anymore than she agreed to sell the house in Empire Boulevard when times where beginning to be hard and the opportunity arose to salvage some of the money put into that house by selling it at a small loss rather than a total loss as she had to later on. At that time, it never occurred to me that she would rather live on Saint John's Place in a cramped little apartment and tolerate the anxiety of having the payment of rent each month, rather than in a comfortable house of her own on a hill overlooking the beautiful Hudson River.

For a long time, I was embittered by her refusal, her refusal to accept my plan to use the money I was sending home to pay off the mortgage on a property she would live in and enjoy, and which would also be my home when the war was over and I came back from Panama. She gave rather empty and even absurd excuses for refusing to agree to the plan saying that she did not want to live among Germans in a town named Germantown, German meaning the Germans and Nazis, the worst enemies Jews had ever had, worse than in ancient Egypt, worse than with Torquemada in Spain, worse than the pogroms in Tsarist Russia.

At any rate, the plan to buy the farm on the Hudson River became totally moot when my father came down with arthritis and was crippled and in great pain. His doctor suggested that he go to a drier climate where he would be relieved. I took the money I had put together for a down payment and sent it home so he could go to Tucson, Arizona. My plan to own a house, that is a house for my parents and myself, became an evanescent dream. I suppose had he not come down with arthritis, which my mother, to ease her conscience or at least to throw the blame from herself, used to declare that he got arthritis riding back and forth to Germantown in the dead of winter.

I do not remember how long he remained in Tucson but he came home somewhat improved, that is, relieved somewhat from the first effects of the first onslaught of the arthritis. He was able to move about a bit more freely than before. He travelled back home from Arizona in a day coach sitting up all the way. He spoke of this as remarkable and was grateful because on the way out to Arizona he had

been in such bad physical condition that he had to go by sleeper, that is in a Pullman sleeping car.

When my father became sick, probably for the first time in his life except for hay fever, my mother who was not in the best of health, had to assume the burden of caring for him, especially while he was in great pain and bedridden. He became the weakling and she the strong one. But this state did not last very long and the tables were turned around, especially in the 1950s when she began to have "heart trouble." Apparently she had what is now known as hardening of the arteries causing bad circulation and commonly remedied with by-pass surgery. My father, who had become all but permanently crippled and could barely walk even with the help of a cane, was the healthier one and had to care for her as best he could, particularly helping around the house and going out to do grocery shopping.

During those difficult times when both were infirm and could barely take care of themselves, I was literally stranded in Panama. Because of my unusual and special type of draft status, military deferment, I was advised not go home for a visit because I would run into all sorts of difficulties with my draft board back in Brooklyn. Through the intervention of the U. S. ambassador to Panama, on the insistence of the rector of the university and the Minister of Education of the Republic of Panama, I had been given a draft deferment, notice of which arrived in a letter signed by the Cordell Hull, U. S. Secretary of State, instructing me to stay in Panama and continue on the faculty of the university. I regret that I no longer have that letter having doubtlessly misplaced it while I was still in Panama.

The incident which generated these proceedings and resulted in my not venturing to go home for a visit was a notice I received from my draft board back in Brooklyn ordering me to report to the nearest draft board in Panama. I advised the rector that I was being called up for army service and would leave. He reported this to the Minister of Education who in turn advised the U. S. ambassador. When the ambassador saw that draft notice from the draft board back in Brooklyn, he could not believe that the members of that board did not know that Panama was a foreign country and that there was no draft board nearby for me to report to. He advised me not to leave, but to stay put and that he would take care of the matter. Very soon afterward, I had the letter from the State Department signed by Cordell Hull with my deferred draft status. The ambassador recommended that I not go home for the time being because of the draft board back in Brooklyn who would probably make it difficult for me to obtain their permission to return to Panama notwithstanding the deferment from the State Department. The outcome of all this was that I remained in Panama and did not go home to see my mother and father until after I was married and after Sarah was born in 1946.

I was married on March 10, 1945. My mother and father did not come to the wedding. It would have been necessary for them to go by train to New Orleans and then by airplane to Guatemala. Air travel was far from common then and they would

rather not have travelled by airplane. Passenger steamships were not running on regular schedules, or at all, because of German submarine activity in the Caribbean. Having them travel to Guatemala seemed so complicated at the time coupled, with the determining factor that the expense was beyond my means at the time, that I did not pursue the matter and was resigned to be married without a single member of my family in attendance. It seems that the augury or hex my paternal grandmother Bahsyeh pronounced when my mother when she was still in "child bed" a few days after I was born -- that she raise me but be absent from my wedding -- came true. An aunt of my mother-in-law who had flown in from Denver, Colorado, was appointed to serve as a surrogate for my mother during the marriage ceremony.

I did come home for a very short visit in 1946. My father-in-law very generously gave me to the opportunity to go on a buying trip to New York during which time I would also visit my parents. When I saw what had become of them during the five years of my absence I was guilt-stricken, shocked and saddened. At the time I left in July of 1941, they were still in middle age and looked well. My mother had had ovarian and thyroid trouble which had been cured. She still had a positive, though somewhat, dimmed outlook on life. My father was still as well as he had ever been and still undertaking construction work whenever he was fortunate enough to land a contract.

When I returned in 1946 my mother was about 56 or so years old and my father 60 years old. But both seemed to be at least ten to fifteen years older, especially my mother who no longer walked erect and had lost all her fire and sanguine view on life. She seemed resigned and lacked her former self-confidence. She was even apologetic for every move she made and for every word she uttered. Penury and ill health had finally broken her spirit. She was no longer the strong woman who would take charge and help or solve problems not only her own but those of others too. She was no longer the woman of positive and inflexible opinions or standards of behavior; no longer the person who would chase me around the dinning room table and thrash me with her cudgel-shaped rolling pin because of some childish infraction like a bad report card from school or an unwitting breach of the rules of conduct with which she required absolute compliance. Nor was she any longer the woman outraged at my sudden growing up and shaving who gave me a resounding slap on the face every time she looked at me as we rode the Fifth Avenue bus from 42nd Street to Washington Square.

When I saw her after a lapse of five years in 1946, she was no longer sure of herself, even doubted herself. She looked and acted as one who had been humbled, as she certainly had by circumstances which she could not control and which had, therefore, frustrated her. She gave the appearance of some one disappointed in life, as she certainly had been.

During the 1950s, as I have already noted above, her health became worse and worse. She aged far beyond her years. The decline in her health was as much

due to psychological causes as physical. Daily aggravations, daily humiliations because of lack of means, sometime for even the most basic needs finally took their toll.

Neither my mother or my father ever asked me for a penny. I sent them what I was able to, even to extent that I deprived my own family, during those early underpaid years at Duke University when we ourselves were living from hand to mouth, from pay-day to pay-day. I still remember with anguish one visit home in particular, when my father, with a look of shame and pain on his face said, that they were running short, about $5 per month because of the medicine they both needed. That was the first and only time he ever mentioned or openly acknowledged that I was giving and he and my mother were receiving. How difficult it must have been for them to have to ask. I blamed myself for not having anticipated their needs and have spared my father the humiliation of having to ask.

So life continued for my mother humiliated and humbled which only exacerbated the decline in her health. I saw my mother for last time on December 31, 1959 when I was in New York to attend a meeting held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I said goodbye and walked out of the apartment on Saint John's Place. It was on the ground floor and had a large triple window facing the street. I looked back and there she was at the window waving her hand saying good-bye. About midnight or a little later, Milton called me to say that my mother had just died of a heart attack.

I should say that my mother died of shame, not of an heart attack.