RUSSIAN NIGHTMARES, AMERICAN DREAMS

Edith Saposnik Kaplan

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Map modified from original map of the borders of the Second Polish Republic by Halibutt (CC BY-SA 3.0), https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f0/Rzeczpospolita_1937.svg.

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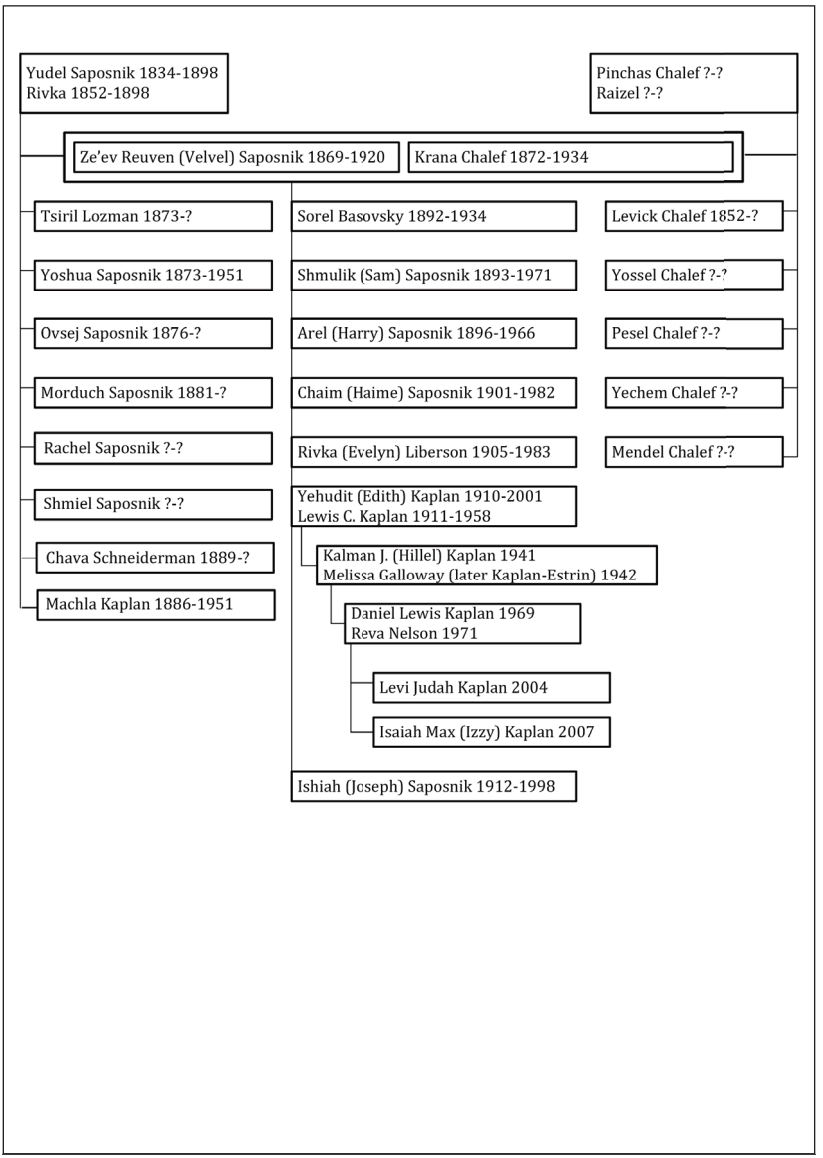
This book is dedicated to my family, past, present and future: to my late father, Zev Reuven (Velvel) Saposnik, who never made it to America; to my late mother, Krana Chalef Saposnik, who survived the hardship of pogroms, revolution, and civil war in Tsarist Russia and managed to make a home for us in America; to my late husband, Lewis C. Kaplan, himself a writer, who encouraged and supported me in the writing of my life story; to my son Dr. Kalman Joel Kaplan, a psychologist, who has helped me bring this work to fruition; and to my grandson, Daniel Lewis Kaplan, also a psychologist, who has taken my story to heart. This book is also dedicated to my late brother, Dr. Joseph (Ishiah) Saposnik, who quietly took over many responsibilities after the premature death of my husband, and to the entire Saposnik family who made the journey with me and established a new life in America.

Map of Edith's Journey

Russia and Poland, 1922

Saposnik Family Tree



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Part IV: Building My Own Life

Foreword to the New Edition

IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY, MOST JEWS IN THE Russian Empire were still restricted to living in the Pale of Jewish Settlement, including a large part of the Ukraine. Despite poverty, legal restrictions, and anti-Semitism, many Jews in Russia (including the Ukraine) remained loyal to their traditions. Even small shtetls produced people who dedicated their lives to the ideals of Torah study and good works. But as the twentieth century began, things grew much worse.

Edith Saposnik Kaplan was a child during a chaotic time in Jewish history. Ukraine was being overrun and terrorized by Bolshevik Reds, tsarist Whites, Poles, and a variety of Ukrainian bandit units. A British-American force occupied Archangel in the North; a French force occupied Odessa for a while. Tsar Nicholas and his family were held prisoner and then assassinated. The new Kerensky government was overthrown by Lenin and Trotsky, and until the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Russia was still fighting in the First World War.

Food was scarce; violence and illness were rampant. Jews, as one might expect, suffered from all sides not only the problems of all the groups but especially and horribly from persistent, repeated pogroms. The scholar and playwright S. Ansky headed a fact-finding mission

during the war. In town after town in Russia and in Habsburg, Austria, Jews were being robbed, attacked, raped, and murdered. Their shops and businesses were destroyed. They were forced to flee for their lives before armies of whichever side would accuse them of spying or giving support to whichever enemy.

The end of the First World War brought no peace to Eastern Europe nor especially to the Jews of the Ukraine. Women and girls were gang-raped and tortured to death with their men forced to watch. The men then were themselves murdered. The number of Jewish casualties cannot be precisely known, but it has been estimated as likely well over 100,000. Largely unarmed and defenseless, Jews were nevertheless accused of firing machine guns from the roofs of their homes and having radios hidden in their beards which they used to feed information to the enemy.

Jews were a fairly easy target, unarmed and defenseless before mobs who were armed and ruthless. Some towns were occupied by a succession of violent armies, all of whom hated Jews and loved easy plunder. Zhitomir, for example, was victimized several times.

Members of the anti-Communist White movement accused the Jews of being Bolsheviks, and some Jews were. The Bolsheviks themselves could be helpful to Jews (as they were to Edith and her family), but at the same time hostile to Judaism, as they were to all religions.

Pogroms and ritual murder charges had increased notably since the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, and tsarist law listed literally hundreds of special restrictions that applied only against Jews. A relatively educated Jewish population was limited by quotas in the schools and universities. Young Jews flocked to universities in Switzerland, Germany, France, and elsewhere, despite anti-Semitism there as well, and hundreds of thousands of Eastern European Jews migrated to the United States, England, South America, and pre-state Israel, then called Palestine.

Edith and her family survived the war and the murder of her father and immigrated to the United States, settling in Chicago. But she documents in her book that there were cousins who emigrated to

Hartford, Connecticut; to Buenos Aires; and some who stayed in the Ukraine and later made aliyah (immigrated to Israel). After a century, the different segments of the Saposnik family are rediscovering each other, thanks in part to modern technology, and most of all to Edith Saposnik Kaplan, who dared to tell her story, the story of a people.

Dr. Matthew Schwartz
Wayne State University and Lawrence Tech University, 2022

Foreword

THE HISTORY OF AN ERA IS WRITTEN IN LARGE BRUSH STROKES. Basing themselves on public records, official documents, and on accounts of journalists and other contemporary writers and thinkers, historians produce the account and interpretations of "history." But smaller, more detailed brush strokes are also required. Of the various genres contributing to a fuller insight into the human condition during a given period, the personal journals, diaries, and memoirs of contemporaries are by far the most appealing and often the most revealing. The best of these breathe life and new dimensions into our perceptions of historical eras and are worth their weight in gold.

Such a precious record is the story told by Edith Saposnik Kaplan. Her story, entitled *Russian Nightmares, American Dreams*, as unpretentious as its name, describes in natural colors her experiences and her family's in the Russian village Varovitch, their plight as refugees after World War I, and ultimately their immigration to the United States.

The great upheavals of those times and the mass movements of populations are seen in microcosm in the writer's perceptive observations. It is an account that reveals the thoughts of an introspective young girl with the foresight to record them while still fresh.

This charming book is replete with scenes of danger and tenderness, helplessness, and triumph. These scenes are all viewed first through the eyes of a child who, during the course of the narrative, matures into

womanhood. All this in a period of enormous change and upheaval. The child is alert and bright, the youthful woman is perceptive, the grown woman is analytic and deeply insightful.

The result is a profoundly moving epic of a young Jewess and her family who make their difficult exodus to freedom. They represent those generations from the Old World who, with courage and determination, become transformed into New Americans, with each member making contributions to their new land. This is a story that, in its essence, transcends race, class, and creed.

Like a fine little naïf painting, this precious miniature speaks volumes to those who bring something to it. Many, like myself, will take this story to their hearts.

Dr. Nathaniel Stampfer
Spertus College, 1988

Preface

THIS BOOK WOULD NEVER HAVE COME TO FRUITION IF NOT for the help of a number of people who saw it as a unique portal into the history of Eastern European Jewry. First, my late mother herself, Edith Saposnik Kaplan, who had the acute memory and the gift of a storyteller to write this book. Her husband, my father, Lewis C. Kaplan, an American-born writer and translator, recognized the importance of my mother's story. My dear cousins Phyllis Dreazen and Nora Saposnik and friend Deena Wolfson encouraged my mother to keep writing after my father died. Melissa Kaplan-Estrin was so very good to my mother during the time that we were married, and also was very helpful in providing photographs for this revised edition. And of course, our son, Dr. Daniel Lewis Kaplan, was the apple of my mother's eye and loved her dearly.

Elie Wiesel read an earlier version of the manuscript and told me he would have published it himself if he could. He called pogroms "the Shoah before the Shoah." And of course, Sydney and Raymond (Reuven) Solomon published the original edition of the book in 1995 and then a later edition in 2000 for Solomon Press.

Raymond also saw pogroms as "the "Shoah before the Shoah." His wife Judy Solomon signed over permission for me to republish the book after the untimely death of her husband.

I mustn't forget Nathaniel Stampfer, the late Dean at Spertus Insti-

tute of Jewish Studies, who in 1988 wrote a beautiful foreword to the first edition of this book.

Dear friend Judy Sherwin helped me with legal issues. Steve Linde, Editor of the *Jerusalem Report*, published various pieces I wrote about the book in his homage to Raymond after his untimely death. And Steve also encouraged me to contact Ilan Greenfield of Gefen Publishing House, who saw the value in this book – and the rest is history.

I thank also all the other relatives who were moved by my mom's story, including my cousins Vivian Lipkin and her children, Mickey, Ira, and Gerry Lipkin and Carol Gordon. Nora Saposnik, Alan Saposnik, Steve (Zimi) Liberson, Willy Liberson, Mark Liberson, David Goldberg, and of course, the aforementioned Phyllis Dreazen were also supportive.

Countless other friends and relatives, including Annette and Lesley Jorbin and Elliot and Ann Lefkowitz, saw this book as addressing a lacuna in the memories of so many Jews in America who had emigrated from the Ukraine. The experiences they had had there were often so brutal that they chose to repress them when they came to America. Yet as I know as a psychologist, one pays a heavy price for repression. As my mom found the courage and her native storytelling skills to tell the story of her family, she became much freer emotionally.

I owe a special thank-you to my newly found cousins Sharon and Jim Parkman and Jacob and Inna Livshitz and Jacob's mother Bella, whose stories are found in the epilogue to this book. Inna was particularly helpful in locating the villages of my mother's youth on a modern-day map. I am also grateful to Moriah, who encouraged me throughout this process.

It has been an honor and a pleasure to work with my dedicated and incisive editor at Gefen, Kezia Raffel Pride, whose life history and mine have had a number of similarities. Valeria Bauer, Gefen's project manager, corralled all the pieces of the project together with expertise. I also wish to thank Ezra Pollack, owner of the Digital Convert in Skokie, Illinois, who helped me make usable images of some old documents and photographs.

There is no better way to end than to remember that those who forget the past are destined to repeat it. *Am Yisrael chai* – the Jewish people live!

Kalman J. Kaplan, 2023

Acknowledgments

I GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE THE HELP OF MY YOUNG FRIEND Deena Wolfson, who lived next door to me and made me go back to writing this story; to Dr. Elie Wiesel, who thought it was an important story that should be published; to Dr. Nathaniel Stampfer, who wrote the foreword; and to Sydney and Raymond Solomon and Gertrude Dubrovsky, who liked the story and helped me edit it.

Edith Saposnik Kaplan, 1995

PART I

Yarovitch

CHAPTER 1

Varovitch Was My Village

Seasons

Varovitch was a village with about twenty Jewish families and a hundred Christian families. Each family was involved in its own world. Some left Varovitch in search of knowledge or to learn trades in the large cities. A few from Varovitch even went as far as America, far from my birthplace.

Life in Varovitch went on just the same: some married, some died. The small community appeared normal and peaceful to the outsider, yet each person suffered his or her own inner turbulence. The village was not different from other Russian villages of its size. It had the same huts, brooks, water wells, animals, birds, horses, and wagons. We all ate food from gardens and fields. We Jews – because of our heritage, tradition, and way of life – were different from the peasants. A minority, we lived at the mercy of the peasant and many a hooligan. If a hooligan felt like hanging a Jew at night in the Jew's own house, he did it. The hooligan would never be punished for the crime. The tsar's regime did not bother with the death of a Jew. Yet the peasant and the Jew got along, because we needed one another. We depended upon each other for life itself. The Jew got all the food from the peasant. The peasant needed the Jew to supply him with essentials such as threads and buttons to make clothes. The peasant would weave woolens and linens. The Jew would make the fabric into garments. Where the peasant women embroidered, the Jewish women sewed and knitted.

Varovitch, therefore, does not stand out as a famous historical place of great treasures. But it is deeply rooted in my memory because all my brothers and sisters were born there – and also because of the hardships we and my parents endured.

In Varovitch, we had to cope with a winter that came early and stayed long, like an unwelcome guest who overstayed his leave. The snow began to fall in October, and then came the bitter frosts. The windows would sometimes stay frozen for weeks. Heavy icicles would come down from the roof. You could hear the squeak under the feet of people walking. Doors also squeaked from the cold. However, without warm clothing, we could hardly appreciate the beauty winter offers. The little ones stayed indoors for the duration. Older children had to go out, bundling up in rags. The thawing season came in March and lasted through April. If winter was bad, the thawing was a thousand times worse. Now one needed high boots to pull himself out of the puddles and mud. Everywhere was mud, mud, and more mud.

Pesach

But Pesach (Passover) cured everything. It came like a shining star that glowed in the dark. It was a most welcome guest for eight days – eight glorious days, with matzo and good food. Mother would bring out the pretty dishes that were used only for that one occasion. Each child had his own wine glass from year to year. Then came the big white Seder plate with blue letters and many more nice dishes. Oh! That was good. Then the wine and the nuts. The next day, we would play games with nuts. We also played with nuts after the Seder if we were not too sleepy. We always took a nap before the Seder so that we could stay up late. Every child had to ask the Four Questions and say Kiddush (the blessing over wine). Father was dressed in the traditional clothes for the occasion: a kittel (white robe) with wide sleeves, black *gartel* (cord-like belt), and black skull cap. His beautiful silver beard framed his radiant face. His dark, large, sad, expressive eyes absorbed pages of

Zev Reuven (Velvel) Saposnik, sketched in 1996 by Chicago artist John Townes from the memories of Edith and Ishiah, as he was around 1915 (there are no surviving photographs of him); Krana Chalef Saposnik, 1933

the Haggadah, and he chanted beautifully. (In the synagogue, he took the cantor's role and always sang and prayed for the congregation.)

He sat in a pillowed seat at the head of the table. He looked like a king with Mother beside him. Each of the children had something new to wear for the holiday. The winter's hardships were soon forgotten, and our hearts were filled with gladness, at least for the eight days of Pesach and of knaidlach (matzo balls).

After the holiday, when the dishes were put away, the house seemed melancholy. My older brothers who came home for the holidays had to go back to the towns where they were studying. Father taught them beginning Hebrew, but when it came time for higher learning such as Talmud, the boys had to go to a yeshiva, which meant leaving home at the early age of nine or ten. The boys had to struggle to get their education, since our parents had very little money. Eating and sleeping in different homes became their daily life. Some days they were

lucky to get a good host and hostess. On those days, they would get a bench with a blanket to cover themselves. Otherwise, they slept on the kitchen floor with no cover. For pocket money, they used to teach children who had homes and beds to sleep in. The only advantage my brothers had was brains. Once a week, Father and Mother went to see the children and bring them some food from home and a change of clothes. During the winter, Father would go alone for fear of bandits, and Mother would stand in the window looking out for Father's return. It was a distance of twelve versts (eight miles) one way. I was too young to appreciate the difficulties. I only looked forward to Father coming home so I could get my bagel and, perhaps, some candy. Otherwise, I had a holiday. I skipped my Hebrew lesson and could play all day.

My Family

My older brothers, Shmulik and Arel, endured poverty, but at least they received the education that Father wanted them to have. Father shipped Shmulik off to America in his mid-teens. A few years later, Father sent Arel to America. They were thus spared the hardships that we youngsters had to go through during the revolution and the civil war.

In the spring of 1914, my oldest sister, Sorel (who was an old maid of twenty-two), married. Although she was a very beautiful girl, beauty without dowry could not get a husband. My parents had to save for a dowry so nothing could interfere with the marriage plans.

I hardly knew my oldest sister and brother. When they left home, my youngest brother was still an infant, and I was not much older. However, I remember how my parents cried when my oldest brother left for America. That memory has stayed with me all these years. When I was a little older, I told my playmates that we would all go to America because my brother needed and wanted us. Later, after my second brother left, America became more compelling for us. Little did we know then that we would be separated for about eight years – a terrible period for us youngsters, who had to grow up in a hurry. As children, we did not understand what it meant when my sister's husband became

a soldier and was wounded. However, after 1917, we youngsters felt the impact of life to the fullest extent.

After the revolution, the civil wars started. With them came pogroms, starvation, disease, exodus. Hundreds of people herded together in one city, where the militia fought off the attacking bandits. People ran for their lives from small towns and villages where there was no protection. The journeys to the larger cities were the most dangerous. The forests were infested with bandits: Petluras, Denikins, Zelenovs, and Machnows, among others. The most vicious of them all were the Balachovtzes, Polish bandits roaming loose in our area.

This is only a small part of what we really went through. I remember my mother telling my father that the living should envy the dead. We small children had to grow up in this world.

I remember as a youngster fearing death so strongly that I questioned why I was ever born. But soon I saw so many dead people that death no longer held any fear for me. I remember once seeing one grave dug for ten men, among them a young boy I knew. I looked at them as they lay there in their street clothes with mutilated bodies ready for burial. That sight did not help build a happy, healthy childhood. From the moment I began to understand the meaning of war, I abhorred it, and up to the present day, I hate and fear war. People never gain through wars, no matter how victorious – in the greatest victories, the greatest losses occur.

However, at times like these, my parents were happy that at least their two older children were spared this misery. I remember my mother telling Father that if he had taken the three older children and gone to America, we might all have been saved. Father did not want to leave Mother alone with four small children; he feared separation from her more than death.

Father was a man well versed in Hebrew, a man of the book, with strong character and personality. He was well liked and respected by all, especially by people who understood him. My father hated a *grober ying* (a coarse person). He liked intelligent, refined people, and he loved my mother for her sensitivity.

When Father married Mother, he was twenty-one and she seventeen. He went to the yeshiva, but not long enough to get his *semichah* (ordination for the rabbinate). He made a meager living as a shoemaker. He would also walk to Chabno, twelve versts away, once a week to buy fancy threads for embroidery and tints for weaving, which Mother would exchange with the peasant women for food staples such as flour, potatoes, and cereals. Mother also functioned as the healer in the village and attempted to cure the sick peasant children with herbs.

Raising a family in a village under the cruelest, most uncivilized conditions was no joke. Yet Saturday was the day of rest. In the morning, my parents both went to synagogue, and after dinner they would remain at the table, and he would read and translate the Mishnah to her from Hebrew to Yiddish. Sometimes he would read poetry he prepared that day. Although Mother could not read Hebrew herself, she was well versed because Father tried to impart all his knowledge to her. My mother told me that when they were first married, Father would keep her on his lap for hours while reading to her. Mother often spoke, blushing, of their young days and their beautiful love life. She was shy all sixty-two years of her life.

Mother's First Vow

My father was the firstborn of a very young mother and much older father. My orphaned grandfather was picked up on the street on the way home from the yeshiva at the age of twelve and taken into the military service of Tsar Nicholas, where he served for twenty-five years as a Nikolayevsky Soldat (a soldier of Tsar Nicholas). He was stationed in Moscow, where he met some Jewish people. Only three types of Jews were allowed to live in Moscow before the revolution: doctors, lawyers, and merchants. He met a merchant family and became a frequent visitor. He enjoyed playing with their little girl, a baby. At the time of his discharge from the army drew near, the little girl's mother had a dream that her child would die unless she married the soldier. A wedding was arranged, and the thirty-seven-year-old soldier saved the

life of a fourteen-year old girl. Despite this age difference, they were very happy together.

My grandparents moved to Smolensk, where my father was born. Several years later, my grandfather decided to take his young wife and children home, where their struggle for existence began. My father, their oldest, was forced to curtail his education at an early age and fend for himself. When he was sixteen, a marriage match was arranged for him against his wishes. My father was very handsome and rather tall; the girl was short and not good-looking. After the wedding, Father went home to his parents, and the bride went home to her parents. A divorce followed, and a few years later, he met my mother.

My mother came from Titiv, a town in the Ukraine. Her mother, a young orphan, married a man with a few children who were older than she was. My mother's half sisters and brothers were all much older and lived in different cities, mainly large ones. One brother, a fine cantor, lived in Ekaterinoslav. Others lived close by. I knew two of my mother's brothers. One, Uncle Mendel, the youngest of that set of children, was very kind. My father liked Uncle Mendel very much, and I loved him greatly.

My parents spent most of their married lives in Varovitch, a place where almost all the children were born, where good memories mixed with bad ones, where two young people (my parents) started their lives from scratch. (Of course, financially, they didn't go further than their first scratch.) With the birth of each child, they hoped luck would accompany the newborn. Instead, there were always more worries, concern, and sickness.,

I remember my mother telling me that when Shmulik was about four years old, he became very ill at night. My parents were afraid that he would die. They had to get him to a doctor who was twelve versts away in Chabno, the nearest town to Varovitch.

In great haste, my father put the child on his back and walked with him to Chabno. Night walking was not safe because of the bandits, although my father knew the way well. In the meantime, Mother's anxiety and fear grew by the minute. She would have felt much better

had she gone with them, but she couldn't leave the other two children alone. Sorel was a little older than Shmulik, while Arel was younger.

Mother never forgot that night. It seemed endless. Mother stayed up all night waiting and hoping for time to pass quickly. Would the child survive the night? The unknown became tormenting. If only it were daylight, she would have felt much better. She would have been busy with the other children and household chores. As things were, she had no choice but to sit and wait. Time dragged, and with it came many thoughts and fears. She sat up all night watching the other children and hoping for a miracle to happen that they should come home well. Mother made a vow that if everything would be well, she would deny herself the pleasure of kissing her children until their wedding day.

Toward noon the next day, Father returned carrying Shmulik on his back the same way as when they left. Mother said she cried, hugging the child, but she kept her vow and abstained from kissing him. She applied this vow to all her children – that she would not kiss them until their wedding day. As my brother, Ishiah, and I were the youngest and unmarried at the time of Mother's death, we were shortchanged: we never felt our mother's kisses. In her denial of this earthly pleasure, there evolved a great strength of character – a most unusual strength, almost mystical. I say it because I know how much Mother loved me and knew me. I still remember her hugging and embracing me, but with restraint.

From my childhood, I can still remember the hard times we had. They are extremely vivid in my mind. I remember when I became sick with typhoid fever. I must have been very young, because I lay in a crib for a good part of the winter.

CHAPTER 2

As Far Back as I Remember

Butterflies and Death

We had all kinds of people in our village, some normal, some more strange than the average, and a few perhaps even more abnormal. Among the latter was one boy, about twelve years old, who always had a runny nose, watery eyes, and a most peculiarly shaped mouth and nose. This boy used to visit me – bringing me candy and sunflower seeds – and rock my cradle. The cradle was a mahogany oblong, like a box, about twenty inches wide and fifty long. It was held up from the ceiling by ropes and had a foot-rocking device so that the one who rocked the cradle could do something else at the same time. This boy declared his love for me and begged me to get well in a hurry; when I grew up, he promised, he would marry me. Older and much bigger than I, he reassured me that he would wait for me. I don't believe that he was sent to *cheder* (Hebrew school) or that he knew how to read or write. This boy's mother sold bagels from a string, and he would bring me one as a present whenever he managed to get one. I used to look forward to his visits; at my young age, it must have been encouraging to know that someone cared for me. But, fickle as other little girls, when I got well, older and wiser, I found another boyfriend whom I liked much more. And to be sure, I was proud of my choice.

Why am I talking about little boys rather than girls? Because there weren't any girls my age nearby. The only little girl I knew lived too far away. My sister Rivka's girlfriends would not play with me. They

were all older than me and had nicer things to wear than I did. I used to wear Rivka's old clothes when she outgrew them. I always envied my sister because she was beautiful and got new things all the time. I, being smaller, got a new dress only for Passover and the High Holidays. To take revenge on Rivka, I used to pinch her and hoped that I would grow taller than her. I soon equaled my sister in height, and when I was about six or seven years old, I was taller than she but much too thin to wear any of her things.

My being so thin became a great concern for my parents. Coughing fits began to torment me, and home remedies did not help. My mother made arrangements to take me to Kiev to see a well-known doctor. I remember being happy that I would go places and see a big city. All was well as far as I was concerned. I remember my mother giving instructions to Father on how to take care of my baby brother and my sister. Though my sister was older than I, she was still a youngster. But our trip had to be canceled because the roads were blocked. It was 1917, and Christian refugees from the war-ravaged areas began flocking through our village, coming by the hundreds – old, young, and babies. They buried their dead on the roads, in the villages – wherever they died is where they were left. It was summer. I sat inside our garden on a log under an apple tree, fenced in from the street. All day long, I watched the refugees pass by.

When I grew tired of sitting on the log, I played with flowers, chased bugs and frogs, and caught butterflies. Occasionally I picked a fresh cucumber from the garden and ate it. But the refugees disturbed me. I always ran back to the street to watch the procession. Women with small children suffered the most, and I often brought some of them into our house. Mother gave them some food and milk for the babies; others came for water, since it was summer and warm. One scene is vivid in my mind: a young girl who couldn't walk anymore. She was placed on a wagon with all the possessions that the families took with them. The wagon with the dying girl stopped in front of our house, and my mother went out to them, like our matriarch Rebecca, and brought the dying child some water and some milk, but she couldn't drink it.

This young Christian girl died as the wagon passed by the church. For days and days, I was afraid to go out on the street for fear of a similar scene, so I stayed in the sunny garden among my old friends the flowers, bugs, frogs, and butterflies.

"Kill the Jews and Save Russia"

As summer advanced, my cough diminished, and we never did go to Kiev. The refugees no longer came our way, and all was quiet for a while. The harvest season began. We who owned no land planted some potatoes on a peasant's plot of land. We picked our potatoes and stored them away for the winter. The little garden near the house was also pretty well picked by then. Our busy season was over, and soon came the High Holidays with the fall season and, of course, the dreadful winter. The war spread to different parts of the land, this time with different refugees. These refugees were terribly frightening. We never saw people like that, with big fur hats, heavy sheepskin coats, and big boots. We only saw the men – the women and children rode inside the wagons. And when a few men came knocking at the doors, we never knew what to expect. We feared the worst from these men, who were called Cherkasi.[1] Even the name sounded frightening, let alone how their faces looked. By mid-winter, these Cherkasi passed, too. Then came 1917 and the March Revolution.

With the revolution came hopes of the war's end. Soldiers in hiding were restored to civilian life. When they came out from their hiding, they were singing the French Marseillaise. We were fortunate not to be too close to the battlefields, so we were spared the actual war ravages, but we got our share a little later. Soon, the singing stopped, and fighting started again. There was no daily paper to report the happenings on the fronts. My father talked to one man who went to town daily and brought back a newspaper. My father would return with the news; often it would be very bad. The fighting spread to local sections.

1. Circassians, Sunni Muslims from the North Caucasus.

Bands of gangsters gathered into battalions and included many young peasant men from the villages. It took about a year for these groups to organize. They formed a strong block to fight the Bolsheviks. The home militia protected civilians but was powerless without support from the army.

Villages like ours had no army nor home militia to protect us. We soon fell victim to a civil war whose slogan was "Kill the Jews and save Russia." Even though the fighting took place in the big cities, we had more protection there. The Jews hid in cellars for a few days while the fighting continued. If the Denikins,[2] Petluras,[3] or the Balachovtzes[4] gained control, pogroms would follow. If the Bolsheviks gained control, order would be restored, and the refugees and poor would at least be certain of getting some stale bread instead of a gun butt over the head. Girls and young women would be able to walk on the streets and not fear rape before death.

Little bands of bandits soon formed into bigger ones. In every village, a new leader would spring up, all under the banner of big leaders such as Petlura or Denikin, or whoever was closest to that area.

We Jews lived in fear from day to day. At night we lit no lamp; we bolted the doors with boards and heavy ropes. Of course, nothing helped. We soon had to leave our homes for the cities, but the problem was getting there: the highways or roads were much too dangerous, the forests were infested with bandits, and there was no railway. We walked or depended on a horse and wagon for our transportation. A peasant would not take a chance transporting Jews for fear that he, too, would

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2. Followers of Anton Denikin, then deputy supreme ruler of Russia and head of the anti-Semitic counterrevolutionary White Russian Volunteer Army, which was fighting against the Red Army. Their rallying cry was "Kill the Jews and save Russia."

3. Followers of Semion Petlura, leader of the anti-Semitic Cossacks, who was later supreme commander of the Ukrainian Army and president of the short-lived Ukrainian People's Republic from 1918 to 1921.

4. Followers of Hetman Stanisław Bułak-Bałachowicz, leader of one of the anti-Semitic counterrevolutionary White armies.

be killed. We all started the journey by foot, and we all ran in different directions. No two families from our village ended up in the same town or city. Most of the people running away from Varovitch were killed.

Mother's Second Vow

The morning before Shavuos, while we were eating breakfast, four bandits walked into our house and shot into the ceiling, demanding money. We all left the house and began to run into the fields. Mother, my younger brother, and I went in one direction; my sister remained in a neighbor's barn; my father and older brother went on still another road through the fields. The bandits shot at my brother, but the bullet missed him. He fell in the field, given up for dead. They then went after my father. He gave himself up so that they would not bother Mother and the two of us. They took whatever Father had on him and let him go. He searched for us; at the end of the day, he found all of us but my sister Rivka. She was not to be found among the living nor among the dead. There were a few deaths that morning, in the one hour the bandits were in our village. My sister was found near suffocation in a barn, covered with manure. That night we didn't sleep in our house but stayed with a peasant, who gave us shelter till the next day.

The following morning, we started walking to the nearest town, which was twelve versts (eight miles) away. No sooner had we reached the limits of the next village than we were surrounded by four bandits who shot in the air and took us into the forest to do away with us. Among that quartet was the notorious pogrom leader Struk,[5] whom my mother had helped cure with herbs when he was very sick as a boy. My mother reminded him of that and begged him to spare our lives. He let us go only on one condition: that when we reached any city, we not tell the Bolsheviks about their whereabouts. Mother vowed

5. Ilya Timofeyevich Struk, a hetman (commander) of a military partisan unit of peasants who were fighting against the Red Army. Struk's gang killed many Jews in the Chernobyl area.

not to report them and swallowed a piece of earth as a pledge. The bandits shot in the air and let us go. We turned back to our village and remained in the fields all night through a terrible thunderstorm. The more it stormed, the safer we felt. The same afternoon, however, Struk and his gang murdered Gisa and Hinde, the two daughters of the shochet (ritual slaughterer), on the same spot where we had been a few hours earlier.

The next morning, we took an even greater chance by going in the opposite direction to a city sixty versts (forty miles) away from our home. The city was Chernobyl, which now has become infamous because of the nuclear disaster. My father visited the biggest gangster of the village, Ivan, and gave him the key to our house and some money. Father told Ivan that if we didn't make it to Chernobyl, everything was his. He begged Ivan to drive us to the only city left for us to go to. Dead or alive, we must get there. The gangster hesitated, but finally agreed on one condition – that we not sit too close to him. In case of shooting, he did not want to be hit by the bullets. We agreed and started our journey, but never expected to reach that city because the roads were perilous there, too. On the way, we saw some people we knew lying dead. A few miles away, in the next village, we had relatives. But by the time we got there, they were already dead. All that was left of them was the blood stains in their homes. We saw the same thing in village after village between our home and the city we were trying to reach.

On the way, peasants told our driver to drop us off and go back home, because we would never reach the city anyway. Somehow, luck was with us; after two days we came into the beautiful city of Chernobyl.

Life and Death Entered Chernobyl Together

Life and death entered Chernobyl together. While we came in hopeful and happy that we had survived the trip, another driver brought in a wagon with corpses. Among the dead were two of my mother's cousins, two young men with mutilated bodies. Luckily, we children

soon forgot these things. While my mother cried at the sight, we were busy watching the wonders of a big city. We felt safe – we saw soldiers, and they didn't shoot at us. Instead, they offered us food and a place to live. I remember my father telling one soldier that we had relatives in the city. One soldier climbed in our wagon and told the driver which way to go. The first mission was to go to the commissariat and report those bandits in the forest who had threatened to kill us. My mother broke her vow to the bandits, in order to save Jewish lives. An army was sent, and the bandits were caught.

We soon found ourselves in my beloved Uncle Mendel's home. To our great disappointment, we discovered he and his family, fearful for their safety, had left for Kiev, the capital. However, their tenants, a family of three – mother and two boys – still lived there. Uncle Mendel had a beautiful home with two kitchens, a big dining room, a living room, and several bedrooms, as well as a great, long, beautiful corridor that I loved best. It had windows all around, and shutters which I loved opening and closing. It was the first time we children had been in such a beautiful home.

Behind the house was a roomy yard that contained a small house that was rented to a family. It even had an outhouse, a privilege very few could afford. The whole place looked like a palace or fortress. At night, the gates would close, and we had complete privacy. I loved Chernobyl and the streets where every house had a number. My uncle's house was at 6 Strizhevskaya. Even the name of the street was musical.

It was too good to be true, if only we didn't have to eat. We soon became hungry, and what were we to substitute for food? My mother wasn't much for life in the big city, where she felt strange and lost. My parents had brought a few hundred rubles in silver money, but that money could not be used, as it was not recognized by the Bolsheviks. My father was afraid to exchange it on the black market, and we remained hungry. We didn't have new currency. My father, job hunting for all of us, found dirty work for himself, my sister, and me. It was my first job. My sister and I had to put coal in big sacks and then sew the sacks with big needles and string. My father had to carry the sacks

to a cart, which in turn was used to load the freighters in the harbor. Chernobyl, on the shores of the River Dnieper, was a very important city, the lifeline between Kiev, Mosier,[6] and other big cities.

My sister, baby brother, and I soon got to know the city from all angles. We knew where the water carriers got the barrels of water by which they earned their livelihood. We also discovered the theater and the school and became part of the big city, making many friends. Together, we went down the hill to the shore and watched the big boats come in from other cities.

But Mother was not happy. The city's doctors were competition for her. You may wonder why. At home, my mother functioned as the doctor, treating illness with herbs. If the patient died, it wasn't my mother's fault. She tried. But if the patient recovered, she was rewarded, and her fame spread. That was in Varovitch. In the big city, my mother was lost. Who would believe in her medical expertise, even if she dared to try her method? My mother was out as a breadwinner, forever. The most important phase of her life had ended, and she had to learn a new way of living, which was difficult. At home, in our village, she had earned a living, and Father helped her. Father, being the scholar, with no special tradesman's craft other than making shoes, found himself in a dilemma. The few Hebrew lessons he gave were not enough to buy food for us.

Refugees received a little help from some committees. Even supplemented by a little work, it all amounted to starvation. Life became very difficult for my parents, and they longed for their own home, where they were at least sure of bread and potatoes. At home, we had our own house, a cow or two, chickens, potatoes, and grain that would last from one year till the next. Here, in this beautiful city, they were lost.

For us children, the city was full of charm. It had life, hopes. We had all kinds of dreams that only children dare to dream. This beautiful city was full of orchards, white stucco homes, sidewalks, brick buildings; the better homes even had electricity. Full of curiosity and wonder,

6. Modern-day Mazyr, Belarus.

we wanted to live in this city. We were hungry for life; we wanted to go to school. But that, too, was difficult. My little brother started school, and my sister and I took private lessons in Russian from the girl whose family lived with us in my uncle's house. Because they were also refugees, our lessons were free. My sister and I studied very hard.

Refugees were coming in daily from all around the city. The better homes were requisitioned for refugees and soldiers. The Bolsheviks brought a third Jewish family, the Kabanovskys, into Uncle Mendel's house – a husband and wife and a teenage daughter, Chaya, who was a student in the Gymnasium and who taught Russian poetry to Rivka and me. There was hardly any privacy in homes. At times of trouble, people all huddled together in a little corner, expecting fate to guard them or to strike death's blow. Older people prayed and were lost in the oblivion of prayer. Scenes like these were very frequent. The city was first bombarded at intervals. Later the intervals became shorter, and the bombardments became everyday occurrences. Once more, our short-lived peace was gone. After several days and nights of heavy bombardment, the Balachovtzes as well as the Strukovtzes entered the city. Woe unto us. They stayed for about six weeks. Pogroms and other horrible things followed.

CHAPTER 3

Upheaval

They Took Away My Brother

One day, they took away my older brother Chaim, who had just joined us after several months of wandering and looking for us. My beloved older and favorite brother, whom I loved so much, was taken to be killed. He used to tell me stories, bring me books to read, help me with my homework. He was my teacher when he was home. Now my brother would be no more. We all cried and felt terrible, but we couldn't even go out to look for his body. For several days, we mourned inside the house, hungry and full of fear. Finally, my brother returned all beaten up and starved. He was kept on the river day and night to bathe the horses. With each new horse, he was given a beating. Girls, too, were captured. They were raped first and then put to work. If they resisted, they were shot. In the meantime, the city was under heavy bombardment from the Bolsheviks. The heavier the bombardment, the better we liked it, for this kept the bandits busy on the front. One day, a shell burst in our yard. Later, from the cellar, we saw hand-to-hand fighting. That was a terrible sight. By the end of the day, the Balachovtzes and Strukovtzes were driven out. The living began to count the dead. There were many dead.

In a few days, order was restored. My uncle's home always housed soldiers. This time the Bolsheviks came. They saw that we were starving and brought us bread and fruit. We ate and ate; the more we ate, the hungrier we became. My younger brother couldn't hold any food; he

had cholera. I ate so many plums that I was sick for a week. My mother later got some spinach at the market and cooked it, but without salt, it tasted terrible. Salt and sugar were the luxury items that people didn't have, nor could they get them. The lack of sugar was not as bad as the lack of salt. If a man had a sack of salt, he could marry off the ugliest daughter. Many a marriage was based on salt.

Uncle Mendel's Home

The government changed hands several times during our stay in Chernobyl. With each change came new casualties, and more of the same as experienced before. Among the casualties was the father of the dearest friend my sister and I had. Bronia, beautiful, shy, and sensitive, was an only child with a mother in bad health. Bronia and her mother lived under the most horrible conditions. Even when her father was alive, they lived very wretchedly; the father, a Hebrew teacher, earned very little. After his death, conditions became even worse, and her sick mother had to go out and provide for herself and her child. She tried with all her might and kept the child in school.

They lived in one room in a subdivided basement. The room was always damp and cold, with mold on the walls. They had no food. The mother did housework and all sorts of things, if and when she found work. But very few homes hired in those days. She began cleaning the barracks for the soldiers, who paid her with bread, potatoes, and a little milk and salt. The mother couldn't keep her job for long – she became very sick. With no money and no food, her physical condition only worsened. Later, they lived only on what was brought to them by strangers who knew of their plight. We began getting bread from the soldiers who occupied part of my uncle's house, which we shared with my friend and her mother. But the bread we got was already green with age. When we cut a loaf of bread, the green powder came out of it. And what still looked like bread hardly tasted like it. I don't know what happened to my friend and her mother after we left.

We stayed in Chernobyl for a year, until my uncle and his family

returned. They had run away to Kiev, which was much larger and safer than Chernobyl. But there was upheaval there, too. When they returned, things became uncomfortable because my mother could not get along with my aunt. My mother decided to go back home to see what was left of our house. Father accompanied her, and we didn't hear from them for about a month. In the meantime, we grew to love my Uncle Mendel very much, and he felt the same about us. Uncle Mendel was a very handsome man of middle age, extremely dignified and fine. During my parents' absence, my uncle kept close watch over us. He took an unusual pride and interest in us. We were his sister's children. Even more, we were the children of the man he greatly admired, a man whom he loved and respected. Uncle Mendel and my father were very friendly. They had a number of things in common, such as a good knowledge of Hebrew and similarity in character and thinking.

I loved my Uncle Mendel mainly for his kindness. I loved him when he woke us in the morning by tickling our feet. It was fun to play with him. My aunt, not like that at all, was always angry at somebody, and we were afraid of her. She always made my sister and me do all the hard work in the house. One Friday, the city was under bombardment, and she wouldn't let us hide under a bed until we finished washing all the floors. My cousin was a teenager with a gorgeous figure who became the idol of my sister and me. We worshipped her silently and watched every move she made; we watched her go out on dates, and we knew all her boyfriends. On several occasions, I carried messages for her to the young men as well as messages from the young men to her. I confess I would have loved to see and read those messages, but it would have been wrong, and, of course, I didn't do it.

We later noticed that a romance was budding between my cousin and my brother Chaim. They made the most handsome couple. My brother was very intelligent, well read and well versed. He was as attractive physically as he was intellectually. He was the poetic type, with beautiful, expressive brown eyes and wavy brown hair, handsomely built and extremely romantic. My brother took me into his confidence, so I knew of his romances. He would explain to me things

Chaim, Chabno, Ukraine, 1919

I didn't understand and would talk to me about his girlfriends. In my childish way, I built images for myself. When I grew up, I would want to love someone like my brother. That fantasy grew with me. The older I grew, the stronger the feeling was within me. My brother became my idol whom I worshipped heartily, as children are capable of doing.

One summer day, my father returned with several loaves of unsalted bread. The bread was almost gone before Father had a chance to wash up and say a few words about Mother and their future intentions. Mother had decided to remain at home and wanted Father to bring my younger brother to her. She wanted the baby near her. After Father rested for several days, he took the baby and walked sixty versts (forty miles) home. Again no word came from them for several weeks, as hardly any mail service came from the villages. In the meantime, we didn't know whether they were alive or dead.

My Home Was Gone

Finally, Father came back with the verdict. This time I was to go home with him. It was no use to protest. I had to go where my parents were. I was much too young to be left on my own.

My father would have to make one more trip to bring my sister home, too. My older brother was eighteen and would be in the army, so he would be left there. The reason my father didn't take us all home at the same time was that in case we should be killed on the way home, someone would remain alive. It was my turn, and I felt very bad. I hated to leave my beloved city. But what did the city mean to me without my parents? I had to leave my friends and my much-loved uncle. One evening, I began packing my few belongings. I took one pair of shoes made of leather and one pair made of cloth. The leather shoes I saved for cold weather. The cloth shoes, which were slippers without heels or any support at all, I put on for the journey. I left behind wooden sandals that we wore in the summer in the city, with a few straps of leather to keep them on our feet, so there would be less to carry.

Early in the morning, my father and I departed. It was a sad and gloomy day for me. I hated to go back home. I hated to walk through the forests. I was afraid we would get killed on the way. I was very unhappy and afraid. The more we walked, the more tired I got. After several versts (one and a half miles), my shoes tore, and I was walking on bare feet. We couldn't stop in the forest to rest, because it was too dangerous. We had to run through, the faster the better, and get quickly to a village where it was safer. However, we couldn't stay too long in a village, because we had to make time. At the end of the day, I couldn't walk anymore. I ached all over. We stayed overnight with some peasants. My torn feet swelled and bled. They were too swollen to put my leather shoes on. The peasant woman put linen bandages on my feet so that I would be able to continue my walk. We were only about eight versts (about five and a half miles) from our destination, but it seemed endless. It took us half a day to get home.

When we reached our village, my father brought me to the house

of a close friend, a Christian peasant, rather than to our own home. Upon entering that house, I saw my mother and my baby brother. I understood immediately that our own home was gone. My feet got even worse than before. My mother put me on the floor in a corner, out of the way, and began applying compresses to my sore feet. She dipped old linen in sour milk to drain the fever from the sores and take the swelling down. She kept that up for several days and nights till I was cured.

I wasn't supposed to go out in the street for fear of being discovered. So I stayed in hiding for several days. I dressed in peasant clothes and went in the field with the peasants to cut the wheat with a sickle. I cut the little finger on my left hand on the first try and bled terribly. The peasant woman wrapped my finger in cigarette paper, but it still bled. A piece of flesh was missing from my finger, and I didn't use the sickle anymore.

Our Last Family Seder

I went to see our house. The windows were no longer in, the doors were off, the furniture taken out. Just the bare walls were left. Before we left, my father had buried several sacks of salt and wheat in the ground. Our benefactor, Ivan, had helped himself to everything! All that was once our home was no longer there. But the cow and the calf were safe. We had left them with a friendly peasant family to keep for us if we returned. The little calf whom we kids adored had grown up and was now a young cow. I used to kiss her and clean her. We had named her Massicle when she was born. Once, as a baby, Massicle had a terrible disease – she was full of insects and sick. My father went to a veterinarian and got special herbs to kill the insects. Massicle was cured and was so happy. As a baby, Massicle ate out of our hands, and we played peek-a-boo with her. When Massicle jumped and ran, we laughed and ran after her. Once, during the Succos holiday, we kept her in the sukkah with us. During the last Passover Seder before we left home, we opened the door for Elijah to come in to drink the extra

glass of wine. Instead, we let Massicle come in. We had a lot of fun. We thought that Father would be angry at our trick, but instead he, too, laughed, and we were all happy. We did not know that this would be our last Seder as a family.

CHAPTER 4

Nightmares

Now Massicle and I Were Strangers

Now Massicle and I were strangers. Sixteen months of separation had estranged us. She had grown sharp horns, and I was afraid of her. I had swollen feet and no place to call home; Massicle was content and secure. She was now a full-grown cow and had become very important. I stood near Massicle and felt insignificant next to her. I envied her for her peace of mind and spirit. I began to realize that my parents had made a big mistake coming back home. It was no place for us, though it was a good place for Massicle and her mother. I stood there crying, feeling that my world had narrowed down to the size of Massicle's barn. In beautiful Chernobyl, my horizons had been wide and far. Even in times of trouble, I felt we were not alone. Here I felt trapped, and I wept hysterically, but Massicle stood mute and deaf to my sorrow. Mother came out to me and began to tell me what we would do next. In a week or two, we would go to the next town, twelve versts (eight miles) from home. My parents thought that if they were close to their village, they could come in every once in a while to get food from the peasants in exchange for merchandise.

There were several other reasons my parents had wanted to get home. They thought some of what they had buried in the ground could be salvaged. There were several sacks of coarse salt that looked like rock candy. Each sack weighed five *pood*s, the equivalent of close to two hundred pounds. The salt itself at that time was priceless.

Several sacks of wheat had also been buried, along with three hundred silver rubles, which Father had buried in an earthen jug. However, as mentioned before, the salt and the wheat had been dug up by Ivan, the driver who had brought us to Chernobyl. Among all the household possessions, the money, the cow, and Massicle were the only things left to my parents from a lifetime of hard work and deprivation. Now, Massicle was given to the peasants as a reward for sheltering us.

Gone were the days when Mother would bring in fresh jugs of milk, a process that was repeated twice a day, morning and night. From the milk, she would make sour cream, sour milk, cheese, and butter. For the winter months, when the pregnant cow would not give any milk, Mother would preserve butter by cooking it with sugar. In that way, it could stay in the cellar for months and not spoil. We children loved it spread on bread. For Chanukah, a few dozen geese were fattened and then killed by the shochet. The goose meat was preserved in a barrel with ice and kept in the cellar for the whole winter. We ate the goose fat on bread and kept some for Passover. We had a dozen chickens at the time, who laid eggs. My parents sold some of the butter and eggs when they went to town. With the proceeds, they bought merchandise such as notions, dyes, saccharin, and embroidery thread, which was used by peasants on their costumes or everyday apparel. All this was gone now.

Gone, too, were those February nights when Father would stay awake and watch the cow give birth to her offspring. Father had acted as the midwife; the newborn calf was immediately wrapped in sacks and brought into the house so it wouldn't freeze on cold nights. In the morning, when we children awoke and found the newborn calf, we were very happy. We hoped the new calf would be a female so my parents would raise it. However, each time, the calf turned out to be a male, and it would be slaughtered by the shochet after a week so that we could eat the meat. Finally, however, the newborn calf was a female, and my parents promised us that we could raise it, which is how Massicle came into our family.

Zalman

All that was once dear to me, I now despised. It was all meaningless. I wanted to run away. I wanted to run back to my beloved city. But how could I? I hated the primitiveness of the village. I hated the squealing pigs that ran loose on the street and in all the yards behind every house. The moment they smelled human excrement, they ran to devour it. Since villages had no toilets, the people had to go in back of their barns, but the pigs cleaned it all up. My mother never let us children go out alone, for fear the pigs would hurt us. One always had to fight them off with a stick.

What made things even worse was that about half the Jews from our village were not there. They had been killed. Those who managed to survive were scattered wherever they managed to find haven. We found ourselves with just one other family, two old and feeble parents and a half-witted son in his forties named Zalman.

Zalman was feeble and underdeveloped, a man in body but a child in mind; he could not think for himself. The younger people in the family who always thought for him had been killed, so he was left on his own with two old parents. Zalman had come from a big family. He did all the hard work in their big orchard and the field. He took care of the cows, horses, and chickens. He had to see that all the fruit trees were properly cared for and all the fruit harvested at the proper time. Zalman was well trained for home gardening and landscaping. When someone talked to Zalman about death, he always answered that he had no time to die. He was busy all four seasons of the year. In the spring, he plowed the ground and planted the seeds, grazed the cattle and milked the cows. In the summer, he was busy with the same work. When it was too hot, he crawled under a cow and drank as much milk from her as he wanted and then went to sleep under a tree. In the fall, he was occupied with the harvest and then with the High Holidays. Finally, only fools die in the winter when it is so cold.

This Zalman, with his unique philosophy, was our only moral support. He could neither read nor write, he was slightly deaf, and he

spat when he spoke, so that we had to stand at a distance and shout to him in order not to get a shower. But to shout under our conditions was extremely dangerous. So the only moral support we had didn't do us much good.

After several days, we were discovered, and it was no longer safe for us to stay with our peasant friends. We spent the night in Zalman's house, along with his parents. Not finding us at the peasant's house, the bandits went straight to Zalman's house. Zalman knew how to bolt the doors with heavy boards and thick ropes. He did the same for the windows. That night, the bandits tried hard to break in, but were unable to. It was too great an effort. Besides, our screams were so loud that the noise frightened them away. The bandits then climbed up on the trees and began to shake off the pears and apples and throw them at the windows. No damage was done because the glass panes had been broken long before, on previous raids.

The following morning, after such a night, my parents felt it was too dangerous for us to stay on, so we started to march to Chabno, a town close to our home. As it was, it was a miracle of some sort that the bandits didn't set the house on fire, or we would have all perished inside. Our escape was a narrow one.

Back in Chabno

We went to Chabno on foot. Our undertaking was risky. We were afraid that we would be surrounded by the bandits on our way to town. By some divine power, we managed to reach town safely. What a relief that was to my parents. Chabno was as much home as Varovitch, and as it was larger, it was less dangerous. The smaller the city, the less protection from the hoodlums. The home militia in a small town was powerless. Our coming to the small town from the big city meant endangering our lives that much more, but we couldn't go back.

The first stop was to the house of my mother's oldest brother, Levick. Upon seeing us, he nearly fainted. He had heard a report that we had

been killed some seventeen months before when we were going to Chabno and had been overtaken on the way by bandits. An "eyewitness" came back to town and reported that he had heard shots. The man was right – there were shots – but he didn't know that my mother, with her quick action in swallowing the piece of earth, had saved us from death. My uncle had gone around Chabno and told people we had been killed. An armed group was organized to search for our bodies. When our bodies were not recovered, it was assumed that we were buried in the forest. My uncle said Kaddish for us, and services were held in several synagogues. The candles burned for eight days, and my uncle sat shivah for the six souls who had departed with those shots. We were the town's first tragedy.

When we appeared and stood before Uncle, he was quite bewildered. Was it another resurrection? When they learned what had happened, Uncle and Aunt kissed us and danced for joy. The whole town knew the good news. We stayed in my uncle's house for a few weeks. He had enough food for all of us, but not enough room for lodging, and we soon had to look for a place to live. This family was not rich like that of my uncle from Chernobyl. He had a small house, part of which he rented out. Uncle and Aunt had one room and shared the kitchen with the tenant.

A man my parents knew went to Chernobyl and promised to bring my sister back to join us in Chabno. My sister was luckier than I. She didn't have to walk the distance I did, but sat in a wagon while the horse did the walking.

After my parents found lodging, things began to happen. The High Holidays were coming, and the air became filled with Yom Kippur. I couldn't understand the downcast mood that seemed to be affecting everyone all of a sudden. My parents went to synagogue for Kol Nidre. The praying inside had a much sadder tone than usual, as if heavy hearts were praying and talking to God, begging Him not to destroy us. Everyone in town was sad and worried. I remember having a funny feeling. I was afraid of the candles falling. If the candles fell from the

holder, it would be a bad sign for all of us. I stood there shivering. The candles burned longer than usual, prolonging my agony and my fear.

The day after Yom Kippur, there was a big pogrom in town. My uncle's house, among many others, was raided. The bandits did some horrible things. Next door to my uncle, a girl named Sonia whom we had just met had had all her fingers cut off. Also, her father's head had been split open. What were we to do? All night long, we heard people running. One man was thrown off the bridge, and he lay hurt and moaning. We barely survived the night. Nor was the next day much better. People still ran in all directions, but only one road was clear. The next town was twenty-five versts (sixteen miles) away. A few days passed in agony. It was now Erev Sukkos, and my mother started to cook, but suddenly she poured water into the oven to put out the fire. She left the food uncooked in the oven and we, too, started to run. Out of town, we joined up with many more who did exactly what we did. We all walked, exposed to danger, forward to the unknown. Who knew whether we would reach the next town safely? Or what was happening there? Perhaps the people from that town were running elsewhere, and we would have to run with them. But where? Where were we to go from there? How big was the world, anyway?

Questions in a Child's Mind

How much more would we have to run? What, how, or when would this terrible life end for us Jews? Did the whole world suffer like we did? What crimes had we committed? So many questions in a child's mind, but no answers. Several years before, my mother had bought me some pretty stockings. I told my playmates that I would go to America in those stockings. My little playmates laughed at me; perhaps they knew better. Where was America now? America had no meaning to me at this point. In fact, I never gave it a thought. We were refugees, hungry and weary, scared, hopeless, and useless. Young people looked old, the old were haggard and the children pitiful.

There must have been about a hundred of us walking that afternoon.

We had gotten halfway back to our home in Chabno when it became dark.[1] We stopped for the night at a deserted inn. All of us who were on the road spent the night in that one place, on the ground, because there was no wooden floor. In the morning, we resumed our walk. It didn't take long before we were in the next town, Narodich. As we entered the town, people were going to synagogue because it was Sukkos, a happy holiday. Instead of going to synagogue, the Jews from Narodich decided to go back home, and each one took a family along. We were taken by one family, but now I hardly recall the details of who the people were. We stayed there only a few days, and we soon went back to Chabno. Rumors were that order had been restored. Our hike back was just as tiresome as the one leaving. We hardly had enough time to rest.

Back in Chabno, we had a little quiet for a few weeks. During that time, my oldest sister, Sorel, who had returned to live with us after her husband Gidale was wounded in the Russian Army, became sick with stomach typhus. My mother took care of her, and she seemed better. One day, however, we were warned to leave town immediately, as Petlura's gang was marching on Chabno. We couldn't leave Sorel alone. My father and Gidale decided to carry her twenty-five versts to Narodich. It was December, and cold, and we had to cross the river. During warmer weather, we would slide across a narrow wooden plank crossing the river. Now it was too cold to sit on the plank, and we walked on the thin ice.

As before, there were many of us in the group, and my father, carrying Sorel on his back, felt unsafe in crossing. My mother tested the ice before we all crossed. Sorel, still sick with typhus, lost control of her bowels and defecated all over my father. What a mess. Gidale, himself sick, was not strong enough to carry himself, let alone carry Sorel, so

1. It appears that there may have been some back-and-forth in this journey, with people setting out to walk to Narodich, deciding to head back home to Chabno, but then continuing to the original destination after a night spent in a deserted inn.

Father had to keep an eye on him, too. Mother took the baby, Ishiah, and walked with him. Rivka and I were on our own. Again, we were in Narodich, but this time, no one met us on the street as the first time; there was no holiday. My parents as well as the many others in the group began to look for a place to stay.

This time we were all separated. I, the luckiest of all, stayed with the brother of Zalman whom we knew from Varovitch. I was to watch the baby for my room and board. There was hardly any food, but they shared the little they had. For company I had Zalman's brother, Borel. Rivka stayed alone, and my parents and the baby were together. Sorel was feeling better and was with her husband. All was temporarily calm.

Borel kept me busy all during my four-week stay there. He was short and bow-legged, and he had a huge hernia that seemed nearly half as big as the rest of his body. He couldn't read Russian, nor could he figure numbers very well. I had to do his private bookkeeping for him. Borel made his living through all kinds of odd jobs and running errands. People for whom he worked paid him with whatever currency they had on hand. At the end of the day, when he came home, he gave me all the money he had, and I would count it for him and add to the gross amount, which was marked on the back of his door, with chalk. Many times he made me count all of it all over again to be sure that there was no mistake. He had several hundred rubles from the old currency, which was not recognized by the Bolsheviks. The new money was in marks, which had little value. You couldn't even buy a pound of bread for twenty marks. Borel had hundreds of marks and rubles, so he was happy, and I was kept busy.

I remember one amusing incident. Several of us, including Borel, slept in the living room. During one night, I was awakened by a noise similar to that of a bombardment. I jumped up off my cot screaming, and everyone ran into the room to see what happened. The noise was coming from Borel, and to this day I don't know what it was. Fortunately, there were no real bombardments during my stay there.

PART II

Departure

CHAPTER 5

Return to Chabno

"Velvel Was Killed"

One day, my parents decided to return to Chabno to try to improve their situation. In a few days, Sorel and Gidale followed. By then, Sorel had recovered from her typhus, and she managed by herself. In the meantime, Rivka and I had a place to stay. My parents, afraid to take us along, decided to leave us alone in a place that was much safer for us than the open road. They didn't even come to say good-bye to us for fear that we would insist on going with them. The next day, when Rivka and I went to see my parents, we were told that they had left and that Father would be back in a week or so for us. But after a time, we began to worry and wonder why Father didn't write to us. Two weeks passed, then three. Rivka and I became alarmed. We wrote but got no answer. We wrote again – still no answer. Rivka and I decided to go to a fortune teller. The people Rivka stayed with forbade us to go. Borel knew what had happened. Everyone in town knew what had happened – only Rivka and I didn't know. Wherever we saw a group of people talking, we would sneak in to listen about the news in Chabno.

One day, I met two women on the street whom I knew. One of them, Brindel, who was from Chabno, was considered to be very foolish and talkative. I thought there was a chance to pump her for news. I ran up to them and asked them what they'd heard from Chabno. They said that the news was not so good. I told them that I had just received a letter from my father to see what they knew about my parents. Brindel

blurted out, "Do you see how you can't believe what people say? And here they said that Velvel was killed." When I heard that, I started to scream. The woman realized her mistake and began to claim that it was only a rumor. I ran, screaming, to my sister with people joining me along the way.

My sister and I decided right there and then to go home, regardless of how, what, or when. We must go home to see what was happening there. It was snowing heavily. We ran to the marketplace and looked for a driver. Two children couldn't walk alone late in the afternoon. Besides, we were afraid of getting lost in the forest. We stood in the marketplace crying and asked anyone in a wagon whether they were going to Chabno. We found one man who already had ten passengers. He finally agreed to take us, too, although we had no money. Among the passengers was a young man of about twenty-four or twenty-five, named Yechiel, who told the driver something, and we got on without paying. Our guess was that he paid for us. This young man knew the whole story about my father. He tried very hard to keep us amused, talking to us about everything including politics, about which my sister and I knew nothing. He told us later that he tried to keep us from thinking about what we were going to face when and if we got home. The snow turned into a blizzard, and the driver lost his way in the dark forest. It was close to midnight, and we were still far from home. We became very worried. My sister then told the driver that he'd better bring us home safely, or our father would never forgive him.

We Fed Mother Milk

It was past midnight when we finally reached the house where my parents were supposed to be. Near the bridge, we were met by the armed Jewish militia, who looked at us and told us not to cry and to be very quiet. They were on the lookout for new trouble, and any sound could give them away. A young man from the Jewish militia took us to the house. Outside the door, we saw my father's winter coat, and we ran into the house crying. Yechiel, our new friend, knowing that we would

need him, came with us. We saw Mother lying there like a ghost. My youngest brother, Ishiah, was curled up pathetically with no pillow and no cover. All Mother could say to us was that Father was dead. Rivka and I started to cry hysterically. The guards, outside, put their guns into the window and warned us to stop crying and making noise or they would shoot us. Yechiel didn't leave us that night. He sat shivah with Rivka and me, consoling us the moment we started to cry, but there really was little he could say or do for us. I wrapped myself in my father's coat and wept bitterly. In the morning, our new friend left.

Rivka and I had to get Mother well. She didn't know what was happening – she was delirious. The house was cold, empty, and filthy. In the morning, we feared that we were losing Mother, too. Ishiah, who was sick, cold, and hungry, went to say Kaddish. I was unable to follow him to the synagogue. Our new friend returned and tried to help. He told me where to go for milk. Every morning, I took my little pot to get milk for my mother from anyone who owned a cow. Rivka would feed Mother the milk with a spoon during the day while I ran all the errands. What were we to do with Ishiah, who also was sick and couldn't walk? He had a cold and frostbite between his legs. With no one to care for him, he got worse from day to day. He wore thin little pants with no underwear. The seams from the pants irritated his sores even more.

The only place he had to sleep was on top of the oven with no pillow under his head, no cover, and nothing to spread under his body. In the early part of the evening, the oven was still warm, but at night it turned deathly cold. The top of the oven was dusty and dirty. While Rivka was busy taking care of Mother, I began to clean Ishiah. I ran to a neighbor to get some boric acid and cotton, and I washed his wounds. The more I cleaned, the deeper I realized the wounds were.

We had a hard time with Ishiah and Mother and felt more helpless each day. Each evening, we would take stock of our situation. What was to happen to all of us? Where would we get food for the next day? If there were another attack on the town and everyone ran, we would be the only ones left. How could we leave Mother? Rivka and I decided right there and then that no matter what happened, Mother, Ishiah,

Rivka, and I would all die together. When Father was alive, we had someone to think for us. He could make decisions. He would always put himself forward in any emergency so as to save us. Who would do it for us now? If only my dear brother Chaim were with us, it would be so much easier for us. We hadn't heard from Chaim in almost a year, and in all probability he was dead.

The Long Evenings

The long evenings were torture; we were too much with our thoughts. Our newly acquired friend, Yechiel, was our greatest comfort. He acted like a big brother and visited us daily, informing us of all the news. Knowing the town better than we did, he tried to get us a place to live so we could move there when Mother was better. The town was divided between a new section and an old one. We were in the old half of the town; Yechiel lived in the new one. For us to move was no trouble at all. All we had to do was to make one bundle from all our belongings and walk there. But how could we walk with Mother being so sick? Mother's recovery was very slow; she had her third relapse of typhus and was much too weak to move. Rivka and I were determined to save her no matter how sick she was. We needed her. Now that we had no father, Mother had to get well. On my daily errands for milk, I made friends who gave me butter, eggs, and even preserves for Mother's recovery. In a few weeks, my mother was able to walk around the room. That was great progress, we thought. Yechiel guided us to the new home he'd found for us, just a block away from where he lived. He helped Mother walk, and we moved.

By that time, Ishiah's wounds were healing. I took my only underskirt and made a pair of underpants for him so that his sores wouldn't be exposed to frost again.

How Father Died

When Mother became better, she told us how Father had been killed. It was the day they'd left Rivka and myself in Narodich. Mother begged Father to say good-bye to Rivka and me, but he refused so as not to excite us and also not to delay their departure. They took the baby and started to walk. Six versts (four miles) from Chabno, the bandits overtook them. My father had no money on him, so they took his tallis (prayer shawl), tefillin (phylacteries), and kittel (a white robe with a black cord belt) that he always carried with him no matter where he went. These were the holiest things my father owned, and the loss of them must have been horrible for him. The bandits also split my father's head with the butt of a gun, and he fell to the ground. Mother ran away with the baby. A little later, a peasant passed by on his horse and wagon, picked up my father, and brought him to Chabno, where my mother and little brother arrived later. Father was in a delirium for two weeks before he died.

Rickel, the woman of the house, told us what had transpired. Father had lain dead on the floor all night with the candles burning beside him. Mother, in her delirium, thought that geese were being singed. Rickel said that my sister, Sorel, had become sick again. Her husband Gidale, who was also sick, came to the funeral, but only one of my father's children, Ishiah, the baby, came. My mother's brother, Uncle Levik, Father's best friend Skorodin, and a few more men (including a rabbi) made all the necessary arrangements for his funeral. We lived at a distance from the cemetery, and these men carried my father all through the town. The Christians who saw the procession crossed themselves and prayed for the departed personality. They knew that only a worthy person was carried like that to his place of rest.

Mother recovered from her physical illness, but her mental anguish was terrible. She mourned and grieved her great loss. She did not know how she would sustain herself and the three small children. What would become of us? Her wound was fresh and deep, and she couldn't think. We needed food and had none. The typhus epidemic was on the

rampage; people by the dozens were dying daily from it. One never knew when one would be stricken. Our new house was clean, but very cold. We had no wood to kindle the fire and no warm coverings. We seldom fully undressed. Many times, we had to wear our jackets to keep warm. We were hungry and cold most of the time.

We all began to feel weak, but Mother was the weakest, because she wasn't yet well. She reproached herself for coming back from Chernobyl. She talked a lot about Rickel's house, about how sick she was there, and how she didn't know when Father died. She didn't remember a thing that had happened. She, too, began to talk of Rickel's house, where my father died, with pain and disgust. It became the symbol of our loss and suffering.

CHAPTER 6

Looking for Safety

Rickel

Rickel was an old woman – little, wrinkled, and somewhat hunch-backed. She wore a patched full skirt, resembling a quilt, a long-sleeved jacket, a kerchief on her head, and a bigger kerchief crisscrossed from back to front. She wore men's shoes, old and shabby. Who was this woman who always sat on a chair in front of the window in the main room and knitted? She was someone I'd never heard my parents talk about, as they did about other people.

One day while still in Uncle Levik's house, Father said that we would move to Rickel's house. The house, Father said, looked safe – insignificant and out of the way. The bandits would assuredly overlook it. In this house, we would be safer than in a nicer one. That was what my father thought. Little did he know that he would die in this safe house.

We had moved into Rickel's house. There was another family in her three rooms. The house had very small windows reaching to the ground, low ceilings, old, gray, pasty walls. The whole house was tipped to one side and seemed as if it would topple over at any moment. Amid the antiquated furniture, not far from Rickel's window where she always sat, stood an old rocking cradle, about a half century old, with some old baby clothes and a broken doll. Occasionally, Rickel left her knitting, went to the cradle, picked up the doll, held it for a while, then went back to her knitting.

I hated and feared this house and begged my parents to get out from there in a hurry. I felt as if it would cave in on us. Whatever happened to her or to any one of us wouldn't have mattered to Rickel. But to me, who loved life, it mattered very much.

Even the name Rickel had a strange sound to me. I never heard a name even similar to that. Her personality definitely was odd, especially to youngsters. Even now while I try to draw her image closer and see what I remember of her and what I could draw from her, somehow, she still remains an obscure image.

Rickel sat in her usual position near the window from dawn till dusk, with stocking and needle in hand, knitting day in and day out, without a care in the world. Her only interest seemed to be the work she was doing. Once, Petlura's gangsters entered the town and set one section of it on fire. While the town was burning, the flames shed some light on Rickel's window. She immediately jumped off her bed, took up her knitting in her usual position, taking advantage of the rare privilege afforded her by the light of the fire. People were running and screaming, but it was no concern of Rickel. She sat near the window knitting quickly. Quickly – faster, it seemed, than usual – because she had light. Who was she knitting for? Her husband? Her son? But there was no one near her. Her husband must have been dead. Then why a son? It could be a daughter. The stockings seemed too big for a woman. No one knew.

Rickel rarely talked. Once she related to us a conversation Father had had with the doctor. My father, in his delirium, told the doctor that in America were his two oldest sons who were doctors also. And if he were with them, they would cure him. After that, Rickel didn't speak again for several days. What was wrong with her? She wasn't sick like my mother. Neither did she seem to care or to worry about anything. I, a child, couldn't form any opinion about her. All I knew then was that something was wrong.

It seems to me now that my father in his delirium spoke the truth when he told the doctor that his sons would have made him well. Father needed a hospital with constant medical care. Not Rickel's old couch,

which was infested with lice and bedbugs. If, at least, Rivka and I had been there, we might have tried to help him, but we had been left in Narodich for safety's sake.

It was Chanukah 1920, and my father at age fifty-one was taken to his final rest by strangers with only seven-year-old Ishiah present. Mother, still delirious with her high fever, lay there forsaken. My sister Sorel and her husband, Gidale, were sick again, also helpless, though Gidale did manage to drag himself to the funeral. Rivka and I were the only ones who were safe and sound. My father's wish was fulfilled. His two little girls were safe in Narodich, twenty-five versts (sixteen miles) away.

It seems that the living must endure pain. We all mourned the loss of our father. With Mother getting better, we, too, felt a little better. One nice day, mother got sick again. This time she had a new form of typhus – *sypnotyphe*, in Russian – a form that had a rash. If the rash broke out, the patient survived. If not, the patient choked or suffocated. Mother got this new form with a very high fever again. What were we to do? We had to get a doctor but had no money. The doctor was on the edge of town. I was afraid to go there myself. Rivka had to be with Mother. I struggled with fear and half conquered it. I looked for the doctor at the hospital, where many doors were closed to the public. Behind one of these was the doctor. There were no nurses around. I ran from door to door, afraid to knock for fear I would knock on the wrong door. But once I was there, I knew I had to get the doctor. After knocking on several doors, I found the right one. There stood the doctor, whom I had never seen before, nor did he know me. He asked what I wanted. I started to cry and begged him to come and save my mother. Who was I, and who was my mother, the doctor demanded of me. When I told him who I was, he asked me, "Who will pay the bill?" I had to think fast – I needed the doctor. I answered quickly, "The *relief* will pay for us."

The doctor came to see my mother. He even prescribed a medicine. But he told those who knew my parents that my mother would never pull through. All he could do, he said, was "feel sorry for the children." I went to the pharmacy and told the pharmacist who I was, and I got

the medicine. The pharmacist, Yakoviev, had known my father well and didn't ask for money.

The problem now was to get Mother well again. One of us had to sit near her all the time. During the day, Rivka took care of her while I ran all the errands. Our friend Yechiel was a big help. He carried water for us from a distance away. He also kept us informed of the news in and around town. He told us to be careful and not to have any noticeable light on during the night while we were up watching Mother. We had no light for the night watch and needed one badly. Yechiel made a little lamp for us from an ink well and a piece of metal. He brought us some oil, and we used cotton for a wick. We put the little lamp on a chair near the foot of Mother's bed and made sure that the window was tightly covered so none of the light would show through. The town had to be in total darkness. One light could have destroyed the whole town. Rivka and I took turns at night. When she slept, I was up. We used to wake each other up every hour on the hour.

Once more, we pledged not to leave Mother, no matter what happened. During one of those nights, the town was attacked. We decided not to make a move. Rivka and I resolved that if the bandits came into the house, we would ask them to kill us first so we would not have to witness the deaths of Mother and Ishiah. Thus we endured for a few weeks till Mother, in spite of the doctor who gave her up for dead, began to recover. I was back on my job, looking every morning for milk. Every morning, I went to a new home begging for a pot of milk for my mother. I knew which cow belonged to which family. I also knew which cows were the expectant ones. I made friends all over town, but not among the cows. I was afraid of them and kept my distance. All I wanted from them was their milk. My mother had to get well. And milk was important for her recovery.

A Small Scrap of Paper

Rivka and I watched Mother day and night, hoping for her to get well. During the midst of her high fever and delirium, there was a knock

on the door. My sister and I were frightened and expected the worst. The knocking persisted. When we opened the door, a stranger gave us an envelope. In it was a small piece of paper about one inch tall and eight to ten inches wide. On that scrap of paper, a few Yiddish words were written: *"Libe elterin, rift zich op vi ir zaint. Vellen mir aich helfin"* (Dear parents, let us know where you are. We will help you.). It was an unexpected letter from my older brother Arel, who had gone to America before the war. As no mail was getting through to our village during the war or revolution that followed, we hadn't heard from Arel or Shmulik for seven years. At the end of the message were some numbers and strange letters, which we could not read, but which we knew spelled their address in America.

Rivka read the note to Mother as we were feeding her tea. And all Mother could make of the whole thing was to wish that Arel could give her a piece of sugar with her tea. Other than that, it made no impression on her. We then began telling her, "Mama, that means when you get well, we will be able to go to America." It still had no meaning to her. It was clear to us then that there was no use talking to her and telling her things about the new hope that had come to us in the darkest time of our life. But how dare we hope at a time like that? The letter didn't come to us directly. My brothers didn't even know whether or not we were alive. And if we were alive today, we might not be tomorrow. We didn't answer the letter just then. But in my child's mind, I realized we better hold on to it. It might be very important to us if we survived. While Rivka took care of Mother, I tried to safeguard the piece of paper. I sewed it into the hem of my only dress, which was made out of flannel.

I must never lose that paper. The address was written in English: 1335 N. Rockwell, Chicago, Illinois, USA. But we couldn't read it. If the address had been written in Russian, I could have memorized it, but since it was in English, we were totally dependent on the piece of paper. In my old, patched little flannel dress was an address in America – to my brothers. They wanted us! After seven years of silence, they had finally reached us.

Rivka and I watched Mother's slow progress. We first helped her sit up in bed, then helped her get on and off the bed, and finally, we taught her how to walk again. Much of this time, we had to drag her as dead weight. As thin and small as Mother was, she was too heavy for us. It was with great difficulty that we were able to do anything for her. We couldn't hold out any longer. When would Mother get well and be a person again?

Rivka and Ishiah became very sick with the same typhus that Mother had. They had contracted the horrible disease from her. By now, Sorel was better, so she could take care of them. I still had to run my errands, begging for milk and many of the usual things given me, such as bread, potatoes, salt, and sugar.

Rivka, who was very handy with a needle, had fixed a dress for a lady who promised to pay with potatoes and bread. One day I went to collect for the work Rivka had done. The lady must have paid her much more than what the job was worth, because I couldn't pick up the sack with the stuff. I put the sack on my back and walked a block or so. Then I fell, sack and all, in the middle of the street. A woman picked me up, took the sack from me, and led me to my house. She looked in my eyes, touched my forehead, and pronounced me very sick. I protested that I was not sick. The only thing wrong with me, I declared, was my legs. I just couldn't stand up, nor could I walk.

It was impossible for me to be sick. Who should go for the milk? Mother had to get well before we could get sick. Now, all four of us lay sick in the same room, all with typhus. Mother had the bed, which was too narrow for anyone to move in. Luckily, Mother was a thin, small woman, so the bed was just fine for her. Ishiah lay on a sofa made of boards that had no padding of any sort. Rivka lay on a bench not more than about a foot wide. I lay on the other bench opposite Rivka. My bench was a little wider than Rivka's. It had a back support and arms. But all the benches were just bare wood. And we all lay on the bare benches with very little covering. I must have been very sick, because I don't remember a thing that took place during my illness.

I only know that my sister Sorel took care of me. One day, she

suddenly screamed out that I was dying. I heard her say that I was already turning cold, but I couldn't answer and just lay there. I called out "Mother" several times, but she didn't answer. Where was Mother? She was sick in the same room where I was. What had happened to Mother? Did she die and leave us the way Father did? "Mother, Mother," I called out again, but still no answer. I must have fallen asleep, because I had a vivid dream. I dreamt my father came to me. It was the first time since his death that I could see him again, so real, so alive. He was wearing his prayer shawl, as he used to wear it on holidays or for the daily morning prayers.

Father came to me, but where was Mother? Did he take Mother, and now had he come to take me? But Father was alive. He talked to me as he used to, and I talked to him. Father, wearing his tallis, spread his arms and whole body over me. As he spread over me, I talked to him. I must have called out loudly, because Sorel ran into the room to see what had happened to me. When she came in, I opened my eyes and talked to her. I told her of my dream and how Father looked and how he was dressed.

Father's coming in gave me new life. Just a little while before, Sorel had pronounced me dead. I was fully resigned, thinking myself dead. Now, Father seemed to have given me new strength. I could talk – whereas just a short while before, my tongue wouldn't move. I lay with high fever. What happened? Was I getting better? But where was Mother? I was alone in the room. Ishiah was up and around. Rivka, too, was much better. How long had I lain so sick? Was I so terribly sick that I didn't remember anything that happened during that time?

In a few days, I was able to get off and on the bed by myself. I went about the house. I then found out that Mother was better and had gone back to Varovitch to get some food for us children. She had risked her life to go back to Varovitch. Why did Sorel and Gidale let her go? She was much too weak to undertake such a journey. It would be much better to starve than to have Mother killed the way Father was. If Father were alive, he would never have let her go under such circumstances. Now she had to think for two and take the role of both mother and

father. How many days was she really gone? Now we sat there worrying. Had she gotten sick again? Would she come back alive? Or would she be brought back dead?

When a person is recuperating from an illness and begins to feel hunger pangs, time drags endlessly. Such was the case with me. I kept looking out the window for Mother's return. I looked and looked. Still Mother did not come. We began to give her up for dead. Sorel said she'd been gone about a week now. In the meantime, we had nothing to eat, and it was still cold in spite of the mild weather. One day, as I sat in the window waiting, I noticed our cow coming in the yard and Mother behind her. At the sight of Mother, we all screamed for joy and ran toward her. She came into the house like a ray of sunshine.

Mother Looked a Little Better

Mother looked a little better. Her friends in Varovitch would not let her come back until she felt stronger. They gave her some food for us also. She stayed with our peasant friends who'd kept Massicle and her mother. Mother brought the cow back so all of us would at least have a little milk. She also brought back some food for the cow. Our friends brought her back on a horse and wagon. Mother must have brought back enough food to last us a month.

With Mother home, things were much better. Whatever should happen, at least we were all together. Now, Mother began to cook for us. She made soup and potatoes and also some bread. She milked the cow twice a day, so we had milk. She made cheese, sour milk, butter, and buttermilk. She sold the butter on the market so she could get food for the cow. The cow had to eat enough to give milk. With Mother up and around, we all began to regain our strength. Even I began to feel a little stronger and got busy. I went to the mill to have the grain ground into flour for Mother to make bread for us. I also went to the mill to get food for the cow. Such were the days for us with Mother on her feet. Oh, it was wonderful to have Mother talk to us and serve us. Although she was still weak, to us she was powerful. She guided

us, was our moral support, was both father and mother. She had to be strong – if only she wouldn't get sick again.

We didn't let her carry water. That was Yechiel's job. He was a strong, husky boy in his twenties. To carry water was one of the hardest jobs. We didn't let her do any hard work. We did all the cleaning and washing and fixing. Mother cooked, and she milked the cow. She knew how to come near the cow without fear of being hurt by her. The cow knew that we were afraid of her, so she used to stare at us, and we would run for our lives. Ishiah was not afraid of the cow. He used to go with Mother when she milked her and fed her. Ishiah knew that Rivka and I were afraid of the cow, and he used it as a weapon against us. When he wanted something from us and we refused him, he would let the cow go after us. Rivka and I always gave in to him when the cow was around.

Yiene

With winter's exit and the coming of spring, we felt a little brighter. Especially with Mother up and around. It also was Mother's last trip to Varovitch. She promised not to go there again, since she no longer had anything to do there. Her last trip had cured her of any desire ever to travel as she had in the past. If conditions should get back to normal, we would have to think about how and where to start life again. If only we would hear from Chaim. He would know what to do. If Chaim were alive, wherever he might be, we would have heard from him by now.

As things were, we had to do our own thinking. We had the address in America. We had to find out how to get there. To get to Poland was not easy. The address in America was not enough. We had to know the right people. Money, too, was an important factor. Without contacts and without money, we gave up and stopped thinking about our new hope. It just was no use to knock our brains against such great odds.

The three hundred silver rubles we had salvaged did not do us any good. We couldn't exchange it nor use it as it was. None of us knew how to use the black market. It was a good thing that Mother salvaged

the cow. In the meantime, we had milk. And a milking cow was always good on the market. Mother had different ideas about the cow. She wouldn't part with her one reliable asset. Mother raised this cow as we had tried to raise Massicle. And now that Mother had her, she would not let her go.

Times were very hard for everyone. Rivka and I became friends with a sixteen-year-old boy named Yiene who lived a few doors away from us. A nice looking boy, tall, thin, and blue-eyed with wavy hair, Yiene lived a sheltered life as a child. He studied Hebrew and Russian and had a good home and food. He had not had to leave home at an early age like my brothers did. He told us that he would soon be going back to his village to get food for his family. He told us that he was afraid that he might not come back alive.

My brother-in-law, Gidale, was a craftsman tailor with a pair of golden hands. In good times, he found work no matter where he was. But when a town or city was in constant unrest, fine tailoring became a luxury. Thus, the present situation left Gidale without work most of the time.

One day, Gidale came home, packed his belongings, and prepared to go out of town in search of work and food. A group of eleven men were going, and he would go with them. When morning came, my sister started to cry and begged him to stay home. Mother, Rivka, and I also insisted that he better not go. He remained at home under pressure. That same afternoon, ten of the eleven were brought back dead, killed and mutilated by the bandits. One eyewitness, the eleventh man, Nachman, escaped and told us the story of what happened. The most tragic part of Nachman's story concerned a father and son in the group. The bandits tied the son to a tree and insisted that the father kill him. The father pleaded with the bandits not to make him commit such an act as killing his own son. The father threw himself at the murderers' feet, kissing them. The murderers stepped on the father, half crushing him. Then they picked him up and tied him to a tree and insisted that the son, now untied, shoot the father. This was the last the survivor saw, for he escaped between bullets and reached our town. The other

ten men were brought back dead the same day, the father and the son among them. Among them was our friend Yiene.

When the ten men were brought home, the whole town went into mourning. Such a tragedy. What a panic. How soon would the bandits come to town? The armed militia was always on guard, ready for action. But the militia alone was not enough to protect the whole town. As I mentioned before, the armed forces were always concentrated in the large cities. Amid the great lamentations, a mass funeral had to be arranged. A group of about a hundred armed men went to the cemetery to see whether it was safe for the funeral.

The funeral started from the middle of the town, just a few blocks from where we lived. Sorel, Gidale, Rivka, and I went to the funeral. The dead were brought into the marketplace, which was the center of town. There we all viewed the bodies, and from there we followed the dead to the cemetery. A few armed men on horses rode in front, followed by the Jewish militia. Then the dead. After the dead came the families of the dead. Anyone who was able to walk walked in terror. Who knew who would be next? Half the town might be dead that same night! We reached the cemetery. Although I had seen many dead people, this was the first time I was actually in a cemetery.

The dead were buried in one common grave just as they were brought in. Their clothes were all stained in blood, with faces bruised and swollen. While they were being lowered into the grave, Sorel, Gidale, Rivka, and I, with a cousin's aid, went to look for Father, who lay nearby. A wooden box resembling a bird cage was Father's monument. This was the first and last time Rivka and I saw Father's eternal resting place. We stayed there and cried our hearts out. Then we all walked back to town.

CHAPTER 7

When We Came Home

Dreaming of America

When we came back home from Father's grave, we found Mother tired and worried. She didn't know where we'd been and what had happened to us. We hadn't told her where we'd gone, for fear that she, too, would have wanted to go. And that was no place for her. Mother saw that we were upset and worried, and she tried very hard to cheer us up. That night, we were afraid to fall asleep. We didn't even take off our shoes. We couldn't get the sight of the dead out of our minds.

That afternoon, while we were gone, Uncle Levik had come to see Mother. They talked all afternoon. Uncle helped Mother with some of her most difficult problems. Mother had to make a difficult decision – we would have perished with the wrong move.

Uncle Levik, whom I didn't like as well as I did his brother Mendel, was a cool and calculating scholar. Father and Mother both liked him and valued his opinion. Now that Mother was alone, she depended a good deal on him for advice. She also had a number of friends who had understood, valued, and liked my father. A few of these friends went so far as to call him a *lamed vovnik*. Legend has it that there are *lamed vov* (thirty-six) saintly men whose piety sustains the world. These few friends of my father now became my mother's friends.

It was difficult for Mother to get around much. Her illness had left her extremely fragile. She was sick – more sick than we children were capable of fully understanding. But we began to see that Mother was

not as she used to be. We therefore made no demands of her. We were happy only to hear her voice and see her as she was. We looked at her as something sacred.

Mother began to look at us and see how neglected we all were. All of us youngsters had sores on our hands and between our fingers. They itched and bled. Rivka had sores even on her back. Mother became busy with remedies. She began to make her own medicine to cure our hands. She took excrement from the chicken and some powder from an old tree and cooked it together till it became like a salve, which she applied to our hands and to other sores.

Mother now had a mission in life that she had to fulfill, and she tried very hard to do it. Her desire to do things for her children was so great that it overcame her physical limitations. Her frail little body began moving around as if she were under a hypnotic spell. Overstrained, her body became a shadow to her spirit. She had three small children who depended on her, and she was not going to fail us. We had an address in America where her two oldest sons were living. She had to find a way out of her dilemma without money. It was April 1921, and she knew that she had to find a way to get to Poland and from there contact her two sons in America.

Rivka began to get attention from our friend Yechiel. He still carried the water for us, only more frequently. Many times, he stayed longer than usual. He even took her for short walks. Rivka, too young for romance, did not take it seriously at the time. She only realized later that Yechiel liked her. She was a good-looking girl, and he was a handsome young man. Yechiel was taken into the family confidences regarding plans of our attempt to go to Poland. That was painful for him, as he realized his friendship with Rivka would come to an end if our plans were carried out. Mother's courage was gaining momentum. Her final decision had to be made quickly. Hesitation might delay things, and that would have bad results.

Gidale was also busy. He was out most of the day looking for work and seeing his friends. One day Gidale came home with six pairs of boots. One of his friends had advised him to exchange some of the

silver money for these boots, which were to be taken to America. Mother became disturbed over the advice given by Gidale's friends. "Who needs boots in America?" Mother asked Gidale. She assured him that in America people had different shoes and that he should take the boots back to his friend. Gidale's friendship with the boot salesman came to an abrupt end when he returned the boots.

Ishiah and I had no friends. We were just with each other. Ishiah had to watch the cow. He had to give her water and hay between milking, at which time she ate a bigger meal. During Ishiah's heroic actions, I remained silent and out of sight. I felt much safer behind a closed door or a window.

After Ishiah left the barn and closed the door behind him, I joined him, and we both played outside, often beneath the blossoming tree. The early May days with the blue, clear sky and warm sun kept us outside all throughout the day. While we played, Mother was busy making arrangements to get to Poland. The cow was the only thing we could turn to. How far could the cow take us? What magic power did she have? The cow would have to take us to America. But how? Mother and Uncle Levik found a coachman who was willing to take us up to the river near a town called Milchen in exchange for the cow. But Milchen was a far cry from our destination. What would happen after we reached Milchen? Could the silver money we had be used there? Everything was uncertain and dangerous. But the chance had to be taken in order to get to America. There was but one way for us, and that way was through Poland, because it was the closest country to us. The cow, Massicle's mother, which was a year or two older than I, would have to go to strange people once more and stay there for the rest of her life. She had been a real friend. First, she gave us milk; now she would take us to America.

Leaving Russia

On May 10, 1922, the coachman stopped in front of the house. Uncle Levik was with Mother. He had come to see her and us for the last time.

The four pillows and the *miltek,* a wooden vessel that Mother used to make the challah (egg twist bread) for Shabbos – which she had brought from Varovitch on her last trip – were placed on the wagon. And all of us began crawling into the wagon one by one. A lifelong neighbor of ours from Varovitch ran breathlessly to say goodbye to us. She and my mother kissed and cried. Pretty soon, more people came up to watch the spectacle. Uncle Levik told the coachman to drive away quickly for reasons of safety. Uncle Levik remained standing until we could no longer see him.

The coachman was driving us to Milchen. Milchen itself was only some twenty-five or thirty versts (sixteen to twenty miles) from Chabno,[1] but the roads and forests were extremely dangerous to go through. We were frightened all the way and wondered where we were going. We reached Milchen safely in the evening after what seemed like an endless journey. In Milchen were many people like ourselves from different towns who all were trying to go to America. Milchen, a tiny town, had thus become very overcrowded. Mother found a lodging where we had to stay for a few days before we could see the man who delivered the Russian subjects across the border to the Polish gendarmes.

We stayed in Milchen a few days and got to know some people. Rivka and I were very well liked by all immediately. They all thought that we were very charming and fine girls. The people who gave us shelter had girls our age with whom we became friendly. One of the girls liked my little blue French beret, which I treasured, and offered me a bone with meat on it in exchange for the beret. I had made the beret myself, and it was most becoming with my long braids. I hated to part with my beret, as it was the only thing left from my beautiful city of Chernobyl. If only I had not worn that beret! But I wouldn't refuse the exchange when the six of us were hungry, so my beret went in exchange for one meal. Mother cooked a soup, and the little girl from Milchen had my beret.

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1. Edith appears to underestimate the distance. Chabno (modern-day Poliske) is approximately ninety miles from Milchen (modern-day Yemil'chyne).

Mother made arrangements with the man who had to take us across the border into Poland. He told us to cross that river at night and that a Polish guide would meet us on the other side and take us to our destination. He took the three hundred silver rubles from Mother in advance and assured us that everything would go smoothly. The agent also managed to take Sorel's golden watch and chain when no one was around.

Wandering in a Polish Forest

After sunset, the agent told us to get ready to cross the border. He brought us up to the river and told us to go across on foot. The water was up to our necks (or to the waist for tall people). We crossed the cold river and came out wet and cold. We began to look for the Polish sentry, our messiah, but he was not there. We looked on all sides, in all directions for a man. Instead we saw guns lying on the ground, as well as soldiers' coats. Music played in a nearby village. Dogs barked, but there was no Polish guide. We kept on walking so as to keep warm. Several hours went by, and we still saw no one. We then decided to walk through the forest on our own. We walked in the dark aimlessly. We suddenly discovered that we had become separated from each other in the forest. Mother, Ishiah, and I were holding on to each other, but Gidale, Sorel, and Rivka were missing. We started to look for them. They must also have been looking for us. Mother began to feel faint from the strain and panic. Ishiah and I held on to her. What should we do? Remain in one spot and wait for them, or continue the search? By then we were weary. If only they would join us. If only we could find them. Whatever would happen then would not matter much. At least we would all be together.

We must have circled that one spot in the forest many times thinking that the lost half of the family had been trapped by some bandits. After all, we saw guns and coats, so there were soldiers around. We were afraid to call them for fear of being discovered. It turned out that they were afraid to call us for the same reason. We all walked in silence.

Our search went on for about an hour, but it seemed much longer. As we were about to give up in despair, we decided to circle around once more. Just then we ran into them. We were too weary and tense to be jubilant. We chained our hands together and resumed our march through the forest. We realized that we had been deceived by the agent and that there was nothing we could do about it. We couldn't even speak Polish. To be caught by the Poles would have meant death for us. To go back to Russia was just as bad. Thus we were stranded in a Polish forest, not knowing which way to go. We wanted to go back to the river and sit there and wait for the soldiers to pick us up. Anything then would have been better than walking aimlessly. Even to be shot would have been a relief. It would have put an end to our suffering.

The music still played, and the dogs barked. We knew that we were near a village. Through the trees, we saw lights here and there. It was past midnight. Our teeth were chattering, and our feet gave out under us. Mother said we would go to the nearest house with lights and knock on the door no matter what the results would be. We stumbled through some rough ground until we reached a house. At one knock, the door opened, and a frightened man appeared. He put the sign of the cross on his head and chest and said in Russian, "Good people, the Lord be with you. What has brought you here?"

Mother begged him to let us in to warm up. He took great pity on us and let us in. His wife was asleep, he said. And his son was in the forests with the bad boys. He promised to guide us through the forest early in the morning. He then told us to rest on the ground in his one-room house. We lay down and fell asleep just as we were, in our clothes. It was a slumber of exhaustion. At dawn, the man awakened us. He wanted to get us out of the house before his son returned, but when we got up and the man saw the ground upon which we had slept, he became frightened. Our bodies were wet when we lay down, so our bodies had left dents on the ground. The man feared we would be discovered through those marks. He hurriedly rushed us out of the house. He walked in front of us at some distance, and we followed him. The man told us not to walk together. It would be safer if we were spaced

out a bit. On the way, we met all kinds of people. We walked through fields rather than on a road where the soldiers were, so we were taken for shepherds who were grazing their cattle and sheep. Along the way, we saw many soldiers, but they were on the road, and we were a good distance away in the pasture fields. That good Russian saved our lives with his advice.

The sun was way past noon by the time we reached the town of Korets. The good Russian knew his way around. He brought us into a Jewish home on a hill. He knew how to go through gardens and backyards. And it was through a backyard that the Russian delivered us to a Jewish house. The people asked him to rest a little and offered us all black bread and spinach borscht, which we and our Russian messiah ate. We wanted to pay him for all the trouble we caused him but, unfortunately, we did not have a penny. Gidale was wearing two pair of pants. I remember him taking off one pair and giving it to the Russian. The Russian man was tall, and Gidale was short. How the Russian could wear those pants, which he did, was one of those miracles that we were getting used to. Nevertheless, the pants fit, and they were a real help to him. The Russian was a poverty-stricken man. He could not get adjusted under the Polish regime. He had no land and was starving.

After we were fed, we washed, cleaned, and rested a little from our journey of that day and the previous night. Our new host then asked us to follow him across the town to the synagogue. In the synagogue, our new host said we would get to know some people who might be able to help us. By now, we had reached the point of not caring what they did with us. At last we were in a small town in Poland by the name of Korets. Walking through the town was fun. We attracted everyone's attention. Rivka looked the funniest of all. She limped on one foot. She had lost a heel in the forest at night, and no one noticed it. Her limp became quite apparent when we walked through the town.

In the synagogue, we were surrounded by all the people who came for the evening services. It happened to be Shavuos, as we were soon reminded. It didn't take long before plenty of food was brought for us.

The people suggested that we sleep there too. The synagogue became our new home, the hard benches our beds, the people our benefactors. We had plenty of food. Everyone who came to pray brought food for "the refugees." We liked it – life was getting easy for us. Ishiah said Kaddish twice a day. Even that was convenient. He didn't have to go out. Rivka and I were invited to stay in the home of the town's musician, a very nice and clean home. Gidale even got a job. The rest of the family stayed in the synagogue about three or four weeks. Until one day, we were discovered by the Polish police. The musician in whose house Rivka and I stayed had a son who was connected with the police. When he heard that we had been discovered, he informed us immediately and warned us to leave town. Gidale had earned some money during our stay in Korets, which was just about enough to pay for our transportation. Mother hired a coachman, and we went off to Rovno, the next town. There we would apply for Polish passports at the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), and the police would not bother us. Our passport would protect us until we contacted America.

Rovno

We arrived in Rovno. It was one step closer to America. The driver brought us to his house, and we began to look for a place to live. In the driver's house, things looked pretty bad. His little girl of about two years old lay dying in a crib. Her blue eyes and blond curls still haunt me. It was a little face for a painter or sculptor.

We rented a place across the alley from the driver's house. I call it an alley because it was a very narrow and dirty street. The basement apartment that we moved into consisted of two rooms. The four of us shared one bedroom containing one bed and a small table with two chairs. At night, we would take off one door, place one end of the door on the bed and the other end on the chair, and make a second bed. We were content with the little we had. It was much better than what we had had just a few weeks previously.

We would have to wait in Rovno until all the legal matters were

cleared. In the meantime, we had to eat and pay rent. Actually, we shouldn't have had to pay any rent, because we served as rat chasers. The place was infested with rats. They jumped all over us at night in bed. The two cats were not sufficient to clear the place. What the basement needed was Petlura's army. One day Mother opened the oven to cook some potatoes. The rats, seeing the fire, began to jump out of the oven into the pot, at Mother, anywhere and everywhere. Mother put out the fire, and that was the end of her cooking. We lived in that basement about six months. Perhaps it was just as well that Mother couldn't cook there, since she had nothing to cook anyway. For several months, we lived on large herring, bread, and water.

Gidale found a job as soon as we came to Rovno. He and Sorel lived in the driver's house across the street. Their place was much nicer than ours. Gidale also got a job for Rivka in his place. Mother, Ishiah, and I were busy running to the HIAS daily, writing letters to my brother Arel's address in America and to our older brother, Chaim, still hoping that he would show up some day. We used to write Chaim at several different addresses, hoping against hope that somehow his mail would be forwarded to him. In the meantime, we received fifty dollars from my brothers in America, and we began getting mail regularly. We began to feel like human beings again. Mother gave Sorel fifteen dollars and put the remaining thirty-five aside for the passports, if and when they would be ready.

Several months passed, and it was becoming clear that our Polish passports would not be ready for some time yet. This was the answer each time we went to the HIAS. Gidale got a little job for me too. I worked hard and earned enough to buy herring. Mother told us that she would not ask Shmuel and Arel in America for more money. We would have to manage on what we had. Rivka and I would have to hold on to our jobs, good or bad. Both jobs and the relief help that we occasionally received provided us barely enough to get by.

I began to suffer from a delayed emotional reaction to our upheaval. My throat and stomach were my weak points. Whenever I had sensed trouble during the previous few years (from 1918 to 1922), my throat

would lock, and I was unable to swallow even a drop of water. Next, I would have terrible cramps. My cramps would usually come at night, and when things would go back to normal, my stomach would go back to normal. In Rovno, eating herring all the time made my stomach more sick than ever.

During the day, I was fine, but the nights were terrible. Mother and I were awake most of the time. Mother was still sick, and I was too. We both needed to eat hot cooked food. Mother began to go to the market, but she could buy very little for the money she had. Further, she had to shop with the marks that Rivka and I earned rather than with American dollars, which many people were using. As a result, she was treated as a refugee rather than as an immigrant. Who would bother with a refugee woman when the town was flourishing with the immigrants? After a long walk and a wait at the market, Mother would come home with a meat bone. But she had no place to cook it. She couldn't cook in the rat-infested oven; she had to find a neighbor who would let her cook the pot of soup. There always seemed to be a good Samaritan. If only she had a bigger piece of meat to make it worth the bother.

When I went to work, Ishiah was left on his own. He proved to be very capable, alert, and extremely intelligent for a child of eight. He ran all his errands, visiting the HIAS daily, often twice a day. He ran to get our mail. The only mail we received was from my brothers Arel and Shmuel in America. And that was not daily. Ishiah, however, took no chances. He went to see for himself what was happening in the HIAS. He soon became known to all the people there. On one of his trips there, he thought that he saw Chaim near one of the windows. Ishiah looked at the young man, who looked at Ishiah, but they didn't speak. Ishiah's mind worked very quickly. He ran to find me where I worked and told me the story. In an instant, we were both on the street running to the HIAS. We ran fast for fear that Chaim might be gone by the time we got there. And it was lucky that we ran. Chaim was already leaving to Korets to look for us. We came in just as he was about to leave.

CHAPTER 8

One Step Closer to America

I Recognized Chaim Immediately

I recognized Chaim immediately and he me. But Chaim had not known Ishiah when he saw him earlier. Ishiah had grown since the time Chaim had last seen him. Besides, as far as Chaim was concerned, we were in Korets. He had just received our letter from there. When I came in, I ran up to Chaim and fell on his neck crying convulsively. Our meeting was a most dramatic one. Whoever was at HIAS turned to us. When we explained to them the nature of our meeting, they all joined us in our joy as well as tears. Chaim had come back to us from the dead. What a happy moment! We walked home together. How would Chaim be brought to meet Mother? The shock might be too much for her. We told him about Father's death. We soon came to the narrow street where we lived. We turned the corner, and soon we were in our basement. Mother was at home. Ishiah was first to walk in. Chaim and I followed. The meeting between Mother and Chaim was as could be expected. There were tears of joy and sorrow. Mother said that she should never again be separated from her children. With Chaim's homecoming, our home life became much easier. Now Chaim would take over the big jobs. He would look after the passports and try to get the visas. Things became much easier for all of us.

Our one room was much too small for us. Sleeping space became a big problem. We soon had to look for new quarters. It was very difficult to find a room large enough for five people. This became Chaim's job.

He did all the chasing and looking. After a long search that took many weeks, Chaim found a house on the other end of town. Although that four-room house already housed two families, it was much better than our basement room. Our new room had two beds. Chaim and Ishiah shared one bed; Mother, Rivka, and I had the other one. It was a ground floor, and the other families were nice.

The owners of our basement room on Krasnaia Street had rarely been home. They went with their daughter every day to the market, where they had a stand. But during the times they were home, it had been quite impossible to withstand the noise they made. They argued and shouted continuously. We used to close our door to keep out the noise. With the closing of the door, we also shut out all the light and air. The room was small, dark, and damp. The walls were gray with mold.

The house we were moving into was beautiful by comparison, and we were sure of having water at all times. The man of the house, by trade, was a water carrier. They were very old people, and kind. Our room also had a window, a table, and chairs. Mother could cook there, and it was warm. We lived there through the coldest time of the year, from October until February or March.

We began to look at Chaim as our protector. He became more to us than just a big brother. He became a partner to Mother, someone with whom she could share her worries. He was a big help to her in all respects. He acted as doctor and nurse to me when an infection set in in my right eye. I used to get up in the morning with my eyes shut tight and with a quarter of an inch of pus on my eyelids. Every morning, Chaim would bathe and clean the pus from my eyes in order to force them open. Between my stomach and eyes, I was sick most of the time. Toward midwinter, I began to feel a little better.

Chaim's return meant the return of a friend, a teacher, someone big and intelligent to whom I could always tell my problems. Chaim was my big brother, with whom I had a shared history.

I remember one instance when I was still in school in Varovitch. I had come home one day very depressed and extremely unhappy. The teacher had explained long division in mathematics, and I couldn't

understand him. The thought of sitting in class and not knowing my work was more than I could bear. But when I confided my shame to Chaim, he immediately put me on his lap and explained long division to me in such a way that I later excelled in arithmetic. I could quote instance after instance when I ran to Chaim with a heavy heart that had to be unloaded, and he listened and understood.

Another instance was when I was about seven or eight years old. I hit a little pig accidentally with a stone on his hind leg and broke it. As the pig belonged to a peasant, this was a most serious affair. It was lucky for me and my family that the little pig couldn't talk. The little pig, free of prejudice, ran straight to his yard and collapsed there. My conscience was not free until I told Chaim about it.

Waiting for Our Passports

It was winter 1922, and life in Rovno began to drag for us. We saw people come and leave, but our Polish passports were not yet ready, and without them, we could not apply for visas to America. Chaim went to the HIAS daily, and finally, the news became more encouraging. Our passports would be ready before spring came around again. This meant that in a few more months, we too would finally start moving onward.

In the meantime, we held on to our jobs. We had to eat and pay rent. At least our waiting at this point had a purpose. For soon we too would reach our destination and finally have a home, something Mother needed very badly. She was unable to hold up physically. She was like a broken doll pasted together and broke down under any strain. Rivka seemed to have adjusted better than any of us. She had met a few young men who called on her occasionally and took her for walks. At times they even brought candy and nuts.

For the rest of us, it was a matter of waiting. Soon we would part from Chaim again. Since he was well past sixteen, he would not be admitted to America to join our brothers. Children up to sixteen and parents were allowed to go under the quota at that time. Mother and

we three younger children could go to North America. Chaim, Sorel, and Gidale would have to go to South America. When this was certain, Mother became quite unhappy. We had received our affidavit from America and our tickets. Sorel, Gidale, and Chaim could have gone on before us, but they waited for us to go first. Chaim accompanied us part of the way, up to Warsaw. From then on, Mother and we youngsters – Ishiah, Rivka, and myself – would go on alone. Chaim decided to stay with us in Warsaw until we received our visas.

From Warsaw to Danzig

We arrived in Warsaw in the late afternoon at the Praga railway station. In a short time, we found ourselves in a very big tenement building in an area known as the Nalewki-Muranów district. Nalewki Street was at the center of the battle of the Warsaw Ghetto some twenty years later. After a few days, we moved over to another big building on Świętokrzyska Street, where we stayed until we left Poland. Warsaw was a beautiful city, full of grandeur and splendor. I was extremely fascinated by its gigantic size and beauty, but it also felt cold and strange. Ishiah learned parts of the city quickly. He knew which streetcar to take wherever we had to go. And he was Mother's guide on all her trips.

Our stay in Warsaw was a short one, for we soon obtained our visas and were happy. But our happiness was short lived. One evening, Mother discovered that she had lost our visas to America. That meant more separations. Mother would have to go to South America with the other three children. We youngsters, under sixteen years of age, would be shipped to New York with the orphans. Mother cried and was very sick all night. The occupants on the floor who were also immigrants grieved with us over our loss and tried to be helpful. Mother and Chaim decided to go to the American Consulate office early in the morning and relate the story. It seemed morning would never come. Nights can be treacherously and mercilessly long.

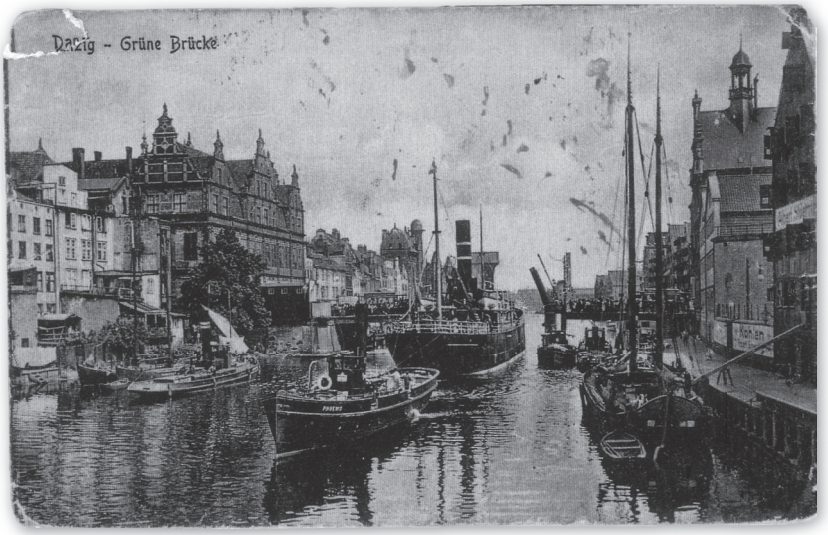
After a long, sleepless, tortured night, morning finally came; with it, both our hopes and fears increased. Would our hope of going to

Edith's Polish passport, 1922

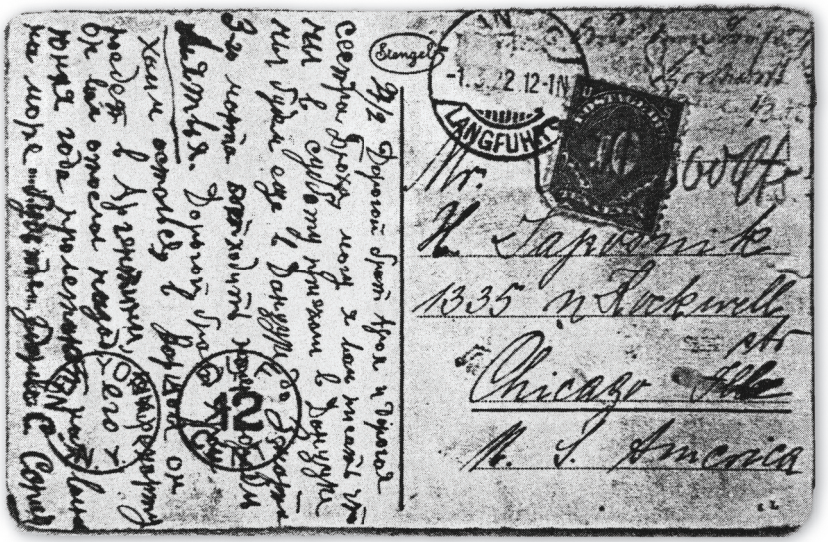
America be realized, or would Mother have to be separated from us youngsters? Mother needed us, and we needed her even more. That day would determine our fate. We sat and waited endlessly, speechless, nervous, and hopeless. As usual, under a heavy strain or worry, I didn't eat. I dare say, no one ate that morning. Mother and Chaim left early in the morning so that they could be the first ones at the consulate office. They returned much earlier and much happier than we had dared expect. The stamped visas on the passports had been returned to Mother. A janitor who had found them the day before where Mother had dropped them had returned them to the consular office, and when Mother came home, people we had become friends with congratulated and kissed her. Some even danced from joy. We children were all bewildered but happy. In a few days, we would leave Warsaw for Danzig (Gdańsk), where we would board the ship for America.

It was Friday afternoon when we left Warsaw. And Chaim? Chaim stayed with us on the train until it began to move. Then he got off, and we looked out the window for one more glance at him. It felt lonely without Chaim. The train was not too clean, nor was it in good shape. It was very crowded. We traveled all night and reached Danzig in the morning. From the train, we were directed to go to the barracks where all the immigrants were housed. The place was clean and warm, and we were given good food. We stood in line three times a day for our food, which was included in our ticket passage. Hot soup, bread and butter – all we wanted. Milk and coffee, sugar, oranges. What luxuries! We stayed in Danzig one week, and we went through different medical exams several times a day. We saw nothing of that city. We were afraid to leave our barracks for fear of getting lost. The only time we left the gates was when we went to the harbor to board the *Latvia.*

On February 27, I wrote a postcard in Russian and sent it to my brother Arel and his wife in America informing him of our whereabouts and when we would leave for America. I sent it to the address written on the scrap of paper I had sewn into the hem of my flannel dress. It was miraculously preserved through the years.



Edith's postcard from Danzig to her brothers in Chicago, 1922



Same postcard, back. It reads, in Russian: "I am able to write that we arrived on Saturday in Danzig. We will stay in Danzig until March 3 when we will board the ship *Latvia*. Dear brother Arel, Chaim will stay in Warsaw until he goes to Argentina. He has sent his ticket back to you. His youth is flying away like the waves on the sea. Be well, Eda Saposnik."

Many uprooted Jews trying to find a safe haven to call home – postcard from Danzig, 1922

Aboard Ship

On board our ship, we felt safe and sound. In a few weeks, we would be in America. What had been a dream to us for so long would finally become a reality. Being aboard ship seemed to mean leaving behind our horrible memories. It also meant leaving behind Father, for Father would never come to join us in our new home. Aboard ship, a new life began for us. In a few weeks, we would be far away from Petlura, Denikin, the Balachovtzes, and all the other gangsters. We would be far away from the imposed starvation and pestilence that we had to endure for so many years. Our childhood years would only be a nightmare. What memories!

Aboard ship, I felt free. I took advantage of all the opportunities offered us. Mother and Rivka were seasick. Ishiah and I felt wonderful. We ate all we could and sometimes more. Many times, Ishiah and I ran to the dining room after all the people left the tables and helped ourselves to the leftovers, enjoying a second meal. Ishiah and I ate

and ate and ate. Young as we were, we enjoyed the social life on the ship, although we did not directly participate in it. We knew all the people – the help in the kitchen, the waiters, everybody. For us it represented freedom of movement, expression of energy, and fulfillment of curiosity. With each rocking or swaying of the boat, new hopes were kindled in our hearts – we were going to America. And Mother was with us. Our whole trip aboard ship was most pleasant. Our dream had come true. We were so much luckier than all those suffering people we had left behind.

Our joy, however, was a bit offset by Mother's worries. She worried about Chaim, Sorel, and Gidale, who hadn't been able to come along with us. And she also worried because our entry to America was through Canada instead of New York's Ellis Island. She didn't realize at the time that Shmulik and Arel had arranged the easier entry for us, sparing us much more stringent physical exams. Further, Mother was seasick all twelve days of our journey on ship, and Rivka was not much better. So they both stayed in the cabin most of the time. Ishiah and I promenaded through every deck and often got lost. We began to feel like children again.

Our journey soon came to an end. On March 15, 1922, we landed in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in Canada, where we spent the night. Our entrance to Canada was without incident. The next day, we went to Montreal. From there, we traveled to Detroit, where we entered America easily. Chicago was our last stop.

PART III

Chicago

CHAPTER 9

Relief and Adjustment

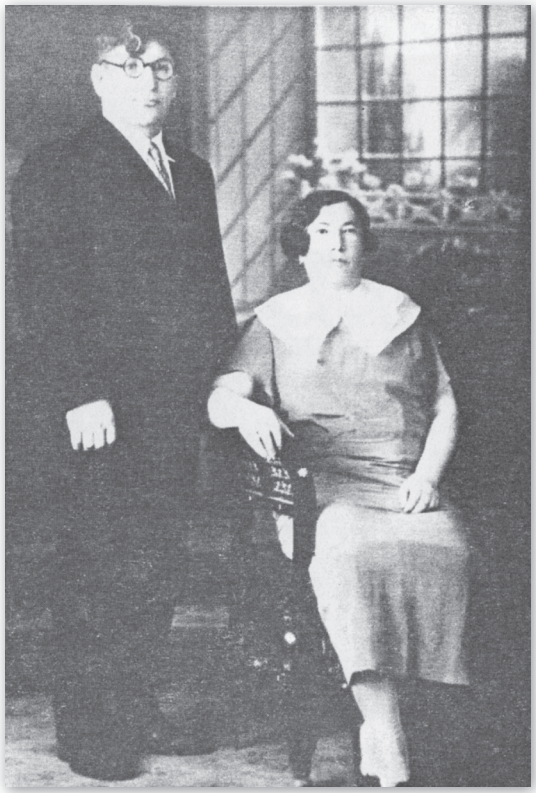
We Arrived in Chicago

On the train to Chicago, Mother felt much relieved. She realized that her worries that we would be detained at immigration had been unfounded. Our next concern was whether anyone would meet us at the station. Had my brothers received our telegrams from Canada and Detroit?

It was late in the evening when we arrived in Chicago at the Dearborn Station. The four of us got off the train and followed all the other people to the waiting room. All at once, a group of people approached us. There were my two brothers, Shmuel and Arel, their wives, and a few cousins. Two separate groups suddenly became one. Kissing and crying followed. Since we had no baggage, we simply got into a cab and went to our new home.

Our temporary home was with Cousin Pinchas. While he had come to meet us, his wife Raizel had prepared food and beds for us. We made ourselves at home until we moved into our permanent home with brother Arel (now called Harry) and his wife, Bertha (Bracha).

After a brief rest from the journey, we had to settle down to a normal life. A life with an eye to the future. We had to start learning English. As luck would have it, all our relatives spoke what seemed to me to be a fine English. I constantly heard the words "sure" and "all right." The telephone frightened me. It rang like a doorbell, a fascinating machine. The receiver was picked up, and two people seemed to be talking, but



Gidale and Sorel Basovsky, Buenos Aires, 1930

I could hear only one side. Again, the words "sure," "later," "all right." What did they mean? How strange it was not to understand what people were talking about. The Russian language was so much easier. In Poland, we had understood Polish. In Danzig, we had understood German. But English sounded altogether strange. How happy I would have been to know the meaning of the words "sure" and "all right." I was determined to begin the study of English immediately. But before we could think of school, we had to look for jobs. My brothers had brought us over and also paid the passage for Chaim, Gidale, and Sorel to go to South America. They were left penniless.

Brother Shmuel, now Sam, had just finished medical school when we arrived. Harry had two more years to go in dental school. And he

and Bertha were expecting a baby. In fact, Sam and his wife, Ida, were expecting a baby also. Mother was very happy about it. She would have grandchildren. But things were very tight financially.

Rivka was now called Evelyn and I, formerly Yehudit, became Edith. We both had to go to work immediately in order to pay the rent. Sam and Ida roomed with some people who owned a tailor shop. Evelyn and I each found jobs at twelve dollars a week. We gave Mother twenty-two dollars and kept two dollars for car fares. Our rent was fifty dollars a month, plus gas and electricity. Mother decided to rent out one bedroom for fifteen dollars a month, which lowered the rent to thirty-five dollars. After all, our money had to feed six people. And at times we children ate double a normal portion. As much as we ate, we still seemed to be hungry from life in Russia. It took us about six months before we felt satisfied after meals. Many times, Mother would take us into the bedroom at night and feed us again. Mother was afraid to have anyone see how we behaved. Our hunger pangs were just maddening. In spite of all my eating, I began to lose the fat I had gained on the boat.

We Were Happy in Our New Home

We were happy in our new home. We had peace and security, no fear of pogroms, no attacks from any bandits. When we returned from work, we found a clean, warm house and substantial food on the table. It felt like a real home, after so many years without one. Mother made a good home for all of us. Having Harry and Bertha in the same house made things a lot easier for us. Our living together made us feel like one big, happy family. We felt accepted from the moment we had been brought here, and we shared the little that we all had. Mother was worried that my brothers had spent all their money to rescue us. When my brothers had first come to America, they had lived in Hartford, Connecticut, with my father's youngest sister, Aunt Machla. They had to struggle very hard to earn a living and go to school. They did all kinds of work: teaching Hebrew, carpentry, selling, and all sorts of jobs. After marriage,

their wives took over the job of working, and they studied. They had not been able to send us extra dollars when we were in Poland. Thus, as I mentioned before, we had not been treated as "immigrants" but as penniless "refugees" until the day we received our passports and were ready to leave.

Looking for Work

We didn't fare too well at our new jobs. The two partners who owned the tailor shop were about ready to go out of business. In the meantime, they demanded a birth certificate from Evelyn. She was older but smaller than I. I had to cut my braids in order to look older. We worked from day to day in fear of losing our jobs. It's difficult to feel secure when you don't know the language of the land. This was Evelyn's second job; she began to work before I did. Her first job, which lasted a very short time, frightened her a little. When the lunch bell rang on her first day of work, she remained sitting at her place, not knowing what it meant. The girls she worked with tried to tell her that it was lunchtime. Evelyn still remained sitting at her work station. Finally, someone came and put a finger to her mouth to indicate eating. Evelyn then took out her sandwich and began eating it hungrily.

We were not the only workers in this little shop. There were three more immigrant girls who had come a few months before we did. We all spoke Russian and Yiddish and tried to learn English words from each other. In a few months, our fears were borne out. The little shop did close down. Job hunting began once again. Bertha's sister took Evelyn to the Union of Amalgamated Workers. Evelyn received a job through the union at Hart, Schaffner and Marx clothing factory, where she worked for several years until she married. I was left without a job. Evelyn advised me to go to the union also. Bertha took me to the union and was my spokeswoman. I, too, received a job at a small shop, where I worked a few months. In the meantime, we enrolled in sixth grade at the JPI (Jewish People's Institute), and we began to learn English very quickly. I did much better in school than on my jobs. The union

sent me from shop to shop on new jobs. Not knowing the clothing terminology, I was often confused. Finally, I was fired from a new job without understanding the reason why. I got paid for that day and went back to the union the very next day.

Hart, Shaffner and Marx – Number 3492

The business agent asked me what I could do, and I boldly answered, "Oh, anything that would be a good job." Well, there was one vacancy at the Hart, Schaffner and Marx vest shop. It was a difficult job that required experience I did not have. I accepted the job, but when the manager saw me, he refused to hire me. He asked me what grade I was in. I answered quickly that I was already in high school. Then he asked my age. I had to lie and say that I was older than I really was. I was hired but had little pleasure on the job. I made very little, since I didn't know the work. The manager thought I had experience, so he left me on my own, thinking that I would get used to the work in a few days. None of my work passed the examiner, and what work I did in the morning had to be redone in the afternoon. This went on for months until it wore me out. One Saturday morning, I awoke feeling very sick. I began to dress to go to work but couldn't make it. The next thing I knew, I had pneumonia, which kept me home a good many weeks. When I was ready to return to work, I found myself without a job. My union found another job for me with a little higher salary at another shop, but this one did not work out either. I went back to the union again and wound up back at Hart, Schaffner and Marx, where, as it turned out, I worked for many years.

Before my illness, I had managed, with Mother's help, to save up fourteen dollars for a dress. I held on to the money for dear life because I wanted a new dress so badly. But when Mother ran short for the rent, she had to use the money. No dress and no job left me very discouraged.

I hated to go to new jobs so often. I was frightened of new bosses. Each shop had its own rules to follow. I still remember my first impres-

sions of the Hart, Schaffner and Marx factory. In the winter, a sliding door would separate the two shops called F and S. In the spring, the sliding door went up, and F and S would join as one big shop. The two shops together were about a block long and three floors high. There were very many people on our floor. I was given the number 3492. The shop was a town in itself, with people of all types and ages – old people, young people, and children such as myself, ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous.

My first contact, unfortunately, was with the ridiculous. I received abuse from one particular character whose foul language I tried to ignore. Later, however, I met a young girl who became a lifelong friend. Another coworker – a young, intelligent Russian fellow – became friendly with me and gave me books to read. We often discussed important problems such as school, studies, and literature, and talked about personal matters. My contact with these sublime people made my job less unbearable than it started out to be at first. I later began to see that it made very little difference what a person did for a living. A fine person remained a fine person, and a brute was always a brute.

However, my school evenings were far more attractive than work. In school, I found an outlet for my desires to learn. I found a good many friends, some of whom I stayed in touch with all my life. School was an outlet for my walled-up emotions. In addition, some of the teachers took a personal interest in me, which helped me a great deal.

CHAPTER 10

Becoming an American

These Were Years with a Purpose

My first six or seven years in America were years with a purpose. I went to school, learned English, and came to appreciate the fine things America had to offer. I pursued my interest in music, literature, and art, which became part of me. I always had time for my two dear friends. When I graduated from high school and had free evenings, I read more and attended concerts and lectures, but I still had too much time.

I found my work uninteresting but was afraid of trying something else. I had to earn my livelihood, and my job was a secure one. I started college in the evening and found it difficult. Perhaps my purpose in life was slipping away, and so were my good intentions for a higher education. I could not afford to go to daytime classes. If Father had been alive and supporting us, things would have been different.

Mother had enough to worry about regarding the boys' education, let alone mine. I was a girl who would get married, and all my problems would be solved. Evelyn was married and had a child. She was very much in love with Sam, her husband, but her life was hard, since her husband was away at college in a different town. Mother watched the baby while Evelyn went to work. She was happy; she worked with a purpose in life. Mother carried the burden of how to pay for Sam's college and also that of Chaim, who had now arrived from Argentina. Chaim – now called Haime – and Sam were going to the same school, Valparaiso University in Indiana, to study pharmacy. Harry, Bertha,

and their two children (Reuben and Ruth), Evelyn and her baby (Willy), my mother, Ishiah, and I all lived together. (Sam's daughter Vivian, Harry's Reuben and Ruth, and Evelyn's Willy, as well as her son Zimi [Steve] and Haime's son Reuben, who would be born later, were all named after our father, Zev Reuven "Velvel.") Mother still kept a boarder, because twenty dollars a month was good money when you had two children in school.

Mother worked very hard. Shopping, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of a baby was much more than she could physically endure. Yet fragile though she was, she never complained; she couldn't give up. Her task as a mother was not yet finished with two children in college. She couldn't fail them; she had to make it. My two oldest brothers, practicing in their professions by then, contributed toward Mother's budget. I worked, and Ishiah went to yeshiva and worked after school, where he was paid four dollars a week.

Mother the Homemaker

Mother did not spend a penny for her own use. My oldest brother wanted her to drink cream, and she promised she would, but she drank milk or water instead to save the money. My brother, Harry, paid the rent and all other bills; Mother took care of the food. She walked a mile to save a dime. No distance was too far and no work too hard. She did it all for her children. She knew how to shop well and cheaply. When friends came to the house on Saturday or Sunday, she always had enough of her baked goods to serve, no matter how many there were.

My years in America meant much to me. I grew up and read books on health and hygiene and understood the changes occurring in my body and that I was normal according to the books. I still remembered the bewilderment and fright I had felt in Russia and Poland about the changes occurring in my body. If only someone had talked to me about them, I might have been spared needless agony. But who could think of these things when you were in danger from all sides and could get killed at any moment?

I Became Very Lonely

Before Haime and Evelyn were married, we were part of a large circle of friends. All of our friends intermingled – Haime's friends, Evelyn's friends, and my own. Evelyn dated more than I did, so I was often thrown together with Haime's friends. Among Haime's friends, I was attracted to one man very much, or so I thought then. This young man was very scholarly and poetic and knew literature very well. He represented all the things that I wanted for myself and that I always loved and admired in Haime. My attraction to this young man now led me to believe that I loved him. He used to come to the house very often, and we all took long walks on Douglas Boulevard and the adjoining park, especially during the summer months. Since my demands were small and my expectations limited, I went on thinking I was in love. But nothing came of this infatuation.

I attracted several other friends of Haime who wanted to date me. But for some reason, I always gave negative answers. How could I go out with someone when I had neither desire nor affection for him? Other girls went out with many young men before they married. Why couldn't I? I always heard the same story from the family. "You don't have to marry him in order to go out with him." I always recognized the fact that you don't marry every person you go out with, but I couldn't always apply it to myself. In groups, I adjusted easily to people, but alone, it was a different story.

After Evelyn and Haime married, I was left pretty much on my own. Ishiah was too young and too busy to take into my life as I had Haime. School had kept me very busy. But now that I had finished, I became very lonely. I began to ponder what it was that I wanted. Was it love? Yes. I wanted to love and be loved, but the kind of love I wanted was not of the practical kind. I wanted romance. I wanted music and poetry in my love rather than earthly possessions.

I Wanted to Travel

I became restless and bored. I wanted to travel, to see what America was like. I had a great longing for life, but no way to express this desire. At such times, I turned to the companionship of my favorite authors and drowned my loneliness in their pages. But away from the books, the question returned: What was wrong with me? My family and friends

Edith in Chicago, 1930s

considered me rather attractive, and I was well liked. A few members of the family thought that it was time I began thinking of marriage. It was thought that there were several young men in our crowd who would have made a good match for me. However, I felt differently about life. I still had a romantic period to go through, and I wanted a chance to recapture the experiences I had never had during my childhood years. I was full of conflicts and was not ready to accept the practical way of life and marriage being offered to me. I was neither mature nor secure enough to stand up and fight for my convictions.

CHAPTER 11

Lonely but Not Bargain Hunting

Turmoil and Confusion

A bargain in marriage did not interest me. I wanted my marriage to be inspired by love and understanding. I wanted equality of personality and character. I did not consciously set all these standards; they seemed to be in me in spite of myself. In fact, I was always unhappy with myself. I even attempted to separate myself from these inner standards, but my inner self always won out. As a result, my conflicts grew. I feared loneliness. My inner longing was always much greater than I let people know or see. Luckily, I had several very intimate friends. I needed closeness – I could not bear being alone. Besides, I loved people.

Security, home, children: all that was fine. If only it came the way I wanted it to come. Who needed more security than I? With such an insecure childhood as I had, I should have grabbed any bargain that came my way and been happy with it. Outwardly, I might have been the envy of the town, but inwardly, I was in despair. I therefore rejected all marriage bargains that came my way and remained true to myself. After all, I had to be with myself all my life.

I began to learn to accept myself more courageously. After all, I was brought into this world, and I had a right to my convictions, desires, likes, and dislikes. That was my way of growing up. I became so full with my own inner self that I initially paid little attention to the turmoil that

was going on around me. Slowly, however, the economic depression began to affect everyone.

During the early thirties, the economic situation grew from bad to worse. The clothing industry was hit especially hard. Confusion and unrest fomented among the workers, who could not take the chance of quitting their jobs to look for new ones. Many of the workers had families with small children, were behind in their rent, owed money on their food, and could not buy clothes and shoes for their children. The situation and unrest among the workers became gruesome. People who had previously lived in comfort were now forced to join bread lines. The numerous evictions and suicides everywhere presented a very disturbing picture. I, too, worked less than usual and made very little income. However, we actually got along at home as well as before – in fact, a little better. My brother-in-law, Sam Liberson, worked as a part-time pharmacist and received twenty dollars per week. I gave Mother ten dollars a week. Ishiah brought in four dollars a week. The boarder paid twenty dollars a month. Since we shared the eight-room apartment with my brother Harry and his family, our rent was cut in half. Mother managed very skillfully and relieved us of our worries. She reassured us many times that we could never have it worse than we had already had it.

I began to read reports in the *Chicago Daily News* about the deteriorating situation in Europe. Nazism was rising in Germany and fascism in Italy. The upheaval in Europe opened my eyes and alerted me to problems bigger than myself. As I began to follow world events more closely, I became troubled and disturbed. I began to hear talk of war among my coworkers. A man who worked across from me predicted a world war by 1938 or 1939. When I thought of the possibility of war, it made me sick all over again. At night, I would have terrible nightmares. My fear and memories of war seldom left me. How I envied those people who had had none of my early experiences. How much I would have given to have their peace of mind!

An Opportunity to Go West

In the midst of this turmoil and confusion, an opportunity presented itself for me to go on my long-desired trip west. It was April 1933. My friend Ruth Aspis was going to visit her sister in Los Angeles. She shipped her suitcase and made plans to take a bus to California. I had no idea then that soon I too would be packing my suitcase. A family in Chicago whom I knew were visited by their son, a Navy doctor in California. Dr. Litwak had come by car, and he told Rivka and me that he would be driving back in a few weeks. Ruth welcomed the opportunity to drive west if I would go too. It would give her a chance to see the country the way she wanted to see it. I wanted to go, but it was hard to make up my mind on such short notice. And what about Mother? It was not easy for her to let me go such a distance away for an indefinite length of time. I had told her that I would try to find work there.

My anxiety and indecision plus Mother's worries and objections to my going on the trip robbed me of my sleep and appetite completely. I had to fight very hard with myself. Should I follow my desires, or should I give in to Mother's pleas and stay home? Mother feared that she would never see me again, and that was more than she could bear. The family was divided. Some supported my going, and others opposed me bitterly on the grounds that I should not leave Mother. However, Mother was not alone. She lived with her children. Further, I had saved some money and knew how to take care of myself. Finally, Dr. Litwak was related to my good friend Rebecca. So there was no worry on that account. I was sure that Ruth, Dr. Litwak, and I would have a good time together. I might never have another chance like that. I lay awake nights crying. My brother Haime came to my rescue, insisting that I go. That hastened my decision.

I made my arrangements for the trip. When Mother met Dr. Litwak, she relaxed. On April 24, 1933, we started our big journey west. I promised to write home every day and got into the car. I looked out the window and saw the family waving to us. Mother looked very small and frail. We soon lost sight of her. Family and home were one part of my life. The three of us in the car were something else. I had made

a big decision, and now I had to be away from home and Mother. But it was not easy for me to think of Mother. She worried about me. She knew that I had no one in Los Angeles or any other part of California. But once we were in the car, those dreary thoughts disappeared. We began to talk and adjust to a long and beautiful journey.

Driving through America

We traveled through Illinois and part of Iowa with no change of scenery. Later in the afternoon, we stopped for food in a filthy Iowa roadhouse. Then we got a cabin for the night, which was not much better. In the early part of the evening, I wrote home a detailed postcard about our trip and the day's events. The next morning, about six, we started on our trip again. Still no change in scenery, but a great abundance of mud in Nebraska. Such mud I had not seen since I was a little girl in Varovitch. The mud created hazardous driving, and we were very happy to part with Nebraska.

The night's rest in Nebraska was a much-needed one. Once in our rented cabin, we showered and then prepared a cooked meal, which tasted like home. We had baked goods that were given us for the long trip. A long walk in the open field underneath the stars completed our second day. We had great expectations of what was in store for us.

We kept to a schedule of waking early and preparing breakfast and sandwiches for a noon picnic at some scenic spot. We entered Colorado and were at the foot of the Rockies. It had snowed that morning, and the sun shone brightly. We went out of the car in our light clothes expecting to freeze in the glittering snow. But to our great amazement, it was delightfully warm. We took some time out to view the mountains. As Dr. Litwak (as we addressed him throughout the entire trip) was driving, we became more and more inspired. Soon we all began to sing. Dr. Litwak recited poetry from memory. Later, he read from a book. We had reached the point where we all hated to see the trip come to an end. We therefore drove very slowly and spent the entire day in Colorado. In Colorado Springs, we saw the Garden of the

Gods and the Cave of the Winds. The next day, we planned to go up to Pikes Peak. To our great disappointment, we found that there was too much snow on the mountain to drive safely. However, that mattered little, because there was much more to see.

Soon we hit New Mexico, with its copper red hills and Indian dwellings. A new world of beauty opened before us. The speedometer slowed down even more as we looked at the great splendor provided by nature. Santa Fe was filled with little white homes surrounded by green shrubbery. This gave me a feeling of peace and serenity. How could this town remain so tranquil? We stayed there overnight in a cabin that was the nicest one we had yet experienced. The dishes and cookware looked brighter and more colorful. In the morning, when we looked out the window, we saw that snow had covered the city. The shrubbery, the homes – everything was white. The whole town lay asleep as if in a white shroud. We drove through the town slowly to make sure that we missed nothing.

Once out of Santa Fe, we continued to drive slowly west, enjoying the color of the New Mexico landscape. We were awed by Arizona, filled with expectations about the Painted Desert and the Petrified Forest. Arizona was disappointing to me, and we went through quickly on our way to California.

In a few days, we were in California. I wanted to keep driving. Los Angeles came as an unwelcome guest with no one to greet me. The three of us parted. Ruth went to her sister, and our driver went to his job, which took him out of the state. I began to feel the chill of a strange city with no family or friends. I looked up an old school friend, Lillian Schwartz, who was happy to see me and helped me find a room not far from where she lived. Lillian knew the city and people to whom she introduced me. Before looking for work, I decided to make plans to see the most important points of interest. I met someone through her who was looking for passengers to share expenses for long distance trips. I took advantage of every opportunity that came my way. I began to make plans for a trip to Yosemite Valley with several people and became very excited about the trip.

Shavuos in Los Angeles

A few days before leaving on my trip, I was awakened one morning by some beautiful singing, praying, and chanting. I was asleep, but I was certain that it was my father singing. Soon I heard more voices. I was startled and jumped off the bed. The praying still continued. I quickly put my head out the window, and upon careful examination, I discovered that right outside my room was a little synagogue. it happened to be the first day of Shavuos, a holiday during the nicest time of the year. My longing for home increased dramatically. My first thoughts turned to my mother, hoping that she was well. Right there and then, I decided to go home after my Yosemite trip.

Before breakfast, I wrote home as I did every day. Then I pulled up a chair to the window and sat listening to the chanting that poured out from that "little house" next door.

The thought of Shavuos took me back to my childhood days when my father was alive. Dressed in his *kapota* (light summer jacket), he would come home from the synagogue with a happy "*gut yom tov*" (happy holiday) for mother and children. The house had been decorated with green plants and wildflowers from the garden or fields. The table was set with fish, blintzes, and other delicacies that had been prepared for weeks for the holiday. We children were dressed very lightly. Our heads were crowned with wreaths of blue and yellow flowers that we picked from the field across the street.

Doors and windows remained open. The apple blossoms came right into our window. The singing birds, the blue sky, and the sun all looked into our house, on our table. After dinner, Father would take a book from the bookcase that stood in the corner, placed where he could reach for it while sitting at the table. He then began to read to Mother in Hebrew, which he then translated to her in Yiddish. While Father was reading, we children ran out to play with butterflies and pick more flowers. Then came our turn for the Hebrew lesson and study, as well as the assignment for our next lesson.

The singing from the synagogue next door in LA took me back to our last Shavuos in Varovitch. And I began to live again through

experiences too painful to think about. I usually tried to put them out of my mind. Even today, when I begin to think and write about them, a cold shiver goes through my body, and tears begin to flow as though these events happened yesterday.

With these memories, I walked away from the window. The chanting from the synagogue followed me. I drank my juice and coffee, dressed hurriedly, and went out of the house. I stood in front of the synagogue, and before long, everyone from inside began to leave. I watched every man as he came out. Did anyone resemble my father? I watched until the last man came out. Then I went away for the day.

CHAPTER 12

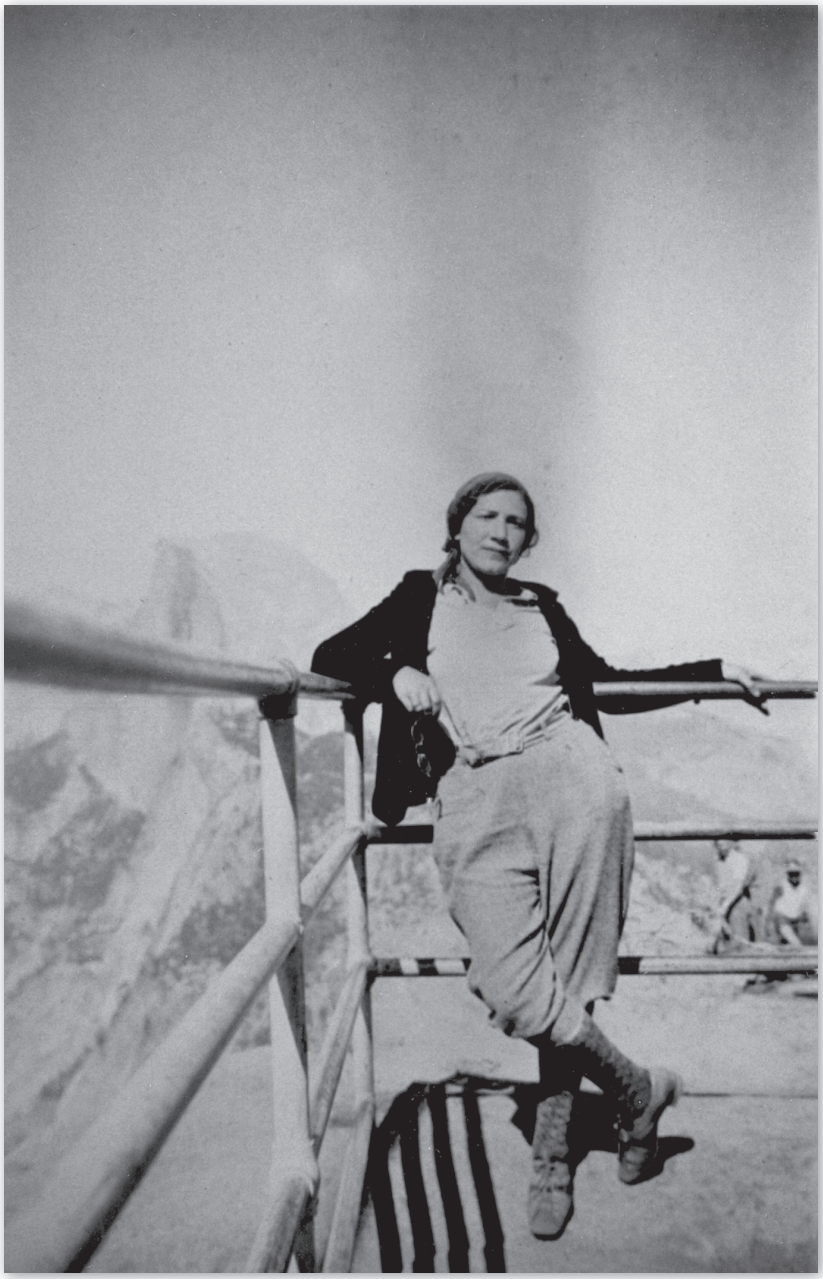
Returning from California

Yosemite Valley

Yosemite Valley, the most scenic part of my whole trip, seemed to concentrate the beauty of California: the waterfalls against the mountain, the Merced River running like a ribbon through the valley, originating, it seemed, from the falls. Numerous mountain peaks. On top of one of the mountains was Glacier Point, from which the valley below looked like a majestic temple or castle. The hike down from Glacier Point was a winding one, with changes of scenery at each turn of the trail. The sun had a good deal to do with the architecture of the magnificent structure. One created one's own architectural structure on the hike down the mountain, depending on how the sun faced and upon the scope of one's imagination.

Below lay a valley facing the Nevada Falls on the edge of the Merced River. In it lay several large rocks that were washed constantly by the running water. On one of those rocks, I spent many an afternoon dreaming.

I spent eleven days in Yosemite Valley, and each day saw something else. And if I had stayed another eleven days, I still would have had more to see. The trip back from Yosemite Valley was also breathtaking. The Sequoia National Park and Mariposa's big trees left a lasting impression, as did the Grand Canyon, all of which I saw before I returned to Los Angeles. As all things end, so did my trip west. Three months spent in almost constant awe at nature's wonders, something



Edith in California, 1933

I had never had a chance to experience before. I was returning home enriched. Ruth and I took a Greyhound bus home from California.

Mother Was Happy to See Me

At home, I walked on air. The rest and the experience of seeing so many beautiful sights, plus my suntan, convinced my family that the trip had been good for me. My friends also saw a change in me for the better. Everyone agreed that I looked very well. Mother was extremely happy to see me back at home.

That fall, Mother said to me that she would soon die. I became very angry at her for talking that way. Realizing that she'd upset me too much, she said that we all had to go sometime. A few weeks later, she said that she had definite reasons for feeling that death would come soon. I could not believe that Mother would die. We had seen how she'd fought death in the past. She surely was stronger now and still quite young. One day, she said to me that she would die close to a holiday so that she would spare the children sitting shivah for a whole week. That winter, she appeared cheerful in spite of her foreboding. She was very happy that I was home and that all her children were near her. She went about her household duties as usual and loved to be with my friends when they came. But one thing bothered her. She would have liked to see me married before she died.

Mother's friend Mrs. Geller came to the house every evening. They would talk or play casino. Sometimes I would join them. When Mother's eyes followed me (wherever I went or whatever I did), Mrs. Geller's eyes did the same. Together they watched and admired me; together they were concerned about me.

Mrs. Geller, unlike my mother, was tall and heavy. In one of their conversations, Mrs. Geller expressed her wish that if only she could give my mother ten pounds of her weight, they would both benefit from it. To which Mother retorted that she did not want the worms to have a feast on her body. She preferred to stay lean.

Mother went on this way most of the winter. At intervals, she would

say that she hoped we would all keep together. It was her greatest wish. The thought of us falling apart was more than she could bear. She told me once that when each child was born, she would save the umbilical cord. She kept all the cords together in one bunch. So should her children keep together always.

Mother caught colds frequently. We were used to seeing her lie in bed a few days and then be up and around again. She had gone through so much in her life that we were not at all surprised at her frailness, although we hated to see her being sick and under medication. But, since my doctor brother, Sam, took care of her, we were sure that he had her under medical control.

Mother Became Sick

A few days after spring officially registered on the calendar, Mother became sick. Again, Sam came to see her, and again, he gave her medicine. We were not alarmed; she had good care. That evening, I had a date with a young man to go to a lecture. I wanted to break my date, but mother did not let me do it. I went out and had a very pleasant evening. Mother's condition seemed to be the same. We were hoping that she would get better in a few days. Suddenly she turned worse and was taken to the hospital by ambulance. I alone went with her in the ambulance. The hospital frightened her, but since I was with her, she did not panic.

Once in the hospital, Mother was placed in an oxygen tent and became bewildered and terribly frightened. She was completely lost; it was her first time in a hospital. She seemed to feel caged in that tent. She looked at me in total resignation. Every once in a while, I put my hand into the cage to touch her face. She looked back at me like a frightened child who was being punished for no apparent reason.

Later in the afternoon, a private nurse came. She told me to go home, but I stayed on. I felt Mother burning up with a high fever. I asked the nurse how high her fever was, but she did not reply. Annoyed, the nurse demanded that I leave. Just at that moment, Mother motioned me close to her.

There was something she wanted to say to me. "Go home, my child. In the top dresser drawer, you will find a little bundle tucked away in a corner." She had saved money from her expenses, nickels and dimes. And whatever money my brothers gave her for her personal needs, that too, she saved. She had gathered her strength to give me instructions as to what to do. She said again that I should go home and take care of it immediately. "Tomorrow," she said, "will be a commotion, a tumult." The money was a wedding gift for me. But should my youngest brother, Ishiah, need it for school, I should give it to him. She spoke no more.

When I came home, only Evelyn was there with her children. The rest of the family was at the hospital, called by the night nurse after she chased me out. I went straight to the drawer and found the little bundle Mother told me about. The bundle contained 170 dollars. I hid the money until I got to the bank. The little bundle became a symbol to me of my mother's love and devotion.

Mother Died before Pesach

The next morning, Friday, March 30, 1934, Mother died with all her children around her (other than Sorel).[1] We watched the last breath of life leave her. I came close to her, but she did not see me. Unlike my father, Mother died in dignity. Father had been murdered by gangsters, with only the youngest, Ishiah, there at his death.

Friday evening was the first Passover Seder. Because of the holiday, the funeral would take place at 3:00 p.m. Arrangements had to be made fast. The commotion began as Mother had predicted. I felt very bad. Why rush her away so fast? I thought that seeing her a few more days would make it easier for us. But Father's boyhood friend Skorodin insisted that Mother be buried that same day. She died in time to join her husband for the holiday – she should not be denied that honor.

1. Sorel, whom Edith never saw again after their parting in 1922 but kept in contact with, died of cancer in Buenos Aires at the young age of forty-two the same year that Krana died.

At the funeral, Skorodin addressed all of us children. "I knew her well. She was kind, sensitive, a mother in the truest sense of the word. A mother who lived only for her children. Full of devotion, forgiving and sacrificing." Skorodin continued: "She lived in poverty and struggled all her life, but she died a rich woman. She left fine children." With those words, Mother was lowered into the grave. We came back to the house and sat shivah for one hour, until the holiday began, ending the initial mourning period per Jewish law. Mother's wish was granted her. She had spared her children a full week of shivah.

Father's death emerged in the context of war. So many people were being killed daily that it had become almost ordinary. But in Mother's case, the situation was different. We lived in a peaceful country. Death claimed Mother at a time when she could have yet lived. We were all grown up, and she was still young, sixty-two years old. She had held on to life when we needed her most. Her grip on life was lost when we became self-sufficient.

Mother's sudden death kept me awake nights. I stayed with my brother Harry and his wife Bertha. Bertha sat up with me all hours of the night until I could fall asleep. During the day, I was fine. I kept busy working. When I was away from any activity, I became depressed. I could not stay home. I sought the company of friends. My sister Evelyn and her family moved to an apartment in the same building where Harry and Bertha lived. My brother Ishiah and I moved in with them. My dearest friend, Florence, lived one block away. That too helped me recover.

PART IV

Building My Own Life

CHAPTER 13

Healing

Life Was No Longer the Same

My home life was no longer the same. My sister tried hard to make a home for my brother and me, but Mother's spirit was not there. However, life had to go on, and I tried hard. I met several young men but could not get interested in any of them. The longing that I always felt became more intensified. I began to dislike my job more and more. My friend Ruth Aspis and I took the one and only exam that was being offered for library work. We never heard from the examining board as to whether we passed or not. I wanted desperately to change my job, but when so many were unemployed, I dared not give up what I had.

Hitler was gaining strength in Germany, and the small countries were falling victim to his military and political conquests. I feared terribly an outbreak of war and began to see a world in ruins. I feared that my brother Ishiah, of military age now, would be trapped in this emerging crazy social order. Fascism was spreading like wildfire all over the world. In Italy, there was Mussolini; in Spain, there was Franco and civil war. The Republican Loyalists were losing and the Nationalist Black Shirts winning, and Franco was gaining in strength. Some of the best of the European correspondents were writing for the *Chicago Daily News*: Edgar Ansel Mowrer and William Shirer were in Germany, and Richard Mowrer (nephew of Edgar Ansel) was in Spain. I never missed a day's reading, hoping beyond hope that they would write better news. But the news was always the same. Mussolini in Italy and

Edith, 1937

Franco in Spain were getting stronger. Hitler, the biggest monster of them all, with his "superior race" mania, was destroying most of Europe. To make things worse, Western powers seemed to be encouraging him, giving him silent approval to take one country after another.

I began to remember my life as a child living through pogroms. We were always running and hiding. I envied the little birds, because they were free to fly wherever they wanted. They could sing in the open air and not be afraid. Oh, how I wanted to be a bird. I remember once asking my mother why she had to bring me into this world. When we

came to America, I felt free – I could breathe freely like those little birds in Varovitch. But I myself did not make up the whole world. It was true that I was safe in my new world, America, that I loved so much. But what about the world that I left behind? It was very frightening that such brutality could occur in a world that was supposed to be civilized. How could it come to pass unchecked, allowed to grow to such enormous proportions? Why were human lives so cheap? Especially Jewish lives?

The Dunes

I began to ask in what way I, as an individual, could help to fight injustice. But where should I begin and in what capacity? I began to think that Soviet Russia represented the answer to the world's problems. I read a number of articles and books advocating Communism, but I found myself unable to get very involved. Could all the world's problems be cured just with my involvement in any cause? I felt too small and too insignificant. My involvement meant just one more person at a meeting or at a party, and a few more extra dollars. That was not, I thought, enough to help humanity. The way to help humanity was to eradicate man's inhumanity to man. But that was too far-fetched an idea. And how could I apply it to my personal being? However, when one is young, there is hope, and despite my apprehensions, I had a strong urge to live. I would meet with friends and go to concerts, operas, plays, lectures, and home gatherings. During the summers, we would go to the Sand Dunes in Indiana and to Ravinia Park for the concerts and operas. Between my friends, cultural events, and work, I kept myself busy. Still, world events affected my mood. Friends said that I was too pessimistic. I told them I was realistic. It was apparent to me that there would soon be war, and that America would be involved.

It was my friends Jennie and Min who introduced me to the Sand Dunes, where they shared a cottage during the summers with more friends and Jennie's husband. We had a nice group of friends and enjoyed our summers there. The Dunes served as a haven for many of

us. The water had a soothing effect on me, especially evenings when the sky was littered with heavenly stars and the bright moon. The stars and the moon were in competition with each other as to which could throw the brightest light on the gentle – or sometimes boisterous – waves of Lake Michigan. Occasionally, a group of people we knew would get together and make a bonfire. There was singing, and one man in our group played the flute beautifully. It harmonized with nature's beauty.

The Party

Young people heal quickly from any pain – physical, emotional, or otherwise. Such was the case with me. I went to parties at people's homes and was bored most of the time. I was invited to a farewell party given by one friend for another. I hesitated about going to that gathering for fear of being bored as I had been so many times in the past. But I went. Once there, I felt very strange. I knew almost no one there. Flora, the hostess, was very nice and sweet, and that was comforting. I knew Elsie, for whom the party was being given. I began to mingle with the crowd and even danced with a young man, which was unusual for me.

At midnight, four people came in: two couples. A young man in this group caught my attention. I was struck by his profile and the shape of his head. However, he soon seemed to disappear. Such was my luck. The evening dragged on until only eight or ten people were left. All at once, the young man I had noticed before came out from a bedroom, where it turned out he had been sitting all evening, reading a book. His presence did something to me. It changed my mood at once. We all began to talk and sing. By then, the young man noticed me. Although I had no voice, he asked me to sing parts from Russian movies – which I did. Then he asked me to sing arias from opera and melodies from symphonies, which I did with his help. We sang and talked until all hours of the night. It was love at first sight for both of us. I knew then and there that he would call me. I knew his sister, who had come with him, but she did not introduce us. The young man asked my name, and that was all.

A week later, he called me. In his voice, I detected a warmth, a kind I never heard before. He invited me to go with him to hear Joseph Szigeti, the great violinist. With great delight, I accepted the invitation. This was the beginning of a long and beautiful courtship. Our next date was an opera. Then Artur Rubinstein, the great pianist. After that, the Jacks String Quartet, and then theater. We liked the same things. Our views were very much the same. We saw each other very often, and in a short time, we knew that our initial feelings were right. We were meant for each other. We felt at ease with one another. My only regret was that Mother was not alive to see Lew. I am sure that she would have seen what I saw in him.

Lew Came into My Life

Lew's coming into my life changed my whole world and helped me recapture a few of my lost years. I felt like a child at times when we were together. He understood and appreciated me. We shared so many of the same likes and dislikes, we became like one person – one heart, one soul in two bodies. We looked at each other and knew how the other felt. Lew's Hebrew name was Yehudah Leib. He was a Kohen (a priest in the Jewish tradition). My Lew was a well-read person in a number of fields – literature, history, and music, for example. In addition, he had a brilliant analytical mind. He was a young man with great potential for a literary career. A gifted person. A linguist. In six months, with a grammar book and a dictionary, he was able to teach himself a language and master it well enough to be able to translate a book from it. The greatest beauty about him was his modesty, unlike many an intellectual I knew. I understood him well at once. Our friendship and love grew with great depth and feeling for one another. There was compassion in our union. When he hurt, I hurt. He understood my feelings even if I couldn't find the words to express them. I considered myself one of the luckiest girls to have met a person like Lew. When we walked together, I felt as if all the heavens had shed their glow on us.

Lew, like all of us, was caught up in the Depression and had to

interrupt his college education when his family fell on hard times. Lew, being the eldest of four children, carried the entire burden of financial support for a family that did not understand him. He worked on the Works Progress Administration Federal Writers' Project for a while. Then, by some luck or misfortune, the Unites States Postal Service offered exams, which many college students took. The highest on the totem pole were accepted. Lew was one of them. He hated the job, and it was hard on him physically, but who dared to give up something that would keep one away from the bread lines? Perhaps because he was so sensitive, Lew was not able to fight back against his family's pressure. So he stayed on in a job that was very destructive for him. In spite of all the hardships, I think that he should have stayed in school and on the Writers' Project.

Since Lew was taking care of his family financially, we could not get married for a while. Nevertheless, we had each other. Lew worked several evenings a week. Every Thursday at nine p.m., the mailman handed me a special-delivery letter. On the back of the envelope was a poem, written out in full. Each selected poem was either a translation from the Spanish or a passage from the Song of Songs. Inside the letter was an excerpt from whatever he was writing during that time, together with some expressions of personal feelings. This went on for a long time. I kept every letter in a special place, tied together with ribbon. I read and reread them. They were filled with meaning for me. I saved those letters for our children to read.

My niece, Ruth, who was twelve years old, and nephew, Willy, eleven, were very curious about their Aunt Edie, whom they considered one of their pals, because I was with them a good deal of the time. The only thing that differentiated me from them was that I worked and had friends who were grown people. And I didn't play jump rope with them.

What made the children particularly curious about me was that I was getting mail. They decided to see what was in those letters. They found my letters when I was at work. They read them and had much fun. Since we all lived together, the children knew all my friends. But

with Lew, it was something special. Lew was going to take away their Edie. Even my five-year-old nephew, Zimi, told his friends that his big sister was getting married.

CHAPTER 14

Our New Home

War and Marriage

Sunday morning, September 10, 1939, Lew and I got married in Rabbi Felix Mendelson's studio. A book written by the rabbi lay right in front of us on the desk. It was titled *The Jew Who Laughs*. We looked at the book and, with that, we left the studio as Mr. and Mrs. Lewis C. Kaplan. Two friends, who served as witnesses, walked with us to our new home, where we officially moved. We bought several pieces of furniture and a phonograph with the three hundred dollars my family gave us in wedding gifts, which we combined with several hundred dollars I had saved during my working years. Life with Lew began in this small apartment, which we both loved. It was our first home, a place where our families and friends were always welcome and where they seemed to love to come. We had company every Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon.

We both kept busy working at our jobs. After work in the post office, Lew was busy writing and translating. In addition to our busy schedules, we began collecting records for our music library. We had begun with concerti and some of our favorite symphonies. Later, we began to concentrate on chamber music, especially the string quartets of Beethoven. During this idyllic time, I began to bake, something which was very helpful to our budget.

I became pregnant during the second year of our marriage. My brother, Ishiah, promised that he would give a record to the newborn

Edith and Lew's wedding photo, 1939

child. If a boy, he pledged Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis,* and if a girl, Haydn's *The Seven Last Words of Christ*.

During my pregnancy, I became increasingly worried. What if we entered the war? What if Lew were taken away from me and sent somewhere to fight? What if I had to hide my baby from bombardment? Fears of my childhood came back to me.

We entered the war, as I feared we would. My brother Ishiah, whom I loved so much, Lew's brother Bernard, and many of our friends were drafted. Lew was rejected because of poor eyesight. I was very happy that my Lew remained with me.

I hated to see my brother in a uniform. As a dentist, he would be needed in the army, but not in combat. The rest of the family and

friends would be sent to the firing line. Would they come back in one piece, or crippled physically or emotionally? Would they come home at all?

Amid all this confusion and turbulence, our son, Kalman, was born prematurely by Cesarean section on October 22, 1941. He was named after my mother, Krana. I became very sick. My brother Ishiah had by chance come home on a furlough just before my delivery. He came just in time to give me a blood transfusion. After three weeks in the hospital and a long convalescence at home, I began to regain my strength and take care of our baby.

Against this background, frightened and full of anxiety for the future, I was to begin to play the role of mother. Would I be a good and just mother to our child? I didn't even know if I had had the right to bring a human being into this terrible world. But this was now academic. The baby was born and needed care and love. When the baby was six weeks old, the attack on Pearl Harbor came. One more shock. Now we would be at war.

We tried to lead a normal life and watch our child grow. When he became a young man, would he too have to fight a war? Weeks became months, and our child was getting to be more and more beautiful. He seemed very bright.

When Kalman was one year old, I began to read to him every evening for several minutes. By the time he was two years old, he knew many of the children's verses. At the age of three, he recited poetry and carried a tune to the music he heard. At four, he read all the books we brought him from the library. The older Kalman became, the more we loved him. We tried to give him love and security, even though I had felt insecure inside of myself. The war triggered in me the insecurity I had experienced in my own childhood.

Lew had been trained as a historian, so he could intellectually analyze situations better than I. Also, by nature, he was more optimistic, having been born and raised in Chicago and not war-torn Russia, so he was spared the experiences I had had to go through as a child. As I see it now, experiences at any age leave marks that are not easily erased.

Kalman, Edith, and Lew, 1941

While many of our friends and relatives were away at war, Lew and I kept busy at home. We had our child to raise, which was a full-time job for me. After a day's work at the post office, Lew also worked at home. This second job, his writing and translating, was done in an atmosphere of love, with chamber music playing in the background. Writing letters to our dear ones overseas also became part of our daily schedule.

In 1943, several poems translated by Lew from the Spanish were published in *Poetry Magazine*. In that year, he also completed his first translation of a novel, *Crossroads*, from the Portuguese. It was a beautiful novel written by the Brazilian author Erico Verissimo. However,

Kalman, Chicago, 1944

there was a complication. Lew's habit was to finish a translation completely before contacting the author or a publisher. This he did with *Crossroads*. Before Lew could contact Verissimo in Brazil, however, he discovered that the author was on his way to America to line up his own translator. Lew despaired. All his work would go for naught. An inspiration hit me. Why not wire Verissimo on board his ship? This Lew did and, through this, managed to show Verissimo his translation before the author made other arrangements. Lew received his authorization. The book was published by Macmillan and Company. It was a belated wedding present, one which I felt I had a small part in.

During this same period, Lew came upon a Spanish book, published in Mexico, entitled *The Black Book of Nazi Terror in Europe*. It was a detailed document of Nazi atrocities that were not being talked about in America. Lew grasped the significance of the work and immediately began to translate it into English. I wept when I typed it, staggered by the emotional impact of the events described in the book. However, to my shock, no publisher wanted it. They all said there wouldn't be a market for it. What was the matter with people? Was my beloved America as calloused as the rest of the world? Why shouldn't the American people know what was going on in Europe? Why couldn't a market be created for a book like this?

All through the war years, Lew worked hard at his writing and translating. He did much research on Simon Bolivar, the great South American liberator, and wrote a screenplay and began a novel on his life. These were productive years for Lew. He worked on two more translations from the Portuguese. One was a second book by Verissimo, *The Rest Is Silence*, also published by Macmillan. And then there was a third book from the Portuguese, *Anguish*, by Brazilian novelist Graciliano Ramos, published by Alfred A. Knopf. Both of these books were published in 1946.

Finally, the long and horrible war ended. We were among the lucky ones. Our dear ones returned tired and weary, but not crippled in any way. We began to feel much better. Family and friends reunited. Once more our friends and family began coming to our home on Saturday nights as they used to before the war. The conversations were often about their experiences. Those who were in the European war talked of their experiences. We also heard a great deal about the experiences in the Pacific. We were getting a good education, but we would have been much better off without any of the knowledge we gained. We were thankful to have them all back in one piece. Other families were not so lucky. Life slowly began to shape itself back to normal, and soon our son was ready for school.

Growth and Sickness

I will never forget Kalman's first day of school. Many mothers brought their children and left immediately. I never did. My baby was not yet five years old and already away from us for half a day. When I came to pick him up after school, we were happy to see each other. One of the mothers came up to talk to me. She picked me out from all the mothers, she told me later. Her name was Annette Fried. We talked for a long time. We met again the next day. It so happened that our children were in the same class. We mothers were becoming acquainted as our children were. Annette Fried and I met every day as we were picking up our children. Kalman and Michael were getting very friendly. In fact, the children became good friends in a short time. After school, the children talked on the phone. Sometimes we would meet where the children could play together.

Annette and I developed a friendship initially around our children, but then around ourselves. We found much in each other to cement a long and lasting friendship.

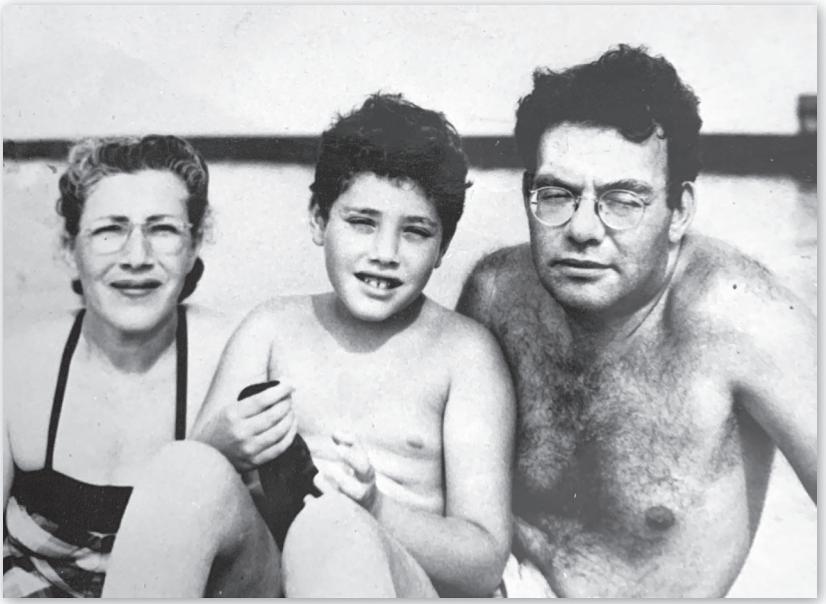
L to r: Kalman, Edith, and Lew, Chicago, 1947

In grade school, during the late forties and early fifties, our son began to show signs that were promising. Lew saw then and there that the child would someday be good in whatever he would undertake to do. The good mind was there. And as parents usually do, we saw in our child the qualities that we wished he would have. As a very

Reuben and Nora's wedding, Chicago, 1949. *Standing, left to right:* Sam Liberson, Willy Liberson, Evelyn (Rivka) Liberson, Haime (Chaim) Saposnik, Reuben Saposnik ("Little Reuben," Haime's son), Sarah Saposnik, Steve "Zimi" Liberson, Harry (Arel) Saposnik, Nora Saposnik, Reuben Saposnik ("Big Reuben," Harry's son), Bertha (Bracha) Saposnik, Marvin Saposnik (Sam's son), Sam (Shmulik) Saposnik, Vivian Lipkin (Sam's daughter), George Lipkin. *Front row, left to right:* Lewis C. Kaplan, Edith (Yehudit) Kaplan, Carol Saposnik (Haime's daughter, named, like Kalman, after Krana), Ruth Saposnik (Harry's daughter), Joseph (Ishiah) Saposnik, Kalman "Kalmy" Kaplan.

young boy, Kalman did a great deal of reading. Lew would read poetry and the great classics to him at bedtime and paraphrase them to him. With this background, he continued to develop. I went to work when Kalman was about twelve years old. But I was always home in time to make dinner for my family. Kalman went to Hebrew school after public school, four afternoons a week. Later he studied Hebrew with my brother Haime, in the back of his drugstore on the West Side of Chicago.

Lew's work began to develop in different areas. He became greatly impressed by reviews he had read of a number of contemporary Dutch books. He turned to a study of the Dutch language with the aim of translating some of these books into English. He had always been able



Edith, Kalman, and Lew at the beach near their home in the early 1950s

to learn a language well enough in six months to be able to translate from it. This pattern held true for Dutch also, and he soon began a book by a Dutch Jew named Siegfried van Praag entitled *Jesus and Menachem*. It tried to place the life of Jesus within a Jewish context. Lew began a translation of a book on Rembrandt as well and also of a book whose review he had noticed in the *Times of London*. It was written by a prominent Dutch woman, Hella Haasse, and dealt with the life of Charles of Orleans. The Dutch title of this book was *Het woud der verwachting*, and Lew adopted the working translation *Forest of Expectations*. The book described how through a political upheaval, Charles of Orleans had lost the straight path of his life and had to find a new one. It reminded me keenly of my own life.

At this same time, Lew began research for an original book on Beethoven, whom Lew had always greatly admired. He also began the study of Arabic and Afrikaans, languages he thought would be very important in the new world order. Lew was able to do much of this work at home, conserving his time and energy by bringing home many

books from the Deering Library at Northwestern University, where he was an honorary member.

During the early fifties, Lew's always fragile health began to decline. (He had contracted rheumatic fever as a child, which had permanently damaged his heart.) But no matter how he felt, he never gave up. His work at home was very important to him. After a day's work and a short nap, he would continue with his writing. In spite of poor health, he remained active. He had just begun to scratch the surface of what he intended to do. In 1953, Lew had hemorrhoid surgery, after which he began to have all sorts of physical ailments. As his heart was weak, I tried to relieve him of as much physical strain as I could. Smoking was very bad for him, and I begged him to stop, yet he could not break that habit. In the ensuing few years, he had pneumonia and surgery again. This time, he was not able to recover his previous strength and became weaker and weaker. Lew had become a very sick man at the age of forty-two.

Lew received medical care from my brother Sam, a physician, and in addition, from Dr. Braun, a heart specialist at Illinois Masonic Hospital, where Lew became a frequent visitor. Among his visitors was a woman, Martha Gross, who would come often and bring him delicious things to snack on. Martha, acting as literary agent for her author friend, Manuel Libenson, had contacted Lew several times previously to do the translation from the Spanish of Libenson's book *The Humorous Dictionary*. Although the book was not published, Martha remained our friend. Through her, we met other people with whom we became friends as well. Our big problem, however, was how to get Lew well again. His condition was not getting better. Lew's sister, Mollie, helped get Lew admitted into the National Jewish Hospital of Denver. Dr. Braun thought it a good idea, as the climate was good and should ease his condition.

We began to make preparations for Lew to go to Denver. As luck would have it, however, our son, Kalman, suddenly took ill and had to be rushed to the hospital. He could not hold food down. Early one

morning, about five a.m., my nephew Willy, Evelyn's son, came and drove him to Illinois Masonic Hospital. By that time, Kalman was in shock and could no longer walk. He was taken to the emergency room. We remained sitting, waiting for the news. The hospital superintendent came to tell us that they could not promise us our child. They would do what they could. Those were the same words we had heard at his premature birth. A short while later, a nurse came to take care of us. We were taken to a special room and given some food. But who could eat? My throat locked as it always did under stress. However, the nurse made sure that Lew drank some juice and coffee. We stayed in the hospital all day, where staff tried to make us comfortable.

Another Upheaval

It was March 30, 1957. Twenty-three years earlier to the day, my mother, Krana, had died. Our son Kalman, who had been named after my mother, lay in an oxygen tent, just as she had, asking if he was going to die.

The surgery lasted a long time. It was a bowel strangulation caused by adhesions from an appendicitis he had undergone as a small child. Gangrene and peritonitis had set in, and eight inches of his small intestine had to be cut away, a procedure that had also been performed on President Eisenhower. Many of the patients, as well as the hospital staff, knew Lew as a patient there. When Kalman came in for such serious surgery, people of all faiths became deeply concerned. Candles were lit and prayers said on behalf of our child. The doctors were afraid of intestinal paralysis. For six days and nights, we arranged nurses around the clock. One night, he wanted me to stay with him all night. I promised him that I would stay with him, but in the end, I had to go home, because Lew was home alone, sick. At the end of the sixth day, a private nurse we had hired named Dorothy Burness called us late at night. We were afraid to pick up the phone. But the news was good. The bowels were functioning. That meant that there was no paralysis

and that Kalman had a chance to recover. The joy was overwhelming. The news spread all over the hospital. People came running to rejoice with us.

Two weeks later, Kalman had surgery again to remove an abscess. However, this surgery was minor compared to the first one. After three weeks in the hospital, we brought him home a skeleton of his former self. Kalman began to recover, but my problem with Lew remained.

My brother Ishiah insisted that I quit my job and take care of my patients. During Kalman's convalescence, my brother made it clear to me that he would shoulder my financial burden and problems. And so he did. During that time, Lew was accepted as a patient at the National Jewish Hospital in Denver, Colorado. It was a very good hospital for Lew's condition, and it was financially possible for us. "None can pay who may enter. None may enter who can pay" was its motto, and it helped many people with heart and respiratory conditions from the northern cities. The hospital was far from home, and Lew did not really want to be separated from Kalman and me. But we were hoping that the favorable climate, excellent doctors, and potential heart surgery would help him. The separation was a most traumatic time for us. Our beautiful home life was broken up. Would my Lew ever get well and come home to us?

Lew in Denver

Reluctantly, Lew went to Denver, and I went back to work. However, Lew's condition was getting worse, and it turned out that surgery was out of the question. Also, the daily contact with so many different people from all over the world who came there for help was depressing. Many were helped, but Lew was among those unfortunates whom no one and no place could help. What he saw had a very strong effect on him. He felt lonely and isolated. When he went for a walk and saw men with their wives and children, it increased his longing for us. He made Kalman an Indian belt at the hospital workshop. Nevertheless, his loneliness tormented him. His letters, though beautifully written,

were often too painful to read. Here is a letter to Kalman that Lew wrote shortly after arriving in Denver.

Friday, June 28, 1957

My Dear Son,

There are so many things that I want to say to you that I don't know where to begin, and I know that once I've started I shall scarcely know where to stop, and I shall wonder if I've really said what I wanted to say, and in such a manner that the words illuminate the heart of the matter, make sense, and what is most important, truly express what is in my mind and heart.

It is so difficult to establish communication between two human beings no matter what their age or relationship may be; words have such an air of finality about them. Once they are uttered, you cannot recall them no matter how much you try, and further explanation most times only serves to make matters worse, bewildering and confusing your auditor without clarifying anything.

I keep thinking of you as a child. To me, you were and still remain the most beautiful child I ever saw, and to this very day I cannot look at an early picture of you without tears coming to my eyes. Sentiment, you will say? Perhaps. All I know is that I am immediately ready to forgive and forget – temporarily at least – any ordeal, foolish or unthinking word or act you may have uttered or perpetrated a moment before. I forgot that you are a person, grown adolescent, almost a man, with a distinct mind and personality of your own. Or, possibly, I choose to ignore it because I fear you are slipping away from us, as all generations must do, and I should like to hold on to you a little while longer. You cannot possibly understand how a father must feel. If he is a fortunate man, has a job that he likes, earns enough to satisfy his family's needs, he is contented, and has ample time for his wife and children.

But if, like myself, he works at a job which he bitterly detests, earns a bare pittance, always has financial worries hanging over

his head, and on top of that knows he is gifted with a faculty for expression, for articulation, which he cannot find time to express except during the few remaining waking hours after his job is done; if on top of that I say he, likewise, has a profound and genuine appreciation of music or the other arts (all of which require time for enjoyment and understanding) and would like to spend time with his family to boot – then I say, my son, he is a miserable creature, absolutely unfit to live with. For art is a jealous mistress and abides no competitors.

If you wish to derive the greatest benefits from art, and that is what you must do, if you wish to be a really full man, you cannot help but neglect your family. It is a difficult thing for a man to make such a decision. Therefore – the conflict. I am making no special plea for myself. I am only asking you to try and understand the situation, and to be merciful in your judgments. And what is the result? A man works his whole life trying to make an adequate living for his family, and he has no time for his wife and children, and when he finally does have time, he is already old, his children have gone away, and he discovers to his horror and amazement that the family for which he struggled so desperately the better part of his life are only casual acquaintances to him, if not complete strangers. It is not his fault and it is not theirs. There is a tragic sense to life which makes it so – you may not see this yet, but you will. And so in desperation, and because he can do nothing else, he consoles himself with his grandchildren.

But I never wanted nor intended it to be like that. True, I expect to love your children, but it's you I wanted to know and understand now; after all, you are partially my handiwork – a large part of me is in you – and naturally, I shall always feel closer to you than to any of your descendants.

And so, when I hear you talk so sanely and intelligently, as you did Tuesday afternoon when we drove to the depot and Aunt Mollie brought up the question of the teenager's attitude towards democracy, I realized with a shock, that in all fairness to you, I can no

longer consider you as a child, but must henceforth regard you as an adult, whose opinions must be listened to with attention, and even sometimes with respect. I do not say this last begrudgingly or disdainfully. There is still much you do not know, but when you have learned that, people will listen to you respectfully. And then I realize even more – that aside from questions of homework, you have never really talked to me like that; that you and I have never really had any serious discussions at all; that in whatever discussions we have had, if they could be called discussions, I have done all or most of the talking, while you listened indifferently; that, in short, we are apparently almost strangers, despite the fact that we have lived together for so many years. I never wanted our relationship to be like that; I always liked to think of you as a potential intellectual colleague, one who was still in the early stages but whose stature was bound to grow with the passing years, because I was certain you had the capability of being one.

No doubt, it has been largely my fault – but have you been altogether blameless? True, I have not been fair to you or Mother, I have been too self-centered, too much absorbed in my own interest to heed anything around me. What excuse can I plead? Time is so short, and one can only accomplish an infinitesimal part of what he attempts to achieve. Remember, I told you that art was a jealous mistress? And rightly or wrongly, I believed that the results would benefit all of us mutually. I still believe so. More than once, I tried to tell you some of these things, but either you were too preoccupied with your own affairs, or you brushed me off innocently, without intending to, by using a word which struck the wrong note at the moment, and the words died stillborn upon my lips. And I am sure the same thing must have happened to you, countless times.

You have so many qualities which remind me of myself. You have my diffidence, my reserve, my reticence, my dislike of showing my emotions (especially affection) publicly, the ability to work under terrific pressure, the tendency to underestimate your own capabilities and to consider yourself inferior to someone else, when

in reality it is the other way around. It is because I see so much of me in you that I have frequently been so harsh with you. I wanted to dispel these qualities from you now, when you were still pliable, to harden you so to speak, rather than have you confront life later with them, as I had to do. And so I hurt you intentionally, even abusively – not because I had ceased to love you, but because I knew or rather thought that driving out your fears now, no matter how much they hurt, would make you less unhappy later. If I have erred, forgive me; I meant well, but I see now that love without understanding is not enough.

One last thing: it may be that my case may be so serious that the doctors here may be afraid to risk surgery, or if surgery is attempted that I may not survive. In that case, you must become the head of the house, and take care of Mommy as long as she lives. I am not trying to alarm you unduly, but one must be prepared for all possibilities.

Please write to me whenever you can. I shall always be eager to hear what you are doing and thinking, no matter how trifling it may seem to you.

Ever with love,

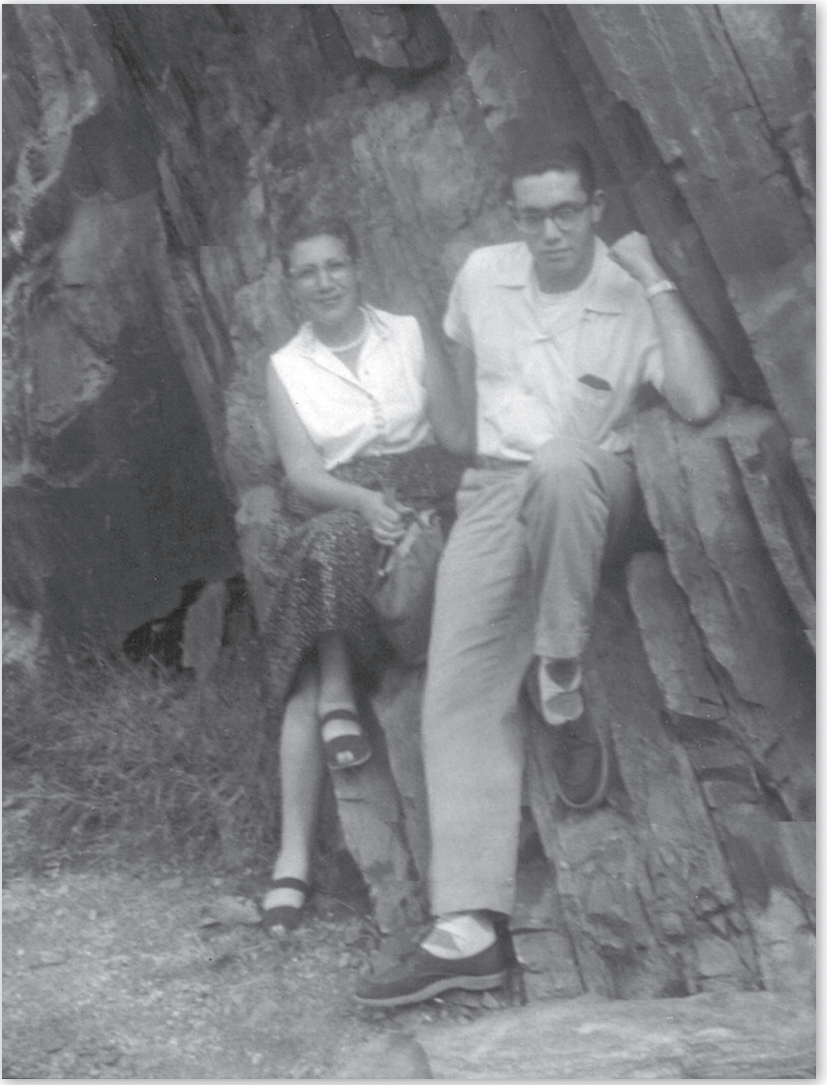
Dad

If you want to get some idea of what life is like in this hospital, pick up a copy of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. I think you will find it absorbing reading.

Lew's phone calls were as painful as his letters. It was hard for us at home in Chicago. The anticipation and anxiety were unbearable. When the phone rang later than usual, I feared and expected the worst. This existence lasted for all the time Lew was in Denver.

Kalman began to recover from his surgery, slowly but surely. We decided that summer school for Kalman would be good, since I had gone back to work. It would spare him being alone all day. Later in the summer, we began making plans to visit Lew in Denver. Kalman and I were excited and nervous, and Lew reacted the same way. Lew

began counting the days, hours, and minutes. He could hardly wait to see us. His anxiety was most overwhelming over our coming. He rented a room for us near the hospital. And he also arranged several short trips. We were together on the trips, and the rest of the time, we were with Lew in the hospital.



Edith and Kalman in Denver visiting Lew, 1957

The moment we saw Lew, we saw the change in him. He was a man with a broken spirit, a hopelessness. Ten days with Lew gave Kalman and me a pretty good picture of what life was like there. Lew introduced us to a very pretty young girl there who was an asthmatic patient. There was no way to look at that beautiful girl and tell that she was so sick. When she got an attack, she would choke and go into convulsions. These attacks would come at any time and any place; Lew saw many of them. That, too, had a strong effect on him. Our parting with Lew was sad. Where were we going without Lew? We left him there, but for how long? And what would the doctors do to help him? Our home was no longer the same. While we were in Denver, I tried not to show my true feelings. Kalman had gotten better; Kalman and I were hopeful that Lew too would get better, but Lew knew the truth. Our trip home was overshadowed with the loneliness of going home without Lew. Would Lew ever come home? In the fall of 1957, after we returned from Denver, Lew informed us that the hospital was sending him home. That was positive evidence that nothing could be done for him there. Chicago's fall was not too bad, but what would we do with him for the winter?

Lew's sister, Mollie, had a friend in Tucson, Arizona, who would help us out. The climate would be good. Lew's friend from the post office offered us his house free in Key West, Florida. We could stay there as long as we wanted. We had to leave Chicago so Lew could live. I called Dr. Alvarez, the *Chicago Sun Times* medical columnist, and asked his advice. Should we go to Tucson or Florida? After I explained Lew's condition, he suggested Tucson.

CHAPTER 15

California, Again

Tucson, Arizona

Toward the end of December 1957, we left for Arizona by train. On the day of our departure, we had to part with our son. He was going to stay temporarily with my sister Evelyn. Another separation. We did not worry for his safety – we knew that he would get good care. But what if he should get sick again? And we were so far away. The upheaval of my childhood seemed to be reemerging.

The train ride was long and tiresome. On the train, we met three schoolteachers who were going to Arizona for their Christmas vacation. By chance, we were all going to the same motel. As soon as we entered our room, we received a call from them. They had gotten the name for us of a doctor and a nurse. They had known from our conversation that we would be in great need of such services.

Lew found several apartments for rent in the morning newspaper. Not knowing the city, and without a car, I started walking in search of a place to live. I walked until I was overcome with exhaustion. I stopped a woman in a car and showed her the paper with the ads. She gave me a lift and directed me which way to go. I started walking again and could not go on. From a distance, I noticed a synagogue. With the paper in hand, I walked into the office and begged for help. I told them my problem. One of the advertised places was near the synagogue. I went quickly and took the apartment. It was one room with kitchen privileges.

I was happy that this ordeal was over. I went back to the motel, and Lew and I got into a cab to go to our new place. It felt very good to have a place. I was able to prepare the special food Lew needed to eat in the kitchen. Nevertheless, we felt lonely and frightened. We knew no one in Tucson. Molly's friend turned out to be of little help. We had no family and no friends. At least we had each other. We ate meals and took walks together. We sat out sunning, reading, and talking. We did everything together. I even administered daily injections to Lew, which was very hard for me to do. But it had to be done. My physician brother, Sam, had trained me by having me practice injecting milk into an orange. It was much easier to put the needle in an orange than to put it in Lew's body. I tensed up before the shot was given and often hurt him.

After about a month, it became clear that Tucson was not the answer. The climate turned out to be not as good for him as we had hoped. The sudden drop in temperature in the evening was too much for him. Lew's prolonged physical problems had demoralized him. We needed other people to ease the tension. We felt isolated in Tucson. I remember being disappointed in Arizona on my trip out west as a girl, and we were disappointed again. Perhaps our luck would turn for the better in California. It would be my second visit and Lew's first.

Back to Los Angeles

We left Tucson for Los Angeles, where we had many good friends. Our old friends Florence and Sol Zoob helped us out. They found us a very nice motel apartment with a swimming pool and a beautiful balcony with several exposures. Most importantly, it had kitchen facilities. The apartment was very pleasant. It was on the ground floor, which made it easier for Lew, and just a few steps from the pool. We sat and talked by the pool. Lew continued to work on his translation of the Dutch novel *Het woud der verwachting*. Los Angeles gave us security. We had moral support and a sense of home. We felt that we were not alone – a

good feeling. In case of emergency, the Zoobs or other friends would be with us. We had not had this feeling in Tucson.

In Los Angeles, Florence and Sol gave as much as any human beings could give. Every morning on their way to work, they came to see how we were. They always brought something that we could use – dishes, pots and pans, anything to make things easier for us. Even more important was their presence and their concern. We saw their doctor, which gave us a secure feeling. They came to visit us evenings and Sundays. My old friend Jimmy Krup brought us a radio, which was very helpful. She also came to see us often.

Then there was Lou Lasco, a post office worker and fellow writer. He was from Chicago – a lifelong friend of Lew's. Lasco had been a close crony to Saul Bellow as well. His coming always made Lew feel good. They always had so much to talk about. Lew always felt a lift when Lasco was around. There was fun and laughter. Another old friend from Chicago, Steve Brown, came every day also, as he was not working during this period. This too was good for Lew.

My Lew fell in love with California. He decided that when he got better, we would move there. I told the doctor of Lew's desire. The doctor, very pointedly and tactfully, told me not to break up our home yet. As I found out later, he told Florence and Sol that Lew had no chance.

The moral support we got from our friends gave Lew some hope. His desire to live remained very strong. And he was very anxious to finish the English translation of *Het woud der verwachting.* He was hoping that it would be published. An initial draft of the translation of almost nine hundred pages had already been typed. Lew was correcting it in Denver, Tucson, and Los Angeles.

Our stay in Los Angeles passed very quickly. It is too bad that we couldn't have gone there when Lew had been well. He would have really enjoyed his friends and the beauty that California had to offer.

We missed Kalman, but we knew that he was well taken care of by my sister, so we were not worried. The most important thing was that Lew felt better. We began to run out of money and had to return home.

On the way, we had to stop at the hospital in Denver for a physical evaluation. They were not encouraging and sent us home.

March was a bad month weather-wise to come back to Chicago. April was not much better. As soon as we returned, we had to resume our usual routine. I had to go back to work. We needed the money very badly. With Kalman at school and me at work, Lew was left on his own. He tried to help himself as best he could. The cold weather confined him to the house, and being alone all day became very depressing and frightening. As soon as Kalman and I came home, he would cheer up. Since I was away all morning and a good part of the day or afternoon, I had to give Lew his injections in the evenings. I dreaded the shots and the long nights. Tension, anxiety, and fear were building up in me. But I kept on going with no sleep and constant worry. I lost weight keeping up with my duties as nurse, mother, wife, and breadwinner. I had many house chores to perform – shopping, cooking, and washing. But we looked forward to the warm weather.

We pulled through the bad months. In May, the weather got better. We could go out for fresh air and sunshine. On weekends, family and friends came, which was helpful. No matter what the temperature, Lew had to be bundled up in warm clothes in order to keep warm. His lips were blue and his eyes lifeless. His face was drawn and his body thin. What had happened to my Lew?

In California, we once went to Laguna Beach with the Zoobs and another couple. It was a beautiful warm day, but Lew was cold and had to be wrapped with extra things to keep from shivering. The same thing was happening here, now, but continuously. We all sat out, but Lew looked different. He sat in his chair with his eyes always following me. In one of his letters from Denver, he had written that even though he didn't always tell me how much he loved me, he was certain that I could have seen it in his eyes. I wonder whether Lew saw the despair in my eyes? My eyes were always on him.

Lew began to feel worse and worse. He had to be kept on morphine. One night, even morphine didn't help. We were up all night. Early in the morning, I called Rose and Jack Ragins, our upstairs neighbors

and friends. They came down, but there was little that they could do. We kept up the morphine and the other medication. Lew was getting worse. He was dying.

One evening, Lew couldn't lie or sit. We were up all night. Lew was standing up in front of the television set, holding on to it, and he began to work on his translation of *Het woud der verwachting.* Suddenly, he said that his mind was clearer than ever before. He kept on working and couldn't stop. The next day, he went to the hospital. The following morning, the hospital called and told me to come quickly. I talked to Lew on the phone and told him that I would be there soon. I dressed hurriedly and went to see what I feared to see. When he saw me, he had a smile on his face. He was so glad to see me. He took my hand and held on to it for dear life. I tried to feed him his lunch, but it was useless. Still holding my hand, he recited the 23rd Psalm from the Hebrew Bible.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul;
He guideth me in straight paths for His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
I will fear no evil,
For Thou art with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies;
Thou hast anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

On Tuesday, June 3, 1958, my Lew died. I had known that I was losing him, but when it happened, it was a different story. I wanted to hold on to him no matter how sick he was. Death overpowered Lew and took him from me.

Kalman Was Sixteen When Lew Died

Kalman was sixteen years old when Lew died. He was a teenager with his own problems of growing up. With the loss of his father, he became bewildered. I tried very hard to be both father and mother, but it was very difficult. I neglected Kalman and myself. My sister Evelyn would bring cooked food for us. My brother Ishiah and other members of the family took care of other things that I neglected. I didn't work the whole summer. I couldn't face people. I spent much time walking by the lake. I imagined I would see Lew where we used to walk together – only to find myself coming back alone. Facing reality was impossible. I was robbed of my sleep and appetite. My tears were uncontrollable. Facing life without Lew became my problem. When Lew came into my life, he gave me an inner strength that I was not aware of. He brought out things in me that probably would have never come to pass otherwise. When Lew died, something inside of me died too. All that he gave seemed to have been taken away from me. When one experiences a beautiful relationship of the kind we had, life without it becomes unbearable.

As sick as Lew had been, as long as he was alive, I knew that he was there. I could see him, touch him, give him shots. I could prepare food that he liked and was able to eat. He would even get angry at Kalman and me. But that was normal. We were alive. Even when he was in Denver, far away from us, we had letters, phone calls, and hope.

At the end of summer, I was called back to work at my old job doing market research, which I had done for the last several years when Lew was alive. The pay was good and the hours short. I had loved it before. I had met all kinds of people, and I found it interesting. After Lew's death, I couldn't face people, nor could I talk to anyone without crying. I cried while taking a bus to and from work. I cried when I went out to the grocery store.

Kalman saw what was happening to me. He angrily called my attention to the fact that I had an obligation to him as a mother. Therefore, for his sake I had no right to torment myself. Gaining strength and courage was hard; only time would tell if I would survive. But time

Edith and Lew, Chicago, circa 1955

passed very slowly, and I didn't seem able to fight. I went to see Dr. Sol Benensohn, who had brought Kalman into the world and also saved my life when I had been so terribly sick. Dr. Benensohn had operated on me when Kalman was born. He had operated on me again five years later, so he knew my body very well. He also knew me as a person and liked me. He had always taken a personal interest in me. Dr. Benensohn did not like my behavior. He put me on medication and told me to get a job in a department store where I could be with people.

After working for two years on two jobs and doing many things at home, I finally found a job at the Crawford Department Store in the neighborhood. When I came to the Crawford, I gave up all my extra jobs, and I had two days free to take care of the house and make a home for our son, a place where his friends could come.

The owners of the Crawford, father and son Garber, knew me from my previous job. They respected me as a person, and I respected them. The steady job plus regular hours gave me a sense of security, which I needed. This was true even though the earnings were meager. With my husband's half pension and my careful budgeting and management, we

got along nicely. If only my husband were with us! I began to fight and recover on my own, without medication. However, peace of mind did not come to me, no matter how I tried, what I did, or where I went.

Life Was Very Lonely

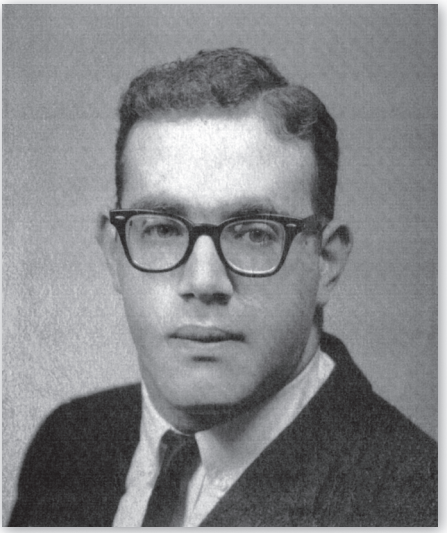
Life was very lonely. I began to feel the way Lew had in Denver. Whenever I saw women with their husbands, I felt empty, and my heart filled up with pain. My husband, so young, whom I loved so much, was cut off from life.

This feeling was especially strong when I was home alone. Lew's presence at the typewriter or phonograph was not there. Had Lew lived a normal lifespan and had the time to accomplish what he wanted, it would have been so much easier for me. Just the thought that Lew died so young was hard to accept. So much of his life's work was left unfinished.

To make matters worse, Lew's family estranged themselves from us. We needed them to stretch out a hand to us, to let us feel that Lew had not left us with such finality. But they all seemed to die for us when Lew died. They seemed to blame me for Lew's death. Until this day, I don't know what I did to have them feel the way they did. I can only think of one reason for their attitude toward Kalman and me: blaming me relieved them of any obligation to us.

My own family stayed very close. This helped ease the sting of the rejection by Lew's family. My sister's two sons, Willy and Zimi, came often. They were young men with time available, and they helped me. Willy would take me out for long drives to keep me away from the house. Above all, my brother Ishiah stood behind Kalman and me. He would leave us money on the bedroom dresser every two weeks without saying a word.

There were also friends. Lillian Schwartz, who lived a block away, came very often. Ben Elkin, principal of an elementary school and well-known author of children's books, lived nearby. He came very often. Ben and Lew had been schoolmates and friends for many years.



Kalman at his high school graduation, Chicago, 1959

Ben kept up his friendship and was very helpful to us in many ways. He remained a good friend. There were also the Taubs, who lived in a house down the street. I knew that I was always welcome there.

Being alone forced me to carry the burdens of both mother and father. Kalman entered Northwestern University on a full scholarship, yet I lived in constant fear. What if things did not go right with him and he decided to drop out of school and join the army? Then he would be sent to Vietnam, a war I bitterly opposed. I wanted our child in school. He was a good student, and he belonged in a world of education rather than killing. Kalman proved to be an excellent student at Northwestern and kept up his scholarship. So, gradually, I began to feel better and relieved up to a point. However, each day that passed made me wish that it was a year so that Kalman would be too old for the draft.

When Kalman was born, I had felt guilty for bringing him into the world. I always had feared and hated war, and I did not want my flesh and blood to suffer its agonies. I still remember the nightmares I had for many years after we came to America, of pogroms and running from the bandits. Those nightmares followed me no matter where I

was. There were times when I was afraid to fall asleep. The nightmares were torture. I did not want Kalman to suffer the same.

At Northwestern University, Kalman made several friends whom he brought to meet me and to listen to music. I often heard him say, "Now I will play my dad's favorite record." At other times he would say, "Now I will play my mother's favorite record." It was almost always chamber music. When Kalman was in the house, it always gave me a good feeling. I wanted him to bring his friends home. Kalman had a hard time growing up; he missed his father terribly.

Kalman finished his education at Northwestern with honors. He received his BA in mathematics in 1963. He was offered a graduate assistantship in social psychology at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. Kalman found it very difficult to leave home, to leave me alone. But the time had come for us to go our separate ways. Kalman, at twenty-one, had to live his own life. As the time was nearing for his departure, it became harder for both of us. The night before he left, Kalman came into my room and wept.

CHAPTER 16

Aging

The Day Kalman Left

I will always remember the day Kalman left. It was on a Sunday. Kalman had to pick up his new roommate on the South Side of Chicago, and from there they would go to Champaign, Illinois. Kalman thought it would be easier for me to drive south with him to his friend's house. I went along, and when the two of them were leaving, I too left. I got on the Jackson Park train to come back to the north end of Chicago, hoping that the ride would never end. The ride did come to an end, however, and I had to go home. I got off at the Morse Avenue station in Rogers Park and wondered where to go. My friend Lillian lived near me. Luckily, she was home. Lillian saw the state I was in and made me eat with her. Later she went home with me.

It is difficult to express in words the agony one goes through as a single parent. To watch a teenager grow up and leave home… The feeling of an empty apartment was most unbearable. Letter writing and phone calls became my life. I had to learn to make the second adjustment. Now, I had no one waiting for me. Home was no longer a home. My whole way of life suddenly changed. Often, instead of returning from work to my apartment, I went to my friends the Herbsts, who lived across the court from me. And still more often, I went to my friends the Taubs, who lived on the block.

Occasionally, I visited Kalman on a Sunday and returned the same day. Kalman came home for holidays and brought friends with him.

He came home for the summer after his first year in graduate school, which was very good for both of us. Each time Kalman had to leave, the same feeling of emptiness prevailed. Before Lew and I got married, we had talked about having children. I told him then that children would come and go, but we would be together, before and after. We talked, planned, and hoped for this. Little does one know how long one is to stay in "this sweet dream called life," as Lew had described our existence in Kalman's high school yearbook before he died.

Kalman did very well in graduate work at the University of Illinois and received a fellowship. He also met a lovely young woman whom he later married. Melissa was not Jewish but from a Baptist family in North Carolina. This bothered me, and I worried that they would grow apart in their thinking.

My Grandson Was Born

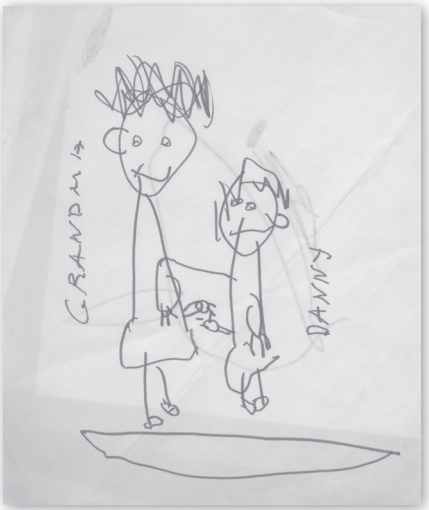
Despite my misgivings, Melissa and I became very good friends. I visited Kalman and Melissa often. They had a small apartment in Urbana, Illinois, but they always had room for me. When Kalman received his PhD in social psychology, he was offered a job as an assistant professor at Wayne State University in Detroit. Melissa was still working on her PhD when they moved to Detroit. I went there as often as I could, and they came to me as often as possible. We developed a very nice relationship. The three of us became a very close unit.

Four years after Kalman and Melissa were married, my grandson, Daniel Lewis Kaplan, was born. It was June 1, 1969. I came to Detroit the day Daniel came home from the hospital. Although the baby was named after my husband, he seemed to awaken nothing in me. When I held him in my arms, I could see how small he was. But I seemed to be without any feelings for my grandson. It bothered and worried me. Would I ever love my grandson?

Nevertheless, I kept going to Detroit as often as I could. I wanted my grandson to know me. As I began to see him more, I began to come to life. The child awakened something in me that I thought I was no

longer capable of feeling. As Daniel was growing, so was my love for him. I used to see Daniel only every few months. He would shy away from me at first. It would take him a while to warm up to me each time. The older Daniel got, the stronger the attachment between us became. When I came there, I had to sit near him at the table or sleep in the same room with him. I would sing him to sleep. In the morning, he came into my bed. It was I who had to make his breakfast. I always had to include my jam. Before he went to bed, I had to read to him. I had a grandson, and I would miss him when I returned home to Chicago.

When Daniel was about four years old, Kalman and Melissa had to go to a convention in Montreal. I was visiting them at the time, and Daniel suggested that I come along with them to the convention rather than go home. While in Montreal, Daniel and I shared the same room. When Kalman and Melissa went to the meetings, Daniel and I were on our own doing what we wanted to do. Daniel drew a picture of us walking and holding hands. I remember him asking me to move my apartment from Chicago and put it next to his house so that he could come to me after school and sometimes sleep at my house.



Daniel's drawing of himself and Edith, 1973

Daniel, around age six, 1975

When Daniel was six, my fears were realized. Kalman and Melissa split up and went their separate ways. I was worried that Daniel would be denied a happy childhood, as I had been. I still remembered how my childhood was snatched away from me. At the age of eight, I had carried the burden of a twenty-year-old. I did not want this to happen to Daniel, who was so bright and observant and so able to analyze situations.

I stayed friendly with Melissa.

Melissa (*right*) with Edith, 1979

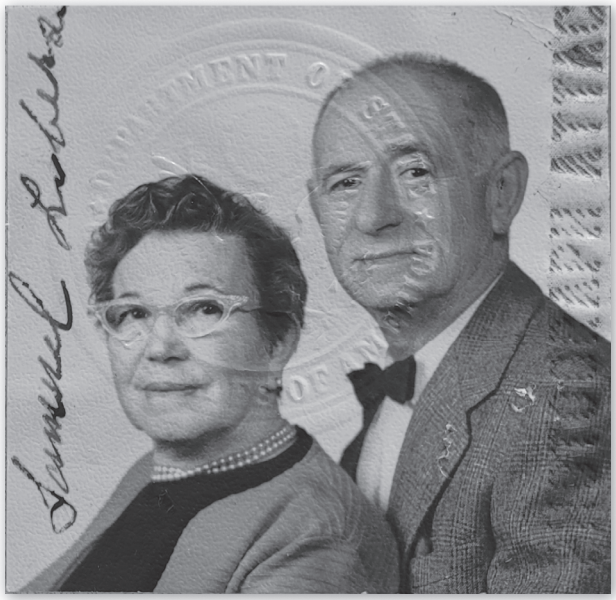
"In a Dark Wood Wandering"

As one goes on living, things happen, and I am no exception. Many of these changes are predictable. I aged, and my grandson grew. My son spent a sabbatical year in Chicago in 1984–85. My neighborhood in East Rogers Park changed, and in the summer of 1985, I decided to move to a condominium in a safe, modern building with my surviving brother, Ishiah. It was painful to leave my apartment of forty-three years. It was the apartment of my married life. I missed the lake very much.

One day, I discovered a lump under my left arm. It proved malignant. I was diagnosed as having lymphoma. I went through radiation treatments and continued working. I soon went into remission.

Soon afterwards, an almost unbelievable event occurred that had been put into motion some years previously by, of all things, a fire in my old apartment in 1977. I had been forced to vacate my apartment and go to live with my sister Evelyn and her husband Sam for about ten weeks while the damage was being repaired. When I returned, I found that many things were missing – including many of Lew's remaining things. His huge dictionary and eleven hundred pages of research on Beethoven were gone. Kalman came into the city to help me clean up. In the process of helping me organize my apartment, Kalman found a big, typed manuscript, wet from the attempts to put out the fire. It was in a brown zippered three-ring briefcase. Kalman became very curious as to what it was. There was no indication of title or author. Suddenly I remembered that it was the Dutch translation Lew had been working on until the night before his death some twenty years earlier. But I did not remember the title or the name of the author. I remembered having known it well in earlier years, but the shock of Lew's death and the ensuing adjustment had robbed me of my memory.

Kalman sent the manuscript to Eerdmans, a Dutch publisher in Michigan. They liked it very much but did not publish fiction. They thought it could be a very important book in America. It was about Charles of Orleans and his imprisonment, but they had no idea what book it was or who wrote it. Neither did Kalman, nor did I. We were all at a loss, at a dead end. Was this, too, to perish with my husband?



Evelyn and Sam Liberson's 1969 passport photo, taken for a trip to Israel

One day while going through an old drawer, I came across a small scrap of paper, not unlike the one I had kept in the hem of my dress in Russia some sixty years earlier. It had six words on it: "Het Woud der Verwachting" and "Hella Haasse." Suddenly it came back to me. This was the Dutch title of the book and the name of the author that my Lew had been translating the last years of his life. This was the key Kalman needed to do something with it. The results have been nothing short of phenomenal. Armed with this information, Kalman was able to locate the author in France, uncover an old contract she had made with my husband in the early 1950s, and place the book with a Chicago publishing house, Academy Chicago.

The lymphoma seemed long departed. When *In a Dark Wood Wandering* was published in October 1989, we (I and my son and grandson) were all very excited. Lew had worked on this translation until the day of his death. Now, finally, his efforts and hard work in translating this book were realized.

There was much excitement with the author, Hella Haasse, coming to Chicago from France. Several affairs were given in her honor by the Dutch Consul General, to which my family and I were invited. It was beautiful and unbelievable that this was happening after all these years. It was just overwhelming. I had to answer many questions. I had to speak for my husband, which was very difficult for me emotionally.

Standing, left to right: Kalman, Anita Miller, Jordan Miller; *sitting:* Hella Haase, Edith, at the Dutch Consulate in Chicago, 1989

I read the book as soon as it came out. The introduction was a book in itself. Each time I opened the book, I saw Lew at the typewriter. Reliving many years of my life became very painful. The book was on the *New York Times* best seller list for several months, which I liked. However, at the same time, the excitement got the best of me, and I went through the deepest emotional upheaval. I kept replaying the tape of a radio interview the author gave to the Chicago author and radio personality Studs Terkel, describing the book and how it came to be and how my late husband worked on the book all through his final illness. I remembered this vividly.

The American title of this book was chosen by the publishers from a fourteenth-century poem by the great Italian poet Dante Alighieri (better known simply as Dante). "In the middle of the journey of our life," he writes, "I found myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost." This image evokes the imprisonment of Charles of Orleans, a poet himself, with a soul not unlike that of my husband. The image had special meaning for me, both literal and symbolic. It described my actual experience of crossing the border from Russia into Poland in 1921 when we were literally "wandering through a dark wood." It also portrayed my own state of mind after the deaths of my father and my husband. Each time, a scrap of paper helped show me the straight way out of the dark wood.

Sickness and Hope

As I mentioned before, things happen in life. In 1990, a year after the book was published, I discovered a lump in my groin. My remission from lymphoma was over. I immediately went to my doctor. I decided not to wait an extra day, because I knew what it was. I could see that Dr. Krauss, my oncologist, became very concerned and called in the surgeon. Both doctors hoped that it would prove to be a hernia, but I knew that it was a recurrence of the lymphoma in a different location.

I was hoping that I would be treated with radiation as I had been in 1985. But that was not to be. After the results of the tests came in,

Dr. Krauss told me that this time I would need chemotherapy, six treatments, each of three-day duration. My first three treatments, which were administered in the hospital, were December 18, 19, and 20, 1990. On the fourth day, I came home and made dinner for my son and brother. I couldn't eat. It was hard to swallow. On December 23 and 24, I began to feel very sick with mouth sores and much pain. On December 25, I was sick all night. On the morning of December 26, I woke up my son – who came to stay with me – telling him I was very sick. My son and brother took me to the hospital. I was put back into the hospital in reverse isolation. I was fed gelatins and liquids, and I washed my mouth with allopurinol and lidocaine to numb the pain. Dr. Krauss lowered the dosage of the second treatment, so I decided to take it at the office. That didn't go well either. I came home and slept for hours. I couldn't walk straight.

There was no choice. The treatments had to be taken to kill the monster that had invaded my body. I had no choice but to endure whatever came with the treatments, hoping it would get easier at some point. A new medicine, Zofran, came out to stop nausea. It helped, but my general condition remained the same. My son called long distance, counting the treatments that were behind me. He would tell me that it would soon be over. That was his way of helping me get through them.

March 30, 1991, was the first day of Passover. We were invited to my niece for a Seder, but I was too sick to go. A few days later, I was back at the hospital for four more days with a sick mouth and fever. Treatment number 6, the last one, was a small one, yet it sent me back to the hospital for eight days. On Tuesday, April 30, 1991, my brother picked me up at the hospital. I passed out when I tried to get out of the car. In a few days, my grandson, Daniel, would be graduating from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and I already had a plane ticket. His graduation meant a lot to me, but I knew that I was too weak to attend. I was very disappointed.

I began to get better, and my disappointment was eased by Daniel's receiving a fellowship to attend the graduate program in psychology at

Daniel, Edith, and Kalman, 1989

Edith and Ishiah, 1992

the University of Illinois in Chicago. Things had come full circle. As my original family was dying out, my own descendants were establishing themselves in Chicago!

Earlier in the story, I said that children forget their experiences, but now, as I conclude my memoirs, it seems to me that I am back where I was many years ago as a child, Yehudit, in Varovitch. Not only do I remember many of the details of all our experiences, I even live through many of them again and again – spared, of course, the physical hardships, for which I am grateful.

I have to stop and wonder whether I really ever forgot things as children supposedly do. Or was there just a temporary lull? I know Mother never got over her early experiences, and I seriously doubt if I have. Each new crisis seems to bring back old memories. I have had many losses, and things have often not been very easy for me. Yet I have always had a sense of hope – if not for myself, then for my descendants.

And this feeling has sustained me.

THE END

Epilogue

LONG AFTER THE EARLIER PUBLICATIONS OF MY MOTHER'S memoirs, I was contacted separately by two cousins I did not know I had.

The first was Sharon Kalin Parkman, the granddaughter of my grandfather Zev Reuven (Velvel) Saposnik's youngest sister Machla, who had emigrated with her husband David Kaplan (not related to my father's Kaplan family) from the Ukraine to Hartford, Connecticut. Sharon contacted me in 2014. She had read my mother's book and found me through her perseverance. She now lived with her husband in Penfield, New York.

The second was Jacob Livshitz, who found me through Ancestry at the end of 2021, though I was not enrolled in it at that time. He was the great-grandson of my grandfather's youngest brother Mordechai (Morduch) Saposnik, who had stayed in the Ukraine. His mother, Bella, made aliyah to Israel in 1972 and now lives in Modi'in, Israel. Jacob lives in Ganei Tikva. He had not been aware of my mother's book until I sent it to him.

Our stories are presented below. I have met both Sharon and her husband Jim, and also Jacob and his wife Ina and his parents Bella and David Lifshitz. Sharon and Bella are my second cousins whom I never knew I had. I was born in Chicago; Sharon in Hartford, Connecticut;

and Bella in Kiev, in the Ukraine. And they are second cousins to each other as well, though they have not met. Here are our stories.

Images of Zev Reuven (Velvel) Saposnik and Krana Chalef Saposnik; Mordechai (Morduch) Saposnik and his wife Batya (Basia) Glicken Saposnik; Yudko, Mila, and Bella Sapozhnikov; and Machla (Mollie) Saposnik Kaplan and her husband David Kaplan are presented in the stories of their respective families in this book.

Sharon Kalin Parkman

I am Sharon Kalin Parkman. My grandparents, David Kaplan and Mollie (Machla) Saposnik Kaplan, came to the United States from Chabno. In Chabno, David, a widower with three small children, had hired the family's milkmaid Mollie to care for his children. They later married. My grandfather came to America in 1907 by way of Buenos Aires, Argentina, heading for Hartford, Connecticut, where his brothers had settled. He then sent for his family to join him. Mollie made the passage to Hartford later that year with her three stepchildren and their infant son.

Once settled in Hartford, they refused to talk about the past, about their lives in Chabno. They just wanted to look forward. Because of this, we knew very little about their past, their lives, their families. We did know that Mollie had one brother, Yeshua, who also had moved to Hartford. David and Mollie went on to have eight more children in the United States, making it a total of twelve children they raised together – David's three and their nine. I grew up knowing there had been two wives, but I never knew where the division was. The children considered themselves all brothers and sisters. The prefix *step* was never part of their vocabulary.

Over the past few years, my husband and I have gotten interested in genealogy. I found it difficult to get much information online about Chabno, except that it was close to Chernobyl and in the exclusion zone, where people couldn't visit because of the nuclear contamination. I could find no information about life in Chabno when my grandparents lived there.

Machla Saposnik Kaplan and David Kaplan,
Hartford, Connecticut, year unknown

Periodically, I would do a google search for Chabno, hoping something new had been added. Then, in December 2013, something new popped up: the book *Russian Nightmares, American Dreams*. Excitedly, I read the description of the book. Even though its Russian focus was from Edith's birth in 1910 to 1922, when Edith came to America

to join family in Chicago, it could still give me a glimpse of life in Chabno in the early 1900s. Then I looked at the author's full name: Edith Saposnik Kaplan. Saposnik and Kaplan. My family's names. I ordered the book.

When the book came, the first place I looked was at the family tree printed in the beginning. There was no mention of my grandmother Mollie, by her Hebrew name of Machliah or by the name her family called her, Machla. Even so, I was convinced that we were somehow related, even at a distance. I dove into the book. When I came to page 85 in that edition, I was amazed by what I read. Edith's parents had managed to get her two oldest brothers out of Russia before the Russian Revolution. Edith wrote, "When my brothers had first come to America, they had lived in Hartford, Connecticut, with my father's sister, Aunt Machla." My grandmother! There it was in black and white. We *are* family.

I researched and discovered that Edith Saposnik Kaplan had died in 2001. But in the book, she talked about a son, Kalman. It took me four months, but I finally found an email address for her son. Happily, my email to Kalman was met with enthusiasm and warm welcome. I have found new family that I didn't even know had existed in America.

Jacob Livshits

My name is Jacob Livshits. My great-grandfather was Mordechai (Morduch) Sapozhnikov, a younger brother of Kalman's grandfather (Zev Reuven). His wife was Batya Glikin.

Sharon's grandmother (Machla) and my great-grandfather (Morduch) were the younger brother and sister of Kalman's grandfather (Edith's father) Zev Reuven (Velvel) Saposnik. My mother is Bella Sapozhnikov, and my grandfather was Yudko Sapozhnikov. My mother and her family came to Israel in 1972 from Kiev, USSR.

My mother met my father David Livshits in Israel. He had come from Russia as well. They married, and in 1975, I was born. Thirteen years later, I did a school project called ROOTS, which is customary in

Mordechai (Morduch) Saposnik and Batya (Basya) Glikin, Ukraine, year unknown

Israel for all children to do. That project served about twenty-five years later as the basis of my own son Adi's ROOTS project.

As with all children, most of the work was done by us parents, resulting in igniting the search for family. The invention of the internet, the access to online databases and old Ukrainian and other archives allowed us to trace the history of the family.

Our first discovery was that originally the Sapozhnikov family was Sapozhnik (meaning "shoemaker"). We managed to track three further generations of the Sapozhnik line; however, as far as we knew, we were the last remaining people of that tree going back to Gershko Sapozhnik, born 1750.

One should be aware of a very important fact when dealing with Russian genealogy. Starting with the rise of the USSR after the Bolshevik Revolution, any mention or existence of relatives abroad, especially in America, was tantamount to treason. If someone knew of

My grandparents and my mother, *left to right:* Yudko Morduchovich (Yehuda son of Mordechai) Sapozhnikov, Bella Sapozhnikov, Mila Sapozhnikov, Kiev, 1950

relatives in the USA, they kept it a secret even from their own family. My grandfather, Yudko Morduchovich (Yehuda son of Mordechai), was a Russian military doctor, an army major, and a member of the Communist Party, as were all proper citizens. Having any sort of relatives in America would have blacklisted him and his family from work, education, housing, and any normal existence.

The next step in our genealogy quest was utilizing DNA, and after having successfully tested my father and mother on FamilyTreeDNA, we managed to track down some lost branches of the family. Some were known but lost, and some were completely unknown.

Having managed to obtain an AncestryDNA test kit, I tested myself, with absolutely no expectations to find any relatives. After about a month of waiting, I saw the results, and the highest match was a Reuben Saposnik. The fourth match was a Sharon Parkman.

Thankfully, by that time Sharon had a full family tree, including Yudel Saposnik and a mention of Morduch Saposnik, my great-grandfather. After browsing her family tree, I started looking for obituaries for the visible names in the family tree and found the obituary for Edith Saposnik Kaplan.

In that obituary, her son, Dr. Kalman Kaplan, was mentioned. Luckily Kalman has a web page with his email, and I sent him an introductory question. This is how we found out that we are not the last of the Sapozhniks, that my mother has quite a few second cousins, and that our family is much larger than we could have imagined.

One observation stands out in all of our family research. Had Jews not escaped Russia at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, we might have really become the last remains of the Sapozhnik line. What is also very apparent is that most of those who remained in Russia perished. WWI and WWII, pogroms, the Holocaust, and every other type of war and persecution that occurred over the last 120 years and likely longer has decimated our people. It is by luck, persistence, and the miracles of modern technology that we could connect now, but none of that would have been relevant had Mollie (Machla), Krana, Chaim, Edith, and the remainder of our *mishpachah* not escaped from Russia. Perhaps it was *bashert*.

In any case, we have found each other!

Kalman Kaplan

I was born in Chicago in 1941 and thus was not technically what came to be called a "baby boomer." I felt as American as anyone. Many of my uncles and older cousins in both my father's and mother's family fought in the American Army in World War II in Europe, though my father was rejected because of poor eyesight and also the residual effects of the rheumatic heart disease he had contracted as a child.

In truth, I was too young to really appreciate what the war was all about, or that Jews were the special target – in Europe, at least. There were many Jews in the neighborhood in which I grew up in

Chicago – East Rogers Park – and this did not seem to be much of an issue. Our apartment was literally one half block from a beautiful beach on Lake Michigan.

The elders in my mother Edith Saposnik's family rarely spoke about their past, although none of them had been born in America, and the older siblings had some accent. My mother was second-youngest and did not have any perceptible accent. They all were medical people – doctors, dentists, and pharmacists. I developed a child's hypothesis that people spoke differently as they got older. Disconfirming my hypothesis were the siblings of my father Lewis and his siblings (all born in Chicago), none of whom spoke with an accent, though his parents (my paternal grandparents) did. But I was a child and really did not know much if anything about the history of the Jews, and if I did, I quickly dismissed such concerns in the interests of growing up seamlessly in America.

My mother was physically lovely and quite intelligent. She and my father used to host intellectual salons in their apartment off of Lake Michigan. People always used to compliment her on her sponge cake. She always seemed very competent to me. Two disquieting events stand out in my memory that I only came to understand later.

I remember playing in a sandpile outside my parents' apartment. It was a block from the beach, so there was plenty of sand available. I do not know what got into me, but during a quarrel with a girl I was playing with over the use of a bucket or sprinkler, I hit her on the head with my little plastic baseball bat – God knows why. She retaliated by hitting me above my right eye with a little rake. I started bleeding profusely. Someone called my mother, whom I had always seen as indestructible. However, when my mother saw me bleeding, she became distraught. As I remember, a neighbor was able to calm her down enough to provide information that her brother (my Uncle Sam) was a physician. The father of the girl who had hit me drove me to Uncle Sam's office. My uncle stitched me up. But the event left an impression on me – most of all, the effect my bleeding had on my mother, something I only later came to understand as trauma.

The second event in my childhood that I remember is when we were treated shabbily by a family named Geroulis at a shoe store. After we left, my mother called him a "Petlura." At the time, I had no idea what she was talking about. Only much later did I come to know that Symon Petlura had been president of a Nationalist Ukraine in the period from 1918 to 1921, and that until his defeat at the hands of the Bolsheviks, some sixty thousand Jews had been killed.

Both my parents were involved in socialist movements and belonged to a group in Chicago called the Dill Pickle Club. They often would sing Yiddish and Russian songs on the beach adjacent to our apartment in East Rogers Park on warm summer nights. They also talked about Palestine and later Israel, but practically nothing about where their families had come from. This was not unusual in the neighborhood in which I grew up, as almost none of my friends seemed to mention anyone in their families before their parents or sometimes their grandparents' generations. As I discovered later, many people knew their family background for generations. As I grew older, I came to know people who would talk about relatives left behind in Ireland, Italy, Greece, France, and Poland. But where did our family come from? We seemed to have no past.

However, unlike many socialists, my father had a keen sense of Jewish history, though he was not formally religious. His family had come earlier than that of my mother (about 1904). He was born in 1911, and English was his native language. He, unlike my mother, went to Marshall public high school in Chicago, was an editor on the Marshall school newspaper and was fluent in both Spanish and Portuguese as well as Yiddish. He was a gifted writer. My mother, in contrast, attended the JPI (Jewish People's Institute) for immigrants at night and had to learn English. As I remember hearing later, my father became much more Jewishly aware during the Shoah and had translated a book, *The Black Book of Nazi Terror*, from the Spanish but was not able to find any publisher (even a Jewish one) to publish it. He showed me some of the rejection letters, which reflected the attempt by many Jews in America to "not make waves." Later in his life, I remember him writing

a number of professors of literature (which he should have been, or a professor of history) to request that they include Yiddish writers in their world literature classes. He wanted me to learn Yiddish, while my mother wanted me to learn Hebrew, which I did to a minimal extent. (I studied Russian and Latin in addition, with a little French.)

Over the years, my American-born father urged my mother to write about her years in the Ukraine before coming to America. As she did so, she did not really receive much support from her Saposnik siblings, most of whom wanted to avoid talking about their past. The only ones I remember being interested in documenting her story were my Aunt Bertha (Bracha), married to my Uncle Harry (Arel), and her daughter-in-law Nora. Otherwise, there was a conspiracy of silence around the past of the Saposnik family. It was if as we had materialized like Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, from the forehead of Zeus. My mother's enterprise of dredging up and recording her early memories seemed to be going against the grain. Worse, it seemed to upset people.

By this point, my father had died, and it was left for me, my mother's neighbor Deena Wolfson, and her aforementioned niece Nora Saposnik (related by marriage) to push her, and our cousin Phyllis Dreazen to help her by typing much of the initial manuscript.

But still, my mother did not have a publisher. And both my mother and I felt her story should be told. In 1977–1978, I was on a sabbatical in the Department of Psychology and Social Relations at Harvard University. My mother pushed me (perhaps *nudged* is a more descriptive word here) to show her manuscript to Elie Wiesel, who was at that time a professor at Boston University, across the Charles River.

I went to Professor Wiesel's office and left two manuscripts with his secretary, a lovely woman named, as I remember, Martha Hauptman. The first was my mother's memoirs, and the second was a translation by my late father of a Dutch novel entitled *Jesus and Menachem* by a Belgian Jew named Siegfried van Praag. Ms. Hauptman told me she would give the manuscripts to Professor Wiesel and scheduled me to return for a meeting with him in about three weeks. When I arrived rather shyly for my meeting. I was ushered into Professor Wiesel's

office. I found him to be very warm and friendly. He invited me to sit down and asked me about myself. I will never forget his advice to me regarding my efforts to publish the two manuscripts I had left with his secretary. "Jesus can wait; take care of Mama." (Eventually, my father's translation of *Jesus and Menachem* was also published – by Wipf & Stock in 2013).

And he wrote an endorsement for the book. I did as Professor Wiesel had directed and now worked with my mother on updating the story about her life after coming to America.

Though the book was now updated, and I had Elie Wiesel's endorsement, I still needed to find a publisher. And again, life proceeded in its strange ways. In the early 1990s, I was working on another project with Solomon Press in New York, a small publisher run by Sydney Solomon and his son Raymond (Reuven). By chance (or perhaps there is no "chance"), I told them about my mother's manuscript. They immediately wanted to see it, and the rest is history. They published it in 1995 and again in 2000. And they received a number of endorsements from distinguished people both in America and Israel.

But they were a small publishing house, and the book was never promoted all that well. I put it on the back shelf. Until…

In the spring of 2014, I was recovering in a hospital from a blood infection. One afternoon, I received a call from a woman named Sharon Parkman telling me that she was my second cousin, and that her grandmother Machla was the younger sister of my grandfather Zev Reuven (Velvel). This she had discovered through reading my mother's book. To be honest, I did not know if I was hallucinating, because of the medication I was on, but took down her phone number. As I recovered, I returned the call and realized that Sharon and I were indeed second cousins. Her grandmother Machla had settled in Hartford, Connecticut, while the widow of my murdered grandfather had settled in Chicago, Illinois.

I began to look at my mother's family tree, which she had put in the beginning of the book, and realized that she had listed her father as one of six siblings, the youngest being Machla, the grandmother

of Sharon. As I recovered, Sharon and her husband Jim came to visit the Saposnik *mishpachah* in Chicago. That was quite a get-together. I discovered a family – or more aptly, that family discovered me – that I was only dimly aware existed, if at all.

I contacted Raymond Solomon about what had happened, and he seemed quite interested in putting out a new edition. But nothing came of this. Then I was informed by his wife Judy that sadly he had been struck down by COVID-19 in Queens in the spring of 2020. I wrote up a sort of eulogy for him for Steve Linde, editor of the *Jerusalem Report*, because I knew that Raymond had written for it, and I included some material about my mother's book.

Something else happened, out of the blue, as it were. In this period, I received an e-mail from a fellow in Israel named Jacob Livshits, who asked me if I recognized the name of his great grandfather Mordche (Mordechai) Saposnik. I looked at the family tree my mother had written in her memoirs, and I saw it as the name of the brother of my murdered grandfather, Zev Reuven Saposnik. A new cousin and I had found each other through this whole last century, which had been so brutal to the Jewish people.

Jacob had found me through Ancestry.com, and unlike Sharon Parkman, had not read my mother's book nor was he even aware of it. I sent him an electronic copy. He told me he wept as he read it. I felt more and more this book should be republished and received rights from Raymond Solomon's surviving wife, Judy. I told Steve Linde at the *Jerusalem Report* of this story, and he put me in touch with Ilan Greenfield, president of Gefen Publishing House. We agreed upon a contract, and I decided to travel to Israel to meet him and also the relatives I never knew I had. Jacob (and his wife Ina and their two children) and his siblings (one brother, Gideon, and one sister, Esty) and his mother Bella (my second cousin – from whom I had been separated for a century, and more, whom I never knew) and her husband David.

And now cousins of the Chicago, Hartford, and Ukrainian branches of Family Saposnik have begun to be reunited. Hopefully, this published book may find others as well, in our Argentinian branch.

More than this, we hope that this book will help provide an example

of historical memory of all those Jews who suffered through, survived, and fled pogroms. Our story is every bit as compelling as that of the Shoah. Although less organized, pogroms in many ways were the Shoah before the Shoah and should be given much greater visibility in our collective memories.

We hope this book will help spur this process as well as foster our understanding of where we came from, assisting us to recover our repressed memories, engage with them, and, in the process, support a healthy healing. Maybe, in retrospect, this is why I became a psychologist.

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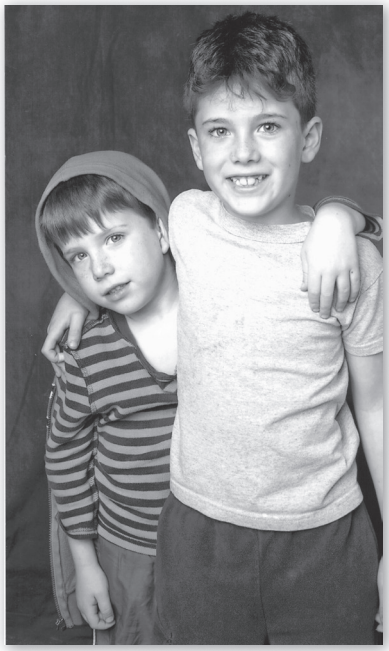
Daniel's wedding day to Reva Nelson, June 23, 2002

Reva, Daniel, Levi, and Izzy, established in Chicago as Edith had wished, 2007



Levi and Izzy Kaplan, Chicago, 2013