

# Attitude & Gratitude

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the memoirs of Max (Mac) Prager

by  
**Max Prager**

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For Hilda, my alter ego who kept her vow

*Chachmas Noshim Bunsoi Beisa*

She who is wise among women builds her house

(Proverbs 14:1)

*Haṣa U Oshir Hasameach B'chelko*

Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot, as it is said:

“When you eat of the labor of your hand, you are  
praiseworthy and all is well with you”

(Psalms 128:2)

## CHAPTER I

On a hot summer morning around 5, Mendel arrived at the home of Beresh and Ruchel Prager. The date was July 18, 1918 and on this day all Jews throughout the world were in sackcloth, mourning the destruction of the Holy Temples. Whenever I would cry as a child, and it was quite often, the neighbors would say: “tisha b’av (the ninth day of Av in the Hebrew calendar) is crying again.” However, since it is alleged that the Messiah was or will be born on tisha b’av, who knows?

Based on all the genealogical sources that I searched, the family name “Prager” was originally established for those who inhabited the city of Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia. Because of the usual anti-Semitism, the Jews fled to England and to Germany. In the eighteenth century, Poland had a king who looked favorably on the immigration of Jews to his land, partially due to the Jews’ expertise in finance. Consequently, the Pragers emigrated from England and Germany to Poland along with their co-religionists.

My father, Beresh, was born in 1878 in Yadow, Poland to Mendel and Chana Prager. He came from a family of seven children, five boys and two girls; he being the third oldest. In order of seniority they were Yisruel, Moshe, Beresh, Binyumin (Byumcha), Nissan (Niska), Maryim (Mary) and Chaya Sura.

I was named after my grandfather, Mendel, who was named after the Kotzker Rebba, Menachem Mendel of Kotzk. Mendel’s father, my great-grandfather Zalman, was a schochet (a Jewish ritual slaughterer of cattle and fowl) and the bal-tefila (non-professional cantor) for the Rebbe. In fact, the offspring of Zalman were and are cantors or baale-tefila. I was called Mendy at home and by my friends until the age of around thirteen when my friends started to call me Maxie, which changed to Mac later in life. Many years later, I realized that my real Hebrew name was Menachem and that Mendel was the Jewish equivalent. Traditionally, boys born on tisha b’av are named Menachem, though I don’t think that was the case with me. My mother Ruchel was born in Ostrawa-Macziweski in 1878 to Avraham Moshe and Sura Walberg. There was one son Shmuel and four daughters: Chaya, Rivka, Ruchel and Toba.

Unfortunately, Avraham died in his late thirties as a result of a heart attack leaving Sura a young widow with five children to support. She managed to do this by owning a store selling cotton thread and wool skeins. In fact, it’s quite possible that my mother never knew her father, given that she never spoke a word about him all the years of her life. She constantly thought about her mother, sending and receiving mail and shipping food and other staples to her and her sister Toba who never left Poland. It seems her brother Shmuel was relatively well off and didn’t need my mother’s help, as he was in the construction business. During the depression, he went bankrupt, which evidently caused his early demise. He, too, never came to America. By the way, according to my mother, his best friend was the Amshenover Rebbe.

The health conditions in Europe in the nineteenth century, not being particularly favorable, caused my father to be a young orphan as well. During the epidemic of cholera, his mother fell victim to this dreaded disease and, having small children to rear, Mendel remarried a single woman who was adored by my father.

Prior to World War I, Poland was occupied by Russia and young Polish youths were drafted to serve in the Russian Army. Each family was required to contribute one son to the Czar. Why Beresh was the unlucky one, I never did ascertain nor did I ever inquire. The possible reason could have been the fact that Sruel was not in good health, Moshe was lame since childhood, and Byumche and Niska were too young. Be that as it may, my father had nothing but fine memories of his stint in the Russian Army. It seems the Pragers are military men at heart. I remember his telling me about his girl friend Chasha who befriended him while he was in the army and who he liked quite a bit. Why he never married her, I really don't know. He loved going to her house whenever she invited him.

After a whirlwind courtship of a few weeks, my parents decided to get married at the ripe old age of 25. Although my mother could have been considered a lush (she loved liquor, wine and especially beer), she did not meet my father at a bar. Like most of the marriages of the time, theirs was a result of an introduction by a mutual friend or relative. In 1904, a year later, Beresh decided to flee from Russia to escape being again drafted to serve in the Russian Army because of the Russo-Japanese war. Immigration to the U.S. in that year reached record heights. The most popular port of embarkation was Hamburg, Germany. Naturally, he sailed in the steerage class debarking on Ellis Island. Like most immigrants, he settled on the lower East Side of Manhattan. Where he lived until he brought my mother to the US in 1906, I have no knowledge.

My sister Chana (Anne) was born in 1909. She was named after my father's mother. My parents' first business venture was in partnership with Rivka and Elya, my mother's sister and her husband. They opened a restaurant to serve immigrants whose wives were still in Europe. The women were the chefs and the men were the waiters. Naturally, no money changed hands on the Sabbath; as a result, many patrons forgot to pay on Sunday for their Sabbath meals. Consequently, this venture went down the tubes. Two years later, my sister Chayka (Ida then Irene) was born.

What my father's occupation was subsequent to his ill-fated introduction to the business world, I can only guess. It must have been tailoring, because that's the only vocation he was ever engaged in. Later on, I will relate his other ventures which all ended in failure. I considered him to be the "revolving-door entrepreneur." My mother put him in business through one door and he escaped through the other.

Evidently, whatever my father was working at increased his income because he was able to leave the lower East Side and move to a rural area called Brownsville. Seeing trees, smelling flowers and walking on grass gave my parents the feeling of being farmers after living in the crowded tenements of Manhattan. In this blissful atmosphere, Maishe (Morris and later Murry) their first son was born on August 20, 1913. These years were not very eventful since nothing that occurred then comes to my mind.

After 2 or 3 years in Brownsville, the Pragers moved to 96 Hopkins Street in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, where I was born. Incidentally, until the time I got married and read my birth certificate, I "celebrated" my birthday on July 23, which was the the date told to me by my mother. In those years, we had no

100-year Hebrew-English calendars. The tenement - nobody called it "apartment house" - we lived in consisted of five stories; on the street level were two stores separated in the center by stairs called a "stoop". The stairs had about 10 steps leading to a vestibule called "the hall" and also to the first floor of apartments; thus, we had 4 floors of apartments. Can you imagine a mother today schlepping up a carriage with a child 5 flights a few times a day?

Our apartment was on the third floor and consisted of a kitchen, living room and 3 bedrooms. We had no heat or electricity. There was a large stove-oven in the kitchen, which was utilized for creating heat and for cooking purposes. Every tenant had his own storage space in the cellar and when he purchased coal, it was delivered to the basement and my father would go down to the cellar with a bucket to fetch some coal. Every religious Jew would have a Shabbos (Sabbath) goy to start up the oven early Saturday morning. I still remember vividly how this Italian youth of around 16 years of age looked; he always wore high-topped boots. After a few years, around 1925, steam heat and electricity were installed in those apartments whose occupants consented to a \$2.00 monthly increase in rent for each improvement; consequently, we had a \$4.00 raise in rent.

Each floor had four apartments. As you came up the stairs, we were on the left. To the right of us lived the Bodners. This was a second marriage for both of them, their spouses both having died. Mr. Bodner, a waiter in a restaurant on Graham Ave. not far from the house, had a child named Solly who was the champion punch ball player of the neighborhood; he could hit three sewers. Each city block had four sewers spaced 25 yards from each other; thus, he was able to hit the ball around 75 yards, no small feat. In punch ball you do not use a stick, or a bat, you only use your fist. Every Sunday morning, the Jews of our block would play the Italians of the next block for money.

Mrs. Bodner's sons were Maxie and Archie and they had one son together, Yonkie. Directly across the hall from us were the Kaplans who had a daughter my age named Sylvia. She was a pretty butterball who created in me the ambition to pursue medicine. I will not dwell on this subject any longer for fear it may embarrass certain members of my immediate family (I am not referring to my wife). To the left of the Kaplans lived the Rosenfelds who had one son, Yankel. Chaim Rosenfeld was a foreman in a men's shirt factory located in Troy, N.Y. and came home only weekends. On one Saturday night, Chaim had a bad respiratory cold in his chest and they called my mother to schtell bankes (apply cups to his back). My mother was an expert in this art and everyone called upon her to lend a banke. She would prepare a pan of hot water, place a dozen cups in it, ignite a pencil whose tip was covered with absorbent cotton, insert the pencil into each cup producing a vacuum and then place each cup on the back of the patient. After a period of an hour, the cups would be removed and rubbing alcohol would be applied to the entire area previously occupied by cups.

All the children of the floor and sometimes of the other floors would come to watch and be entertained. What especially fascinated the kids were the multi-colors of the spots left by the cups. Unfortunately, Chaim's body was covered with hair like a bear and my mother struggled to have the cups stick. The darker the spot, the more

severe the cold, and louder were the cheers of the children. Incidentally, Mrs. Rosenfeld was the one who called me tisha b'yav whenever I cried.

Very few of the building's tenants were Orthodox, although all were Jewish. There were four shomer shabbos (Sabbath observant) families, including us. One was Pinchas who sported a beard and achieved notoriety by allegedly groping Mrs. Bodner who was well endowed. The latter related this incident to my mother within earshot of me. Many evenings she would come into our apartment to spend hours with my mother while her husband was working nights at the restaurant. While listening, she had a habit of placing her right hand into her dress and touching her left breast. Being an inquisitive child of perhaps five or six, I was mesmerized by her action. She was fairly pretty with natural blond hair and very zaftig. Her husband prayed every morning; however, on shabbos he went to the first minyon (quorum of 10 Jews) and then went to work. This was not unusual because practically everybody worked on shabbos; there were very few jobs available for Sabbath observers.

Two houses from our building was a Hungarian schul (synagogue) where we all prayed. I imagine that my father went into tailoring because that was one of the few occupations in which you could observe the Sabbath. Both his brothers who were millinery manufacturers worked Saturday but their wives kept shabbos. Also, my father-in-law, Harry Friedfeld, and his sister Helen Fein were the only siblings out of seven who were Sabbath observers. Similarly, in my mother-in-law's (Sadie Hecht) family, two daughters strayed from being Orthodox. My mother's five siblings all remained true to the fourth commandment. The above illustrates that even among the most religious Jewish families there were many, who finding it difficult to obtain employment, chose to work on the Sabbath.

All my siblings attended Mark Hopkins Junior High - P.S. 148 - which was located two blocks from our house on Hopkins St. Maishe also attended Hebrew school every afternoon. This school was on Stockton St. four blocks away. The curriculum was so advanced that it was superior to many day schools of today. In addition to chumish, tanach, rashi, mishnayis and gemmora were taught. By coincidence, my very close friend Dave Lupkin attended the same Talmud Torah.

Every tenement building on Hopkins Street placed a wooden bench in front of the house for the convenience of the tenants. Since air conditioning did not exist and I don't remember electric fans being used, people would escape the heat and humidity in their apartments by sitting on these benches all day and till midnight when they would go upstairs and try to get some sleep. Many nights, I, as well as others, would either sleep on the fire escape or on the roof.

This bench also served as a social meeting place for nursing mothers, who would sit there with their mammary glands exposed without any pretense of cover. Men returning from work in the evening would not even think of stealing a glance at the uncovered breasts since their libido was not aroused. Since, in almost all instances, these mothers were amply endowed, I attribute the lack of sexual arousal to the fact that nursing in public was universally accepted, not as today. Another phenomenon of those days was the prevalent lack of modesty in

children; urinating in the gutter when the urge hit them. Going up four or five floors to their apartment was out of the question. Boys would do this till the age of seven or eight; while little girls up to the age of three or four would do the same. Very often, one would see dead horses lying in the street for days with flies all over the carcass, awaiting special trucks to remove them.

At this time in my life, I became cognizant of the laborious preparations for shabbos, and for the holidays. My mother started on Thursday for shabbos, when she did her extensive shopping at the outdoor market, which was 2 blocks from our home. In the evening, she would knead the dough for the challas and for the noodles, which was always added to the chicken soup. She placed the dough under a large comforter so that it would rise. On Friday morning, she would twist the dough into several challas and then paint them with egg yolks, using several feathers tied into a bundle. After, they were ready to be placed in the oven for baking. Of course, being a very pious woman, she would perform one of the most important mitzvas (obligations) assigned exclusively to Jewish women, After removing the dough from the comforter, she would tear off a piece of dough in order to comply with this mitzva. On Friday afternoon, she washed the kitchen floor and covered it with newspapers, which stayed all shabbos. The shabbos candles were the only illumination the entire night.

Each Jewish holiday had its own method of preparation. A few weeks before Passover, Italian vendors would sell grapes enclosed in wooden baskets from push-carts. These grapes were different than the dessert grapes now sold in food stores. My mother would buy quite a few of these baskets, which were emptied into a large receptacle to allow my father to stomp the grapes with his naked feet. Sugar was then added to the crushed grapes and then poured into large glass containers, which were placed on the fire escape to ferment into wine over the winter. Borsht, called russel, was similarly produced by chopping up the beets, adding vinegar and/or another condiment and then pouring it into glass bottles which were also placed on the fire escape.

Prohibition was the law of the land at this time; but this did not deter my parents from being moon-shiners. My father had access to a seller of raw alcohol and he would use a baby carriage to transport the illicit merchandise. Many times, I, being a child of four or five, would accompany him on his illegal trips. My mother then took over the manufacture of whiskey. She would mix the spirits with either huckleberries, blueberries, cherries or other fruits, depending on the liqueur she desired. Again, she would add sugar to allow fermentation and put this on the fire escape.

Every tenant had a small cubicle in the basement of the building, which was used for storage. Several days before Passover, my father and Maishe would bring up all the Passover dishes, pots, pans and utensils. Ridding the house of all semblance of chamatz (unleavened food), by cleaning thoroughly the icebox, gas range and all food closets was a monumental task. Children had a special game exclusively for this holiday. Three holes would be punctured in a small wooden box that had previously held hard cheese. Each hole was of a different diameter. The box would be placed against a wall of a building and each child would roll hazel nuts trying to get the nut into a

hole. Getting a nut into the smallest hole would earn the most points; getting them into the other holes would earn less.

Shevuos, a holiday that celebrates the acceptance of the Torah by the Jews, is not difficult to observe nor in its preparation. In fact, the only characteristics that defined this holiday are all enjoyable. Tree leaves and flowers are placed throughout the house, adding beauty and fragrance to the observance. In addition to satisfying the senses of sight and smell, Shevuos wants us to enjoy the sense of taste. For some reason, dairy meals are favored for this holiday, especially cheese. Thus, cheese blintzes, cheese kreplach (pyrogen) and, last but not least, cheesecake.

The holiday of Succoth lasts seven days followed by Shemini Atzeras and Simchas Torah. We celebrate Succoth by constructing huts in which we eat all our meals and the very pious sleep therein as well. Our ancestors, after being liberated from Egypt, spent 40 years in the Sinai Desert living in huts the entire time. Each tenement building built a succah (hut) in the back yard, which usually had room for about 8 persons, all male adults. Women are not obligated to eat in the succah, although today most do. My mother, sisters and I, not yet being thirteen, would carry down the food four stories for my father and brother. She would also light the holiday candles in the succah. This holiday dictates the purchase and use of an esrog (a citron) and a lulav (a bundle of palm leaves). Almost all families purchased one set, which was used by all members; economy being the reason.

One day before Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), an age-old custom is performed. This is called schlugen kapuris. When the Jewish Temple existed, Jews would bring animals to sacrifice in the Temple to ask the Almighty for forgiveness for their sins. Since the Temple was destroyed and sacrifices no longer exist, a live chicken is held over the head of a person and rotated three times simultaneously intoning a prayer asking for forgiveness. I would accompany my mother to the chicken market where she would select several live chickens for the holiday. After schlugen kapuris with all of us, she returned to the market and the schochet would slaughter them.

On one occasion, a chicken decided to relieve itself on my sister's head. Today, the very pious still use live chickens, while other less pious use money in lieu of chickens. There were women in the market who made their living plucking feathers from the chickens. Also, there were times when my mother would buy live fish and keep them for several days in the bathtub. I was mesmerized watching my mother cut off the head of the fish and the rest of the body kept shaking for several minutes after being decapitated.

## CHAPTER II

My earliest recollection is probably from the age of three. I remember being terrified whenever I would notice the street cleaners sweeping the gutters; they were dressed completely in white and, to my mind, they resembled doctors. As a result, as soon as I saw them, I would run up to my apartment crying. Another vivid remembrance was when I was four. It was Chayke's graduation from Junior High at the age of twelve, which means she finished nine years of schooling at such a young age. She received a medal for excellence in Spanish and another medal in one other subject.

My parents threw a party to celebrate the occasion, inviting relatives, friends, and neighbors. My sister was dressed in white and looked so pretty. We owned a player piano so we enhanced the festivities with nice music, Yiddish and English. I remember being held on my great-uncle's lap and being hugged and kissed by him. Perhaps, I remember this incident more than some others because even at that age I wasn't hugged or kissed often, if at all. Uncle Dovid, who was my grandfather Mendel's brother had a beautiful black beard and, evidently, liked me as I did him. He lived on Gerry St., a few blocks from our home, across the street from Pfizer Chemicals. He died in his late forties from lung cancer, which, I am quite sure, he contracted from his exposure to the multi-colored smoke belching from the chemical plant.

At the age of five, I was enrolled in the kindergarten program in P.S.148. On the very first day of my attendance, pints of milk were distributed to each child. Either because of missing my mother or disliking the teacher, I threw the bottle of milk at the latter and I was either asked to leave or I refused to return. This ended my secular education for one year.

However, when I was sent to learn to read and write Hebrew at the very poor home of a rabbi, I took to it as a fish to water. The rabbi came from Bialystock, Poland and was extremely short and thin and possessed a very straggly beard. His physical stature and face pallor were the result of malnutrition. He and his wife were probably in their sixties based upon their son's age which, I would venture to say, was in the forties. The rabbi constantly smelled from herring, which didn't bother me because I love all types of herring and fish to this day. It is quite possible that I will always remember this sweet, loving couple because they honestly loved me and called me Mendele. They could not have loved a grandchild more.

When I turned six, I entered P.S. 55 on Floyd St. where I remained for two years. Unlike today's society which frowns upon permitting anything resembling religion from being introduced into educational or governmental institutions, Xmas parties were held in each classroom at every school. My mother was the consummate baker of honey cake and I would deliver this delicious morsel as my contribution to the party. Every child was asked to bring some edible to celebrate Xmas. Apropos of this, whenever in future years I would relate to my mother that a teacher or rabbi complimented me, she immediately said: "I will bake him (or her) a honey cake." In my second year, my teacher was Mrs. Stanley, a middle-aged Irish school-marm who I disliked intensely. She

would have the entire class line up near the windows and, with a long pencil, examine every child's hair for lice. The girls received an extra long look because their amount of hair was much greater than the boys. Every once in a while my mother would wash my sisters' hair with kerosene.

During these two years, I continued learning with my rabbi the Five Books of Moses (*chumish*); and the beginning of the Prophets (*tanach*). He was such a good teacher that, when I was examined by Rabbi Mendelowitz on my entry to Yeshiva Torah Vadaath, I was placed in an advanced class. Spending practically no time in the apartment, other than eating and sleeping, I was constantly in the street playing with my friends. During the day, I was attending school and in the afternoon for about 2 hours I was learning Torah with my Rebbi. Immediately after my lessons, I would play with my friends in the street. During the day we would play ball and other combative games on teams.

One of the games we played was called "iron man", which had no resemblance to the game itself. Each of us would carry a window-shade pole, which had a metal prong on each end. Territory in the gutter was assigned to each team and the winner was the one who captured the other one's territory by using the poles as weapons. As luck would have it, an opponent speared my left cheek with the metal part of the pole ripping a considerable amount of skin and flesh and causing excessive bleeding.

Fortunately, on the corner of our block was a drug store owned by "Doc Sills" who was as respected as if he were a physician. Upon examining the wound, he felt it advisable to call Beth Moses Hospital, which was on Hart St. about eight blocks away. In those years, persons needing emergency medical care would go to the nearest druggist who would then phone the nearest hospital and an ambulance would be dispatched staffed by a medical intern and a registered nurse.

Immediately upon gazing at the hole in my cheek, the intern tells the druggist that I will require many stitches to close the wound. To this day I am amazed at my statement to the intern which was as follows: "Doctor, if you stitch me, will I have a mark on my face forever?" His reply was in the affirmative. Then, this 7 year old asks him another question: "If you don't stitch me, will I also have a mark forever?" He again said: "Yes." So I wisely told him not to give me stitches.

This accident occurred about a half hour prior to supper- time. I was at the drug store over an hour and one would conclude that the parents of a seven-year old would become concerned about the welfare of their child who has not joined the rest of the family at the dinner table. However, Ruchel Prager was not the ordinary mother: she was rough and tough and my father couldn't be bothered by minor problems. When I arrived at my house, the entire family was in the midst of their meal; a bandage is covering my left cheek, traversing my head and going down my entire right cheek.

You would think that seeing a child of that age sporting such a large bandage would elicit shock, alarm and, last but not least, a great deal of concern. However, my mother asked the cause of this accident in a cool, untroubled voice and then told me in Yiddish "*keim tzu di tisch iness*" translated to "come to the table and eat." The

following morning saw Mendel in school, bandage or no bandage. In fact, I do not remember ever staying home from school except when I had the German measles at age 12. Until I had my tonsillectomy at age 13, I suffered each and every year from tonsillitis, as far back as I can remember, and I would attend school with compresses around my neck. Someone years later gave me the knick name “nails”. After what I went through, I certainly deserved that name.

My mother really deserved that appellation. I must have been around six and my brother eleven when we were frolicking naked after a Friday afternoon bath. Evidently, we were making too much noise, which prevented my mother from completing her *erin shabbos* (pre-Sabbath) chores. Believe it or not, she flings a fork that she was holding right at the two of us; and, lo and behold, it sticks in the right buttock of Maishe. My mother, of course, was beside herself and started wailing and showed immense contrition. But, in retrospect, I must say she was one tough lady.

One incident comes to mind, which illustrates her unruffled nature. When annual bouts with tonsillitis became even too much for Mama, she decided it was time to have my diseased tonsils extracted. Since none of my siblings ever underwent surgery, Mama saw no reason to start with me, causing me to suffer until I reached the age of 13. Through the grapevine, she discovered a hospital that would perform a tonsillectomy for \$10; this fee covered the surgery and an overnight stay at the hospital. The hospital was Brooklyn Hospital located on De Kalb Avenue in the Fort Greene section.

It seems that Friday was the only day of the week that tonsillectomies were performed or, perhaps the \$10 fee was only good on Friday. At any rate, my mother escorted me to the hospital via trolley car on a Friday morning. As we opened the door a nurse greeted us; and my mother left me. I don't remember whether I was either kissed or hugged. I awoke several times during the night, vomiting quite a bit due to the anesthesia. My nurse was so kind and compassionate that I fell in love with her and had her in my mind for about a week after I left; it illustrates again how much I was longing for affection. The following morning, being Saturday, my sister Anne who was not a Sabbath observer came via taxi to take me home.

Despite her outer veneer, Mama had a very soft side as well. My siblings and I had only one living grandparent; my mother's mother who was living in Poland. One day, when I was around six or seven, a letter arrived from my mother's sister informing her of my grandmother's death. For days, my mother locked herself in one of the bedrooms and I can never forget her sobs and wails. My philanthropic urge was learned watching my mother since I was a little child. She would solicit alms from all her neighbors and friends and then walk up many flights of stairs distributing her collection to poor and sick families. At least once a week, she purchased groceries and produce from her own meager funds and again found needy people to care for.

Having never giving much thought to how babies were created, learning from my friends at seven the truth had no effect on me. My parents did not become suddenly, in my mind, sexual perverts and what they indulged in did not appear dirty or irreligious.

During the hot summer months, my parents and I would go to the beach at Coney Island. This would occur on Sundays, as Papa would be home. We would go to the Municipal Baths, called by most people City Baths since “municipal” was too difficult a word for immigrants. It was located on Surf Avenue at West 8<sup>th</sup> Street and they would furnish a locker and showers for a charge of 10 cents. Papa would place me on his shoulders and swim in fairly deep water. I still remember the refreshed sun- burned look that was ours after leaving the baths for home.

On weekdays, Mama and I would go to the beach, but since I was too young to go to the baths by myself, we changed into our bathing suits under the boardwalk. Mama never removed her underwear and slipped her suit over her undergarments. I was too young for my mother to be concerned about my nudity.

On one particular day, while we were walking under the boardwalk on our way to the beach, she accidentally hit her forehead against a water pipe and began to bleed profusely. We immediately went to the first aid station where they stopped the bleeding and wrapped her wound with a bandage. One would think that the accident would cause Mama to go home; however, she again showed her toughness by going into the water and acting as though nothing had occurred. She always held on to the ropes separating the various sections of the beach and dunked herself up and down many times. This action gave her the most enjoyment.

I enjoyed going to the movies during the summer when I had no classes. A few blocks from my home was a movie house called the “White House Theatre” which was in a one-story white edifice. What remains in my memory was the method employed by the management to reduce the foul odor created by the heat and humidity in the theatre. Every hour a young man would go through the aisles using a spray gun filled with a deodorant. Talking pictures had not yet been developed; a player piano would create music to enhance the enjoyment of the film. For 5 cents admission, you were able to view a double feature (two full-length films), a serial film which was then called an “episode,” a comedy and the news.

### CHAPTER III

My next educational change molded me tremendously in what I would consider some very significant segments of my future life. These are: my love for religion, education, sports and respect for self-discipline. Being enrolled at the age of eight in what was one of two elementary yeshivas in the country was a high-water mark of my life. These two yeshivas were Yaakov Yossef on the lower East Side and Torah Vadaath which was founded five years previously in 1921 and was located at 206 Wilson Street in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. I, living in Bedford-Stuyvesant, attended the latter. The only other yeshiva existing at that time was Rabenu Yitzchak Elchonen, a high school.

The building was a three-story red brick structure bordered by Division Ave. on its right and Lee Ave. on its left. You entered into a moderate sized vestibule leading into a fairly large synagogue used for prayer and study. There were stairs on each side of the hall leading to the second story which housed the administrative and principals' offices. Also, there were a number of classrooms on this floor. The third floor consisted of classrooms only. You will notice that no mention was made of a gymnasium, pool nor laboratories.

On the left side of the building was a narrow alley, which served as our schoolyard where we played soccer every day at recess at 10:30 and during the lunch hour. We had a one-hour break between 3 and 4 p.m. when we began our secular studies, which lasted till 7 p.m. with no break. During the one-hour afternoon recess we played in the street punch ball and association football (no tackling). On many days we'd play the latter against our secular teachers; this was later on when we were seventh or eighth graders.

At the age of eight, my mother decided to have at least one of her sons attend a yeshiva. Since my brother was five years older than I and Torah Vadaath did not exist when he was a child of school-starting age, he was enrolled in a Talmud Torah instead. The reader will notice that little mention is made of my father to this point and for good reason. Mama was the dominant member of the household making all decisions, pushing her children to excel in school and buying their clothes.

Maishe and I would get a new suit every Passover as we outgrew last year's very quickly. A ritual would be performed each and every time a suit was purchased for me. My mother would take my father along as the "maven" since he was in the men's clothing business and, supposedly, was an expert in suit material and workmanship. The three of us walked to Graham Avenue where all men and women's clothing stores were located.

The store salesmen would stand outside the stores and, as the potential customers would walk by, describe the immense bargains to be garnered. On one such occasion, when I was about seven, I was walking a bit slower than my parents and a little behind them; lo and behold, a salesman grabs me by the hand and yanks me into his store and literally holds me hostage to force my parents to find me. After several minutes, they noticed my disappearance and began a frantic search for me in each and every men's store. This incident reminds me of the days of vaudeville when a stage hand would use a large hook to yank a bad performer off the stage.

Evidently this *modus operandi* was successful because my parents returned and were looking at suits. Papa had already been instructed by Mama, the boss, to reject any and every suit that was shown by deprecating either the material or the workmanship; and, sometimes, both. In those days, bargaining was the order of the day and both seller and buyer knew that the opening buy and sell price was never the true value of the merchandise; each knew in advance the approximate final amount that would end the sale.

After trying on many suits, I was told by Mama “Mendy, let’s go.” She already selected the suit that I would end up wearing but this was a shopping maneuver to reduce the price. Little did Mama realize that the salesman had far greater experience in this cat and mouse sport. He knew exactly her plan of attack since almost every customer used the same tactic. He knew that we would all depart; and later on we would return. After walking in the street for a few minutes, Mama would ask Papa: “Is he following us?” No sooner did the words come out of her mouth when our salesman would beckon us to return offering a lower price, which he had in mind all the time. This was the common and accepted method of *handling* (negotiating a purchase).

Papa was the sweetest and most placid human being that I have ever known. I had never seen him angry nor raise his voice to his children, nor to anyone. It is true that he showed no outward affection to his wife or to his children; but we all knew how much he loved us. From my earliest days till the day he died, I constantly heard him say: “Children, you don’t know what a mother you have”. He kissed us once a year on Kol Nidrei night prior to going to shul. He hit Maishe and me only once and I’m sure it hurt him more than it hurt us. I was around seven and Maishe twelve when Chana, who was around seventeen and working, decided to give us money to go to the movies. There was only one problem, it was Saturday afternoon. I still remember the movie; it starred Milton Sills in a picture about a prisoner at Sing-Sing prison.

My parents somehow learned of our transgression and were eagerly awaiting our return to greet us with a set of cat-of-nine-tails. We were ushered into the small bedroom and Mama kept yelling at Papa: “schlag ze” (hit them). Poor Papa had no desire to inflict punishment on his children but he had to obey the boss.

His greatest joy was when he was alone in the house and spent his time reading a Jewish newspaper called “*Der Tag*” (The Day). He would read it avidly from the first page to the last; and when he found an article that would interest my mother, he would read it to her. I must have inherited this habit as I do the same. His expertise lay in politics. He enjoyed reading political stories and news and was a Democrat as many Jews were.

There were five Jewish dailies in New York City; “*Der Tag*” [“The Day”] (Democrat), “*Der Forvitz*” [“The Forward”] (Socialist), “*DerMorgan Journal*” [“The Morning Journal”] (Republican), “*Freiheit*” [Freedom] (Communist), and “*The Tagablatt*” [“The Daily Sheet”] (non-political). The extreme orthodox read “*The Tagablatt*”; the less extreme read “*Der Morgan Journal*”. Most secular and labor-conscious Jews read “*The Forvitz*” and the rest of our people read “*Der Tag*”; except for the communists.

## CHAPTER IV

My first day in Torah Vadaath will always remain in my memory. My mother escorted me into the office of Rabbi Feivel Mendelowitz, the Hebrew principal. He wore a black hat and suit and had a large salt and pepper beard. I was immediately attracted favorably to his kind and gracious demeanor. Sitting directly opposite him and with Mama at my side, I was given an oral examination by the Rabbi in *chumish* (bible) to determine in which grade I should be placed. After examining me, he caressed my cheek to allay either my fear or apprehension and with this act gave me the confidence to start a new phase in my life.

Mama then inquired about the matter of tuition and the Rabbi told her the monthly amount depended on her ability to pay. She then asked if four dollars a month was adequate and he replied in the affirmative. He also told her that if she could not afford to pay for the hot lunches, I would be fed gratis. The Pragers being a very proud family, she declined his magnanimous offer and purchased a lunch box which contained a thermos bottle. Miners and other laborers would carry their lunch in these boxes. Every day she would enclose a sandwich, two fruits and fill the thermos with hot coffee. Evidently, serving coffee to an eight year old does not injure his health nor impede his growth as is universally believed. I was placed in the third grade class whose rebbi was Mr. Greenberg, a fairly tough man who took no prisoners. After my Bialystoker *melamed* (Hebrew teacher), he was not easy to digest. We learned *chumish* and a bit of *Rashi* in this grade.

Living about a mile and a half from school, necessitated my traveling by trolley car. Each morning at 8 I would walk to the corner at Tompkins Avenue and take the trolley to the corner of Division Ave. and Wilson St. I would then walk about 25 yards to the school. We were released in the evening at 7 and I would arrive home about 8 when I would eat my supper alone because the entire family had eaten by then.

Since we had such a long day, we were not assigned any homework. After supper around 8:30, I went down to the street to play with my friends, none of whom attended Yeshiva. Just imagine parents today allowing children of eight playing in the street at night unguarded and unprotected.

The games we played were varied and very unique. They were as follows:

1. "Johnny on the pony"- two teams were chosen; each consisting of five kids. The team that played the pony had one kid (usually the weakest) stand against a building wall. The other four would get into a bending position placing their heads between the legs of the kid in front of them. It would, therefore, appear as a human bridge. The competing team would stand across the street on the sidewalk and each of the five, in turn, would run across the gutter and leap as far as they could on this bridge. The aim was to get all five landed on the others without falling off. Once all five were settled on their opponents, they would yell: "Johnny on the pony 1 2 3, Johnny on the pony 1 2 3, Johnny on the pony 1 2 3 all off." Then the other team would take over and repeat the same procedure.

2. “Church on fire”- this game was a type of initiation of new kids on the block. Having been born on the block, I never had to be indoctrinated. The kid was placed against a wall blindfolded and on cue, would yell “church on fire” where upon, five or six kids would run at him with their penises out and would extinguish the supposed fire. I always wanted to know how the initiate explained his being soaking wet to his mother.

3. “The Knight and his Horse”- this was another initiation. One kid would play the role of the horse and another would take the part of the knight. The initiate would act as the servant to the knight who would help his master get on the horse. The knight had previously stepped into fresh and wet horse manure, which was always available. The knight would command his servant to extend his arm with the palm of his hand up so that the knight could step on his hand and be able to get on the horse. Of course, the poor kid then ended up with a full hand of fresh horse manure.

The other games we played were “chase the white horse”, “ring-a-leave-e-o”, and jumping over 50 gallon milk cans. Around 10 PM, mothers appeared in the various windows calling their sons to come up to bed. Many a night, I was the last member of the family to go to sleep. It is incredible that this was happening to a child of eight.

I went to yeshiva on Monday thru Thursday from 9 in the morning to 7 at night; on Friday and *eruv yom-tov* (the day preceding a Jewish holiday), from 9 to 12 noon; on Sunday I went from 9 to 6:30. Since I had to travel by trolley, I left the house each morning at 8 and returned at 8 in the evening. It was a ritual every Sunday that I receive 15 cents for lunch to buy a hot pastrami sandwich. My parents and siblings would either go visiting or indulge themselves in other pleasures, so I was placated with delicatessen food that I enjoyed. Every *shabbos* my mother would reward my brother and me for reading the *sedra* (biblical portion of the week) called “*maver sedra*”. The incentive was a hot pastrami sandwich for each of us purchased on the corner delicatessen dispensing Bronfman meat products. My yeshiva cautioned us not to buy other meat processors products i.e., Isaac Gelles or Hebrew National. Several years later, Bronfman was indicted for selling horse meat, so much for “*hashgocha*” (supervision).

During the summer, there were no secular classes; however, in the month of July, Hebrew classes were held from 9 to 1:30 in the afternoon. The attendance was not mandatory since the more affluent students went to camp or to resorts with their parents; those less fortunate like me were in school. The yeshiva was closed during the month of August and I spent it doing many things. Sometimes, I would go to my Tante Beila and Uncle Byumcha for a few days. They had 2 sons Mendel (Max) and Yaakov (Jack) who were grown so they enjoyed having a young child in their home. Besides, they loved me and the feeling was mutual; Tante Beila lived in the Bronx at 2117 Daly Avenue.

Also, there were summers that I would spend with Tante Chaya Sura, my father’s youngest sister, and her husband Leon Hahn; he was considered the wealthiest in the family. He owned a luggage store and, evidently did quite well. They lived on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn in an expensive building with a doorman.

Having no children of their own, they adored me. She, however, was an invalid for many years due to the negligence of a surgeon in Unity Hospital on St. Johns Place in Brooklyn. He, or his associates, neglected to remove

a surgical instrument from her stomach. After a long and protracted lawsuit, they received a tidy sum from the settlement. She always convalesced in our home as she had a great deal of confidence in my mother.

Also, during August, my parents and I would visit my father's cousin Chasha, and her husband Jake Wollman; they lived in Jersey City. I can just picture the ritual of each and every trip. My father and I would purchase 2 sticks of peppermint chewing gum and my mother would buy hard sucking candy in the candy store which was in the adjacent tenement.

Then we walked to the next street, Flushing Ave., where we took the trolley to Park Row in Manhattan going over the Brooklyn Bridge. After leaving the trolley, whose fare was 5 cents, we walked several blocks to Cortland St. where we took the Hudson Tubes, now known as PATH. While riding the train, I still recall all of the passengers, as well as us, chewing a mile a minute and reading the advertisements along the ceiling of the car. I would always marvel at the engineering skill of constructing a tunnel underneath the Hudson River. The thought of a break in the tunnel and a water flood always came to my mind. Upon arriving in Jersey City, we would be met by Jake who would drive us in his open Studebaker to his home. Very few people owned cars in 1926; Jake was a self-employed glazier.

Chasha was always smiling and Jake was a handsome man, both being very genial hosts. After a delicious meal, the adults would retire for tea and cake while I would peruse the pictorial history of World War I. I found this book fascinating and I would flip the pages for hours and never get tired, nor bored at looking at the same pictures year after year. Of course, Mama would reciprocate and invite them to our house; where the menu would always be the same. My mother, not being a gourmet cook, would on special occasions prepare dishes that were her specialty; namely, rolled cabbage with either meat or rice as an appetizer and fried veal cutlets (weiner schneitzel) as the main dish.

Every summer the three of us would go on Sundays to the *vald* (the woods) in Bronx Park where the entire Prager family who resided in the Bronx would gather for a picnic, which included hot cooked food and a day of song. Many of the male Pragers were professional singers and the women would join in as well. In those days, Palestine and Zionism was not as popular among Jews as Israel today. Except for the Jewish National Fund *pisbkas* (collection boxes), which were distributed to the students of all Talmud Torahs, Yeshivas, and secular Yiddish schools i.e: Workman's Circle, very little attention was paid to the kibbutzim in Palestine. Once a year I would walk in the streets with my JNF box stopping people and solicit money for our co-religionists in the Middle East. Therefore, unlike our singing Hebrew and Israeli songs as we do today, the songs we sang were only in Yiddish.

Mama would cook meat and, believe it or not, my father would schlep pots of meat with dishes and utensils and cake and fruit on the subway from Brooklyn to the Bronx. We would go Tante Beila's house and then go together with them to the *vald* where the whole clan would gather. The others also brought cooked food and beverages for all. After eating and much beautiful singing, the men separated themselves from the women, I tagging along.

One cousin, Benny Krantz, would hold court; every male in the group would listen eagerly to Benny as though he were a rabbi or teacher. Upon his finishing his few words, laughter would burst forth from each and every one in his audience. When the laughter would die down gradually, Benny would speak again holding the attention of his enthusiastic listeners as never before; loud laughter would commence again. For at least an hour, Benny entertained his cousins; however, I never quite understood why they found his words so funny. As I got older, I was gently told to stay with the other children my age who revealed to me why I was being banned from the adult group. It seems Benny was a raconteur of off-color jokes and it would embarrass my father were I to listen to them.

Whenever we would visit the Bronx or go to a family affair, singing Yiddish songs lifted our spirits and made us forget our poverty; and in some cases, our illnesses. For many years, the Pragers had a family circle, which provided us with another reason to gather together.

Maishe, being 5 years my senior, and now reaching the age of thirteen preferred playing with his friends to joining his parents on trips to cousins. Being extremely handsome, Maishe had all the girls vying for his attention. At the age of twelve, he already had a girl friend named Rachel who was cute with long brown curls and who lived several blocks away on Gerry St. My sisters being seventeen and fifteen certainly felt too old to accompany their parents when visiting family. Chana, the older, was working in a paper box factory as a machine operator. She started working there at the age of twelve, never graduating from elementary school. She was, in current terminology a “drop-out”. The factory was called “Wohlgemuth Paper Box Co.” and was located 2 blocks from the house on Hopkins St. She worked there 43 years until her death at age 55; sustaining a heart attack while working at her machine.

Chayka, my younger sister, being an excellent student, would have been a candidate to pursue a general course in high school. Needing another wage earner in the family, my parents opted to have her attend Alpha Business School, a tuition-paying school, for 2 years where she learned stenographic subjects ie: short-hand and typing. After finishing her course, she was hired by the United Palestine Appeal, the predecessor of the United Jewish Appeal, where she rose rapidly to an executive position. She was employed there till her untimely death at the age of 32.

In order to augment the meager wages of Papa, my mother would take in home work and my sisters, as children, would help her. I always said that if the roles were reversed and my mother the breadwinner, we would have been much richer or less poor.

Maishe’s bar mitzva was a 2- day celebration which was not unusual even in those days. Of course, catering the affair was unheard of, especially in our economic circle. Food preparation commenced at least one week prior to the affair. Tante Rivka, Mama’s sister would move into our house at that time and begin cooking and baking together with my mother. You can just imagine the quantity of food they prepared when you realize that at least 30-

40 people were invited for the *Shabbos* meal, 20-30 for *Seudah Shlishis* (the third Sabbath meal) and 50-60 Sunday afternoon.

All furniture was removed from various rooms and rented tables and benches were the replacement. Maishe, on Saturday received the *Maftir aliya* (called up to the Torah) and rendered a most beautiful *Haftorah* with perfect *Ivra* (Hebrew) and *Trup* (cantillation). By coincidence, my brother and I were born in the same week of the Hebrew calendar; thus we both had the same portion of the Torah, *Vebeschanan* and the same *Haftorah*, *Nachamu*.

My brother had a beautiful voice and earned quite a bit of money as a member of choirs from the age of nine till he became twenty. He started as an alto and, when his voice changed at the age of around fourteen, he became a soprano. Choirs performing at Orthodox synagogues did not include females for several reasons. The obvious reason was the ban on women mingling with men in the house of prayer. Another less known fact is the principle of *kol isha*, which translates into “a woman’s voice”. The very Orthodox do not listen to a female singer, lest, they become seduced sexually by her voice. Consequently, males are used to emulate female voices in Orthodox choirs.

The *selichot* (repentance) prayers commence each year at midnight on the Saturday preceding *Rosh Hashana*. Starting at the age of four, I was taken by my parents around 10:30-11:00 p.m. every year to hear Maishe in the choir chant *selichot* and *shep nachas* – derive pride in their son’s achievement. Very often, he would be singing at a *schul* far from home which would require taking trains and trolleys and would necessitate our arriving home around 4 a.m. I remember falling asleep during a trip home and my father carrying me.

At the age of fifteen, I was persuaded by Mama to audition for Maishe’s choir so that I too can earn some money and, of course, hand over whatever I received to her as my brother had done for the last nine years. To my surprise, I was accepted as a cross between an alto and baritone. I had a deep voice that resonated throughout the house when I spoke. Maishe always called me “foghorn.”

Rehearsals were held on the Lower East Side on Monday – Thursday evenings for about three hours each session. My brother and I had to travel with two trolleys to get there. These rehearsals normally would last six weeks and would start around the first of August and end one week before *Rosh Hashana*. After four weeks of rehearsals we were both out of a job; our Cantor Srulowitz lost his position because of the Congregation’s fiscal problems. My brother sang with him for the previous five years at the same synagogue and no problems arose. Mendel joins the choir and suddenly the Cantor and choir are jobless. My brother always kidded me by saying that I must have jinxed the choir when I became a member.

Sunday was a continuation of the celebration; a day filled with *simcha* (merriment) and much singing of Hebrew and Jewish songs. No Orthodox meal is devoid of a *dvar torah*- translated as a torah word. After the fourth course, Maishe gave a *pschetal* or *pilpul* which is a debate or exegesis among *Amoroim* and *Tannaim*, rabbis who lived in the fifth century through the seventh century. The Talmud consists of these debates on *halacha*- Jewish religious

law. Many times the law will be as stated by Rabbi A, another time as stated by Rabbi B, and sometimes by neither rabbi and the Talmud says *taku* - when the Messiah will come he will decide.

My brother took me to my first football game when I was eight. It was held at Hawthorne Field in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, about 3 miles from our home. The game was played by the Boys High junior varsity and the hero of the game won by Boys was Whitey Schlesinger, whose father owned a wholesale paper bag and twine business on our block. Sid Dworetz was the quarterback and Schlesinger was the halfback - running back of today. Of course, Maishe was not too happy about having his younger brother tagging along but Mama interceded on my behalf and, after making me comb my hair, he consented. Never removing the cap from my head, I had no reason to ever comb my hair.

Uncle Simcha, who was the husband of Tante Chaya, my mother's oldest sister, was the manager of a *mikva* (a ritual bath house) owned by a congregation on Division Ave. located two blocks from YTV. He and his family lived in New Haven for many years before retiring and moving to Williamsburg. He ran a business there delivering sodas, seltzer and other beverages to private residences. As he was a heavy smoker, his long white beard was spotted with nicotine stains and he constantly had a cigarette odor emanating from his mouth. During the afternoon recess, I would very often walk over to the *mikva* and visit with him. We had a mutual affection for each other and after asking me what I learned that day, he would hug and kiss me after giving me a penny or two.

Occasionally, I had lunch at their apartment, which was two blocks from the *mikva*. Tante Chaya, being old and frail, would usually be resting in bed when I arrived and I had to knock on the door for quite a few minutes before she heard me and let me enter. The menu consisted of either an omelet or spinach *latkes* (croquets), which I enjoy to this day especially the latkes. Both their daughters were rabid Communists and vegetarians and the latkes were left over from the previous night's supper. Their oldest child was a son named Yukel who was a *talmid chochim* (Talmudic scholar) with a very pleasant singing voice and employed these talents in becoming a sexton in a prestigious synagogue in Bensonhurst whose spiritual leader for many years was Rabbi Morganstern, a respected figure in the rabbinate. Yukel Bilger, besides his erudition, was personable and gracious and was well liked by the entire family. Whenever we had a death in the family, Yukel delivered the *hespid* (eulogy) as he was an eloquent speaker as well.

## CHAPTER V

In 1927, at the age of nine, I entered the fourth grade in my secular studies at the Yeshiva. The Hebrew section did not designate by number the class one attended. From grade 1 till you graduated, the secular class consisted of the same students; there was no skipping, nor being left back. However, in the Hebrew studies, there were three tiers of classes in each grade. You were placed in the tiers depending on your proficiency, usually how well you did in *gemorrah* (Talmud). I was bored stiff learning *gemorrah* since the rebbi repeated the *blat* (page) over and

over again till every student knew it well. I enjoyed learning *Chumash, Rashi*, - an eleventh century French rabbi who produced the most read and studied commentary on the Bible, Prophets and the Talmud.

My first Hebrew teacher when I entered YTV at the age of eight was Rabbi or Mr. Greenberg. We never asked nor were told whether a particular teacher had *semicha* (rabbinical ordination). In his class we learned *chumish, rashi, tanach* and *digduk* (Hebrew grammar). The next Hebrew teacher was Rabbi Kaplan; I will refer to all my Hebrew teachers henceforth as Rabbi. His son Abraham was in all my secular classes, I remember him quite well; he was a very fine young man whom I liked.

In this class we learned, in addition to *chumish* and *rashi*, more intensive study of *neviyim* (Prophets) and *mishlei* (Proverbs). When we reached the age of ten, we were taught *trup* (singing the *haftorah* and reading of the Torah in song). Each word in the Torah and the *haftorah* is marked with a sign (musical note) informing the reader how to express that word musically. These signs, however, are not marked in the Torah scroll from which we read every Monday, Thursday, Saturday, every month on the day or days of the new moon, all fast days, and all holidays. Therefore, the reader must memorize every sign or note of the portion of the Torah he is reading. To facilitate the memorization of this task, a book called a *tikun* was published. On one side of its pages is the exact copy of the Torah scroll showing each word without a sign and on the other side, the page shows each word with the sign.

Since my father served in the Russian army, I cannot attribute my attraction to the Navy to genetics; however, at the age of nine for some unknown reason, I became very much interested in the U.S. Navy. Our home was about a half a mile from the Brooklyn Navy Yard on Sands Street and Flushing Avenue. Every year for an entire week people were permitted to enter the Yard and board any and all ships stationed therein. I would walk on a Saturday and board the submarines, battleships, cruisers and destroyers. On each ship were guides who would describe every part of the ship and the functions of all the equipment. The galleys - the kitchen and cooking area - and the engine room, in particular, fascinated me.

Little did I know then that later on in life I would be the officer in charge of a ship's galley. Watching the crew go about their chores instilled in me a sense of envy. Of all the ships that I boarded, the submarine was most admired by me. Unfortunately, being claustrophobic prevented me from choosing this type of ship when I enlisted in World War II. Many times during the one hour recess, between 3 and 4 p.m., I and some of my classmates would visit the Navy Yard and just gaze upon the various ships that were there. We did this from outside the yard, not being permitted to enter. The Yeshiva was seven or eight blocks from the Navy Yard.

On *chal hamoed* (the intermediate days of the Passover and Succoth Holidays) we did not attend classes at YTV. Since my parents could not afford to go to hotels for these holidays as many do today, I had nothing to occupy my time since all my friends on the block were attending school. However, I had the good fortune of being liked by Mr. Gold, the wholesale egg man who occupied one of the stores in our tenement building. During *chal hamoed*, I would accompany him on his horse and wagon early in the morning to pick up his daily supply of egg crates from the Wallabout Market which was about a mile from our home. Then, we would distribute the eggs to

groceries, bakeries, etc. He would allow me to hold the reins by myself for a good part of the day and I felt like I was a Brooklyn cowboy.

Around this time of my life, I began to become interested in professional sports, especially major league baseball. Since television and even radio broadcasts of the games did not exist, a baseball fan received his play-by-play information through the ticker tape. Every poolroom would have a ticker primarily for the results of the horse races, as big time betting was conducted in these poolrooms.

A very large blackboard was installed that would show what was transpiring at all major-league games. The ticker would report home run info as to who hit it, how many teammates were on and the inning. For example, "Ruth homered with 2 men on in the bottom of the 3<sup>rd</sup>". Also it stated any change of pitchers e.g., "Pennock replaced by Hoyt in the top of the 5<sup>th</sup>". At the end of each team's time at bat you would receive hits, runs and errors. Each poolroom had an artistically talented young man who wrote on the blackboard using multi-colored chalks to display all this data.

The very first time that I was exposed to this new experience was the 1927 World Series between the Yanks and Pittsburgh. All games were held during the day, as nightlights did not come into being till several years later; I believe it was 1939. Several blocks from my Yeshiva, a poolroom exhibited its board outside so that people did not have to enter its premises. During my afternoon recess, which lasted one hour, I went to see what was happening at the game.

The Yankees, as usual, had a very formidable lineup: Lou Gehrig at first, Tony Lazzeri at second, Mark Koenig at short, Joe Dugan at third, Babe Ruth, Earl Combs, Bob Meusel, in the outfield, Benny Bengough catching and quite a pitching staff consisting of Herb Pennock, George Pipgras and Waite Hoyt.

On the Pittsburgh Pirates were no slouches either; having Pie Traynor at third, Glenn Wright at short and Paul and Lloyd Waner in the outfield. Bob O'Farrell caught and a pitching staff headed by a Hall of Famer, Grover Cleveland Alexander, who did his best while drunk, and Jesse Haines. The Yanks were victorious in 4 games.

## CHAPTER VI

On Election Day 1928 when Herbert Hoover defeated Al Smith for the Presidency of the U.S., was the day of my first move to another location. Although the economic depression did not start till the 1929 stock market crash, the Pragers did not need external influences to keep them financially unendowed. My father, who nobody would consider an astute businessman, showed great acumen in his real estate transactions. Not being a member of the Real Estate Board, nor having a real estate broker license, he realized that if he moved often enough he could obtain two months free rent plus a new paint job. Consequently, we now relocated to 96 Hart Street, nine blocks from 96 Hopkins Street, our former residence.

I was now ten years of age and in the fifth grade at YTV where my Hebrew teacher was Rabbi Slofkin, otherwise known as Slibo. He inflicted corporeal punishment gratuitously. Believe it or not, I was never hit by Slibo although I was a poor student in *gemorrah*. I don't know whether it was the method of teaching *gemorrah* or I not being interested; be as it may, I was at best in the second quartile of the class.

In the secular fifth grade, my teacher was Mr. Smith who was a coward for the reason that I will now relate. Alongside of me in class sat a sixteen year-old young man who recently had come from Europe. He could not have been placed in high school because of his lack of knowledge of the English language. Mr. Smith gave us a quiz and this young man copied every answer that I had on my paper. When our cowardly pedagogue marked the quiz results, he discovered that my paper and the immigrant's paper were identical. Without questioning me, or the immigrant, he calls me up in front of the class, slaps my face and says nothing. That was the only time in my entire life that an instructor had hit me; suffice it to say, I cannot ever forget it.

Across the street from our home, a *rebbe* lived in a private house consisting of a basement and two floors. The *rebbe's* family lived on the second floor, the *schul* was on the first floor and the basement was used as a kitchen and laundry room. The family's name was Gottesman and in addition to the Rabbi and his *rebbitzzen* (rabbi's wife) were four adult children. Several years ago before we moved to Englewood from Brooklyn, on one of our frequent visits to our son's home in this city, I met a young man at Cong. Ahavath Torah, the only orthodox synagogue in Englewood at the time, whose name was Gottesman. I inquired if he was a relative of a Rabbi Gottesman who had lived on Hart Street; sure enough he is a grandson.

My introduction to *schtiblach* (residential homes used as houses of worship and talmudic study) began at the age of ten. I fell in love with the Rabbi and his family and especially the mode of prayer. It was much warmer than the atmosphere at Cong. Ohel Moshe Chevra Tillim, which was located on Tompkins and Willoughby Avenues and where my parents prayed. The rabbi at this congregation was Aaron Burack who was an eloquent speaker and fine gentleman. He married a daughter of Rabbi Inselbuch, a revered member of the clergy. The Buracks had a young son who was three years younger than I who I took to the Yeshiva daily via trolley car.

I refused to *daven* (pray) with my parents at their *schul* and I must commend them for not forcing me to be with them. In fact, they joined me for the High Holidays; and my Bar Mitzva was held at the *schtibel*. Every *shabbos* afternoon when *seuda shlishes* was served, I would bring the *gefilte fish* (stuffed fish) and *challas* from the basement and we would eat and sing *zmirros* (Sabbath songs) in a pitch-dark environment. My love for *schtiblach* remains to this day, attributing this feeling to Rabbi Gottesman. My both sons evidently inherited my preference.

Many years later when I was a member and president of Kingsway Jewish Center, we would alternate every Saturday between KJC and Cong. Oheb Zedek run by Rabbi Aschkenasy, the Yasse Rebbe; Yas being a city in Romania. On the High Holidays, we would all pray at OhebZedek and alternate on the other holidays. I remember Cantor Yossele Rosenblatt singing at a *melave malka* (the departure of the Sabbath bride, a meal held on Saturday night) held at Rabbi Gottesman's *schtibel*.

Four blocks from our home was Tompkins Park, located on a square block bordered by Marcy, Tompkins, and Lafayette Avenues and Van Buren Street. In the center of the park was a library which I visited every Saturday, and on Jewish holidays. I would take out autobiographical books, written by famous people in the fields of history and medicine, and biographies as well. Despite the fact that I had very little spare time to read, since I attended school from 9-7 daily including Sunday, I devoted Saturdays and Jewish holidays to reading.

Mama was extremely pious, praying three times a day and reading talmudic books written in Yiddish; however, she enjoyed going to the movies in order to relax from her many problems and arduous work. She and I would go almost every Saturday night to the De Kalb Theatre which was located at De Kalb and Tompkins Avenues several blocks from our house. Papa accompanied us once and immediately fell asleep; that being his first and last visit to the movies.

On Fridays, I attended Hebrew classes from nine to twelve; went home for lunch and then went to play ball with my best friend, Norman Cohen who lived on Willoughby Avenue, the next block. His father owned the De Luxe Furniture Co.; so, comparatively speaking, I considered them very affluent.

Mama was always striving to augment the family income, Papa not being a very strong wage earner. My mother's first business venture at this time was a "commission bakery"- a retail store that sold prepared baked goods-; the second, was a store selling slaughtered chickens; the third was an attempt at a partnership with another man to contract and manufacture men's trousers, a business that my father was familiar with. Suffice it to say, all lasted for a very short time.

Simcha's *mikva* provided additional income for the family. Mama and Rivka worked there every night for several years cutting the nails of the women and preparing them for their monthly immersion into the small pool. My mother would come home by trolley at midnight, wake us from sleep and serve us cheesecake and other delicacies that she would purchase on the way home. I remember her spreading on the kitchen table loads of coins that she would receive as tips.

## CHAPTER VII

After living on Hart Street for 2 years, our lease expired and Papa resumed his real estate activities. In 1930, a year after the stock exchange crash, the depression started in earnest and my father joined the unemployed ranks. Thus, receiving again 2 months concession-free rental- and a complete paint job of the entire apartment proved advantageous when compared to the cost of moving, which was around twenty dollars. Approximately 2 months prior to the expiration of the lease, Papa and Irene, -called Chayka and Ida previously- who was 19 years of age and the highest wage earner in the family would spend their Sundays looking for new apartments.

They located a 2 family house at 59 Vernon Avenue between Marcy and Nostrand Avenues, just two blocks from our former residence. We rented the upper floor while the owners, whose name was Gellis, occupied the street level floor.

I was now 12 years of age and befriended Maxie Gellis who was 14 and attended Boys High School, located at Marcy and Putnam Avenues which was 14 blocks from our home. Maishe –now called Morris- also attended this school as I did the following year. Acting always held an attraction for me; Maxie, his cousin and I would act out different plays that we would create. On Saturday nights, I would join my friend Norman and visit the Young Israel of Williamsburgh situated at Willoughby and Throop Avenues, 3 blocks from my house where we would play basketball.

An episode occurred around this time that has remained in my memory to this day. My father, being unemployed, wished to maintain his self-esteem by trying to earn some money. He became a peddler knocking on doors to sell men's ties. On one particular day, when the temperature was flirting with zero, he returned home in the evening frozen stiff and without making one sale. I took one look at my poor father; went into a bedroom and began to sob. That picture has remained with me forever.

Being close to sexual maturity, I began to notice the other sex. Looking out the window one day, I saw a beautiful girl around my age walking in the street. She had black hair worn in curls and a classy look, which always attracted me to this day. I would keep looking out the window for close to a year hoping to get a glimpse of her and wishing that I would make her acquaintance; but I was too shy to introduce myself.

Mama was not a gourmet cook but she did excel in a few dishes. One of her specialties was *chulent* (a dish consisting of small potatoes, flanken meat, either stuffed derma or stuffed chicken neck, and plenty of chicken fat. This was before people heard about cholesterol and the drug "Lipitor". On the corner of our street was a kosher bakery. I, not yet reaching the age of thirteen, would bring the large pot of *chulent* to the bakery before sundown on Friday and after Saturday prayers, I would return to retrieve the delicacy. The baker, also being an Orthodox Jew, would open the bakery after he left his schul. There were at least five or six other families availing themselves of his kindness.

My rabbi at YTV at this time was Rabbi Eisenberg, a Hungarian, who sported a long salt and pepper beard. He would constantly smoke *alilka* (a pipe 12" long with an upturned bowl at the end) while teaching. About 5 or 6 months prior to my attaining “manhood”, Rabbi Eisenberg asked me if I, or my parents, would object to his instructing me in the way *tefillin* (phylacteries) are placed on my arm and my forehead. I replied that I and my parents would be honored by his request. Consequently, after he placed the *tefillin* on me, he hugged and kissed me; a gesture that I will always cherish since kissing and hugging was not prevalent in my family.

The time of my becoming a Bar-Mitzva now arrived. Of course, there was no question as to where the religious service would be held. Since I always prayed at the *shtibel*, I was called to the Torah there. Unlike today, I did not lead the congregation in the prayers; nor, did I read the weekly portion of the Torah. I received the *Maftir aliya* and chanted the *Haftorah*. Also, I refused my parents wish to deliver a mini sermon, called a *dvar Torah* or a *psbetil*. My celebration was held on Saturday only in our home.

At YTV, until I arrived in the 8B grade, nothing of great significance happened. My secular teacher, Mr. Kezbom, who arrived at YTV only a year before, was very much interested in extra-curricular activities for the students. His philosophy of teaching was to change the insular attitude of the yeshiva teaching staff. He felt that although we spent ten hours a day at school, we were intellectually equipped to engage in every facet of learning prevalent in secular schools. Thus, he wanted our class to be the first YTV graduating class to edit a “year book.” He chose the name of the publication to be “The CHRONICLE” and selected me to be the first editor-in-chief. I really don’t know if any other yeshiva elementary school had a graduation “year book.” He was so successful in his pedagogic innovations that, in the following year, he succeeded Mr. Blickstein as principal. Speaking of principals, there was also a change in the Hebrew department; Rabbi Dr. Stern replacing Rabbi Mendelowitz three years previously, both being very well loved by the entire student body. Being a member of the Yeshiva College faculty, Dr. Stern taught math in the afternoon.

Our graduation in January 1932 was held in the Young Israel of Brooklyn situated on Bedford Avenue and Keap Street in Williamsburgh. Another innovation at commencement exercises, which was instituted by Mr. Kezbom, was a play to be acted in only by the graduates. I played the role of “George Good”, which gives the reader a fairly good idea of his feeling toward me; he also chose me to give the salutatory address.

At this juncture, I must relate an incident that occurred a few moments after my address. As my mother was not literate in English, to this day I don’t know how she knew that there was an honor established which was superior to the one that her son Mendel was given. She inquired of me why I did not give the valedictory address; she now being a maven in graduation honors. As always, her children never could achieve enough to satisfy her. Throughout my scholastic life, I was criticized by her although in high school I achieved a 90 average and a Regents average of 93.

Upon graduation from YTV, Mama expected and wanted me to attend the Mesivta YTV, which was located at Taylor and Bedford Avenues, several blocks from the elementary school; Papa, as usual, was non-committal. This

situation was not the first, nor the last where we disagreed; I remained very emphatic in my desire to attend Boys High School where Morris attended previously. Continuing to be extremely bored learning *gemorrah*), attending a yeshiva certainly did not appeal to me.

Since so many students attended Boys, the freshman class had to go to three different annexes: Waverly in the Fort Greene area, Lewis in the Bushwick area and Johnson in the Williamsburgh area. For my first semester, I was assigned to Waverly. From my home in Bedford-Stuyvesant, I traveled to school by trolley car. In my second semester, I went to Lewis where I attended from Sept. 1932 to Jan. 1933. At Lewis, one experience is still remembered by me. At YTV, I had no girls in my classes and never had a female teacher. Lo and behold, I was now blessed with one lady instructor, Miss Dalrymple, my English teacher, who came from the South. She, in my eyes, personified everything a Southern gal was supposed to look like. Possessing a beautiful face with a body to match, she aroused Mendel who had now reached puberty and whose hormones were working overtime. I sat in the rear center of her class and had a perfect vantage point in staring at her legs underneath her desk. This was my first sexual infatuation with a woman.

## CHAPTER VIII

In November 1932, our bi-annual lease expired at 59 Vernon Ave. and again Papa and Irene went apartment hunting. For some reason or other, the Pragers wanted to make a radical change in neighborhoods so, consequently, after many years we moved from Bedford-Stuyvesant to Ocean Hill, north of Brownsville, at 411 Howard Ave. corner of St. Marks Ave.

Moving to a new neighborhood at the age of 14 changed my life considerably; namely, socially and athletically. Not having to attend school from 8 am-8 pm at the Yeshiva afforded me time to indulge in many activities outside of school.

Directly across from my residence on Howard Ave. was P.S. 144, whose large playground was my athletic home for the next four years. I, and my new friends, would play softball, association football and handball each and every Sunday and very often in the afternoons after school hours. Quite often, we played association football at night under the lamppost lights. Unable to afford regular footballs, we wrapped old socks with rubber bands to simulate a football and played for many hours until it was time to retire for the night.

As we grew older, we played softball for money against other teams in the very large playground of P.S. 178, several blocks from my home. We formed an athletic club called the Condors- the largest South American bird- and purchased jackets whose colors were blue and gold. Although I was the youngest member of the club I was elected president and team captain.

My friends came from diverse backgrounds, although poverty was the common denominator. Of course, none of us considered ourselves poor as that was relative. From the very beginning, I was attracted to Itchka Shapiro who remained by best friend for many years. His father was the Rosh Yeshiva (principal) of Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin. He was born in Europe and immigrated to the U.S. at a very young age. Although he rooted for the N.Y. Giants baseball team and I was a rabid Brooklyn Dodger fan, this fact never altered our strong friendship for each other. He attended Alexander Hamilton H.S., the archrival of Boys High my alma mater.

He did not go on to college. At the age of 19, when I worked during the summer for T&P Optical Co., I was able to obtain employment for him at T&P where he remained for many years until he was drafted into the Army during World War II. After his release, he went to work for the U.S. Post Office where he worked nights for many years. Late in life, he married a woman who suffered from depression and never had children with her. I would hear from him, or from his brother who I would meet in the street from time to time, about once or twice a year. Gradually, our relationship ended when he ceased calling me and, not knowing his new address or phone number, I was not able to contact him. It bothers me immensely that to this day I don't know whether Itch is still alive.

My next closest friends were two brothers, Jack and Sandy Wasserman. They both attended Samuel J. Tilden H.S.; Jack went to college at night and I don't recall in which field he majored. Sandy did not attend college and

went to work for a company that manufactured dresser sets, which consisted of trays, mirrors, hand brushes and combs. On weekends he was a soda jerk in his brother-in-law's pharmacy in the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn. Jack died about 15 years ago; Sandy remained a close friend till his death 4 years ago.

The other friends that I had at this time remained close to me till about the time that I married; then, I lost contact with them. They were, in no order of importance, Harry Wiskopf, Maxie Eisenberg, "Goldy" Goldberg, Gellman, and "Belinda". Harry was on the heavy side with curly blonde hair and a NY Yankee fan. He did not attend college and I don't know what was his occupation. Maxie attended Brooklyn College as a pre-med student and became a physician. "Goldy" went to CCNY uptown and became an academic teaching history on the college level; he was an excellent student. Gellman attended Brooklyn College and was a math genius and went on to teach either physics or math in college. "Belinda" – blind in Yiddish – was quite a character who made his living panhandling. His wearing of very thick eyeglasses helped him in his trade pretending he was blind and a palsy victim. He did quite well financially.

Our favorite hangout was in front of Talmud Torah Tiferes Hagra which was adjacent to my residence. TITH had 3 steps in front of one of its doors, which afforded us room to sit and schmooze for hours.

One incident I recall around this time is worth mentioning. I was around 15 and on one Friday night we played a game in front of TITH, which required rapid running from one sidewalk to the sidewalk across the street. I was dressed in my Sabbath attire, which included a pair of new shoes with leather heels, not particularly fit for running. On one of my dashes to the other side, I slipped and fell. Instinctively, I stuck my hand out to shelter the fall and landed on my wrist. I was sure that I had broken my wrist since the pain was excruciating. I immediately went up to tell my parents what had occurred and, not having a family doctor, I decided to go to St. Mary's Hospital which was 2 blocks from my home. I don't remember whether an x-ray was performed that night or the following morning; be as it may, I was hospitalized and spent the night. The x-ray showed a severe sprain.

On the following morning, a priest went through the large ward where I was lying and went from bed to bed giving each patient a blessing. When he arrived at my bed he said "I know that you are Jewish and, instead of giving you a Christian blessing, I would advise you to keep the fifth commandment to honor your father and mother." I never forgot his compassion and those words. In the afternoon, I was released and sent home.

It is quite possible that my choice of professions was triggered by my weekly computation of my father's wage. Papa worked for Meyerson Mfg. Co. a contractor of men's trousers. Since he worked piecework, his pay was calculated by the number of trouser pockets he sewed by machine multiplied by a rate agreed upon by management and the Amalgamated Clothing Union headed by Sidney Hillman, an advisor to Pres. Roosevelt. Papa would write the number of bundles of trousers he sewed for the week in a small notebook. I would add up the number and, after my calculation, would tell him what his earnings were for the week. I don't remember his wages ever exceeding \$40 per week. Our love for him was never predicated on his business achievements or his financial acumen. We admired and loved him for the values he inculcated in us.

Although I enjoyed playing ball and socializing with my boy friends reaching the age of 15, my libido kicked in and I found myself looking at the opposite sex with new interest; similar to the way I stared at the girl on Vernon Ave. when I was 13. My modus operandi did not change as I now found myself staring at a beautiful, blonde girl of around my age or a few months younger. She lived around the corner on St. Marks Ave.

This infatuation lasted almost for a year and, believe it or not, I never had the guts to speak to her and for all I know it is possible that she never knew that I existed. I must add that after a while I noticed that she was slightly cross-eyed which did not lessen my liking for her.

On the top floor of my building lived Dotty who was not particularly pretty but had loads of personality; a characteristic that I always admired in people and still do. I liked speaking to her but our relationship never went beyond friendship. My only physical contact that I had with her was my teaching her to swim in Coney Island. She would lie down on her chest across my outstretched arms and my feeling her tiny breasts gave me quite a charge; this being the first time that I felt a girl in a prohibited area. Suffice it to say, I became a swimming instructor whenever I had the opportunity. I never went to parties with her nor indulged in kissing games i.e.: spin-the-bottle. My friend Itchka always carried a torch for her but never related his true feeling towards her. To this day I don't know if Dotty ever knew that Itch cared for her.

## CHAPTER IX

In 1933, at the age of 15, I started attending Brooklyn Dodger games at Ebbets Field, which was located at Bedford Ave. and Sullivan Place, a little over 2 miles. I would arrive at the Stadium on a Sunday morning 3 hours before game time with my lunch consisting of one or two sandwiches, 2 pieces of fruit and cake. The first hour was spent outside the players' entrance so that I could greet my heroes. In addition to the Dodgers, I admired especially the N.Y. Giants i.e. Bill Terry, Mel Ott, Carl Hubbell and Freddy Fitzsimmons. It would have been an excellent opportunity to obtain autographs; however, I never had the desire to do so.

As soon as the gates were opened, I would rush to the bleachers to acquire a good seat; the entrance fee was 55 cents. After a short while, my team would commence batting practice, being the home team. The pitchers were stationed in the outfield catching and chasing balls batted by one of the coaches with a fungo bat. Since the bleachers were situated farthest from home plate in center field, those sitting in the bleachers would carry on conversations with the pitchers. After the visiting team took batting practice, both teams began fielding practice and then the game started.

The 1933 Dodgers ended in sixth place with a record of 65-88. They finished the next five seasons fifth, sixth or seventh despite finishing in fourth place 1930-1932. My ardor for them was not based on their performance. I became a rabid fan of "dem bums" until they left for L.A. in 1958. One of the bleacher fans was an elderly woman named Hilda who attended every home game with her cowbells. Behind first base a three-man band named the "Dodger Simfony" played raucous music throughout the game.

The team was called the Dodgers because of the many trolley cars in Brooklyn and the inhabitants of this borough were constantly dodging these cars. For a period of two years, 1930-1931, the team was named the Robins because Wilbert Robinson had been the manager from 1914 thru 1931 leading them to two World Series in 1916 and 1920. The Boston Red Sox beat them in 1916 four games to one

Famous Dodger players were Rube Marquard, Zach Wheat, Jake Daubert, Casey Stengel, Chief Meyers and Fred Merkle. Among the Boston players were Carl Mays, and Babe Ruth who won one of the games with a .64 e.r.a. In 1920 the Cleveland Indians beat them 5 games to 2. The Dodgers included some of the above while the Indians had Tris Speaker, Steve O'Neill and Stan Covalski who won 3 games with a .67 e.r.a. "Uncle Robbie", as he was affectionately called, caught for the Philadelphia Athletics and Baltimore Orioles from 1886-1902. In 1945, eleven years after his death, he was inducted into the Hall of Fame.

I can still remember the 1933 roster: Sambo Leslie-1b, Tony Cucinello-2b, Glenn Wright-ss, Joe Stripp-3b, Hack Wilson, Johnny Frederick, Danny Taylor in the outfield, Al Lopez-c. The pitchers were Van Lingle Mungo, Boom-Boom Beck and Hollis Thurston. Beck had an appropriate name as almost every pitch he threw landed in the stands, his record being 12-20. Mungo had the best record at 16-15 with an e.r.a. of 2.72. The players were mostly

over the hill and consequently their poor showing until 1938 when Branch Rickey, who had built a dynasty at the St. Louis was engaged as general manager of the Dodgers.

He was the father of the farm system and immediately created a winner in Brooklyn. In his first year at the helm he traded for Dolph Camilli, a feared slugger; Freddy Fitzsimmons, a southpaw who always faced center field at the start of his windup and Leo Durocher, a fiery shortstop. In the following year, he again traded for 3 excellent pitchers, Whitlow Wyatt, Luke Hamlin, Hugh Casey and for Dixie Walker, a .300 hitter, resulting in the Dodgers finishing third in their division.

In 1940, the farm system began to pay off by the development of two stars, Pee Wee Reese and Pete Reiser; both having a great impact on the team. Reese played 15 years with Brooklyn and one year at Los Angeles, the new home of the Dodgers, and participated in 7 World Series. Pete Reiser, who was even more talented than Reese, leading the League in doubles, triples, and batting average of .343 in 1941 and stolen bases in 1942 and 1946. In 1948, he had the misfortune of crashing into the concrete wall in center field at while chasing a fly ball; today all the walls are covered with rubber. This injury ruined a very promising career; he going downhill rapidly as he never regained his strength. Finally, after being traded to 3 different teams, he hung up his spikes in 1952. Reese made the Hall of Fame in 1984. The team finished in second place.

Rickey continued on his quest to bring a Pennant to Brooklyn by bringing 4 good players to the team in 1941: Kirby Higbe-pitcher, Billy Herman-2B, Arky Vaughn-3B and Mickey Owen-catcher. Herman made the Hall of Fame in 1975. These valuable acquisitions were responsible for finally winning the Pennant after 21 years of draught. Their opponent in the World Series was the Yankees who beat them 4 games to 1; they were the only team they ever met in October in the ensuing years. The following year saw them finish the season in second place.

The “Mahatma”, as Rickey was called, was not finished, going to his farm and bringing up to the majors Gil Hodges, a slugging first baseman and Gold Glove winner, Hal Gregg, a pitcher and Rex Barney, a pitcher blessed with a smoking fast ball who had difficulty finding the plate. In 1948, he struck out 138 batters, walked 122, achieving 4 shutouts and 12 complete games and an e.r.a. of 3.10. In the other 5 years on the team his record was mediocre at best, having an e.r.a. ranging from 4.41-6.42 and never winning more than 9 games in a season.

Hodges, in his 12 years on the team, was very often among the league leaders in home runs, runs and runs batted in. He was the manager of the N.Y. Mets 1963-1971 and in 1972, while playing golf in the off- season in Florida succumbed to a heart attack at the age of 48. He lived on Bedford Ave. between Avenues K and L, a few blocks from my home, and I would drive by his home every evening on my way home from the office. When the funeral services were held at St. Brendon’s Church, on Avenue N and East 27<sup>th</sup> Street, I remained outside to pay my last respects to a “mensch” (a good person) who also happened to be a good ballplayer. The war began to take a toll on major league baseball resulting in many of the younger players going off to pick up arms against the enemy; as a consequence, the Dodgers lost ground and settled for third place in 1943. The teams with older players did well during these years.

Again the farm came through in 1944 with 2 good pitchers, Ralph Branca and Clyde King. I will write about Branca later on these memoirs. The team was now devoid of every young and talented player and the result was ending seventh, by far the worst result achieved in all the years they remained in Brooklyn. After the war, the farm contributed Carl Furillo, an outfielder with an exceptionally strong, accurate arm giving him the name, “The Reading Rifle”, since he resided in Reading, Pa. Besides being an excellent fielder, he was a dependable hitter owning a batting average between .295 and .344 which led the league in 1953.

1947 introduced 2 mega stars, Duke Snider and Jackie Robinson, the former developed in the farm system and the latter coming from UCLA where he starred in baseball and football. Robinson played one year with the Montreal Royals before coming to Brooklyn. I will not write about his being the first black player to be admitted to the major leagues since every person is very knowledgeable on this subject; he entered the Hall of Fame in 1962. Several years later, New York teams had the best center fielders in baseball, Willie Mays, Mickey Mantle and Duke Snider. All three are in the Hall of Fame, Snider making it 1980. Suffice it to say, Rickey was most responsible for the Dodgers playing in the World Series 7 times in the period 1941-1956.

Not being financially able to go to camps or resorts in the summer, I spent my afternoons visiting poolrooms where I would “watch” the baseball scores on the blackboard. However, this practice was not without risk. These establishments were owned and managed by the underworld, especially gambling bookies. Not infrequently, raids were conducted by a special squad of detectives from the District Attorney’s Office. They would arrest all occupants of the poolroom and take them to the nearest police station in patrol wagons. Those below 16 or so would get a kick in the pants and told to leave and never to return; I never heeded their advice. Incidentally, I’m quite sure that these “law enforcers” were on the “take” and advised management in advance of their visit.

Once when I was “shooting pool” when I was around 17, a hush came over the crowd when a well-dressed man in his thirties made his entrance. I had no idea who was this extremely important individual. Somebody, who was more familiar with gangsters than I was, informed me that I was gazing at Bugsy Goldstein, a reputed member of Murder, Inc. Years later when Tom Dewey, then NYS Special Prosecutor, brought to justice this crime syndicate, Bugsy was electrocuted the same night as Dasher Abbandando and Happy Maioni at Sing Sing.

Dewey went on to become Governor of New York State and ran for President in 1948 when he lost to Harry Truman in an upset election.

## CHAPTER X

At the age of sixteen through, an unusual circumstance, I ceased wearing a cap outdoors. A large 5-alarm fire destroyed most, if not all, of the Coney Island Boardwalk. My mother and brother decided to go and view the damage and Morris objected to my wearing a cap stating: "Mendy looks like a jerk." I, of course, agreed with him and, after my mother gave her consent, went bare headed for the first time in my life. My sexual aggression that followed was a direct result of this incident. There is a Talmudic saying: "a sin leads to another sin," perhaps, this happened to me. At any rate my attitude towards girls changed radically after doffing my headpiece.

My next infatuation, was with a young lady not quite fifteen named Esther who lived in a large, beautiful home on President St. about ½ mile from my home. For about one year, I, and some of my friends would visit her on many Friday and Saturday nights and an occasional Sunday afternoon. She had a "finished basement" equipped with a ping-pong table and other assorted games. Her parents were very lovely people who seemed to like me and enjoyed hosting my friends and me; her mother always had sweets and sodas for us.

On the occasions when I alone would visit Esther and her parents retired for the night, we would engage in "heavy" petting. Thus, at the age of 16, I was introduced to an activity that I found extremely enjoyable. Esther was a young lady possessed with class, a sense of humor, quite pretty and intelligent. When I graduated from high school, not yet reaching my seventeenth birthday, I took Esther as my escort to the senior prom. Her father drove us to the Havana Madrid nightclub where the prom was held and then called for us.

Very soon after the prom, I felt terrible that I wished to end our relationship, which was due to two factors. Firstly, I was too young to get involved with a girl and, secondly, Esther was not quite five feet tall and I always wanted a tall girl friend. I remember her crying when I broke the news to her, but she soon got over it. Her father died soon after at a young age and I called to console her in her grief. Many years later during World War II, while home on leave, I and my wife Hilda, whom you haven't met yet, met her and her baby son on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn.

We both recognized each other and she told us that she was happily married and that her husband was a scientist working for the government and therefore not in the Service.

In 1934, age 16, I heard about a religious group that was forming called the "Anshe Zedek Boys" because they met for religious services and social activities at Cong. Anshe Zedek which was located on Park Place, 2 blocks from my home. This group was led by young men among who were, Morris Gershbaum, Joe Kaminetsky, and Phil Tatz. Morris was a successful lawyer; who with his wife Blanche were killed by a motorist while sitting on a bench on Eastern Parkway, supposedly, the culprit lost control of his car. Joe founded and led Torah Umesorah for many years prior to his making *aliyah* (going up) to Israel with his wife Selma. Phil became a rabbi and immediately thereafter made *aliyah*.

We used the *Bais Medrish* (study hall) of Anshe Zedek for Sabbath and holiday services. After a year of our group's formation, we had to make a choice of either joining the Young Israel movement or Hapoel Hamizrachi; the latter consisted of young religious Zionists as opposed to the Mizrachi organization, which was the home of older religious lovers of Zion. After a vote was taken, we ceased being the AZBO and became the Hapoel Hamizrachi of Park Place. We joined several existing branches throughout the metropolitan area; namely, Brownsville, Boro Park, Lower East Side, Williamsburg and the Bronx. Also, we now admitted young religious girls, which certainly increased our social life. For some reason, perhaps it was due to the compatibility of our members, Park Place and Boro Park held many joint social and athletic activities.

In my freshman year, I actually did homework for the first time in my life, never having any at Y'TV. As a result my grades were quite high, achieving 90 and above in all my subjects.

For the balance of my stay at Boys, I attended the main building at Marcy and Putnam Aves. Being a beautiful architectural edifice with an extremely tall tower, it was declared a landmark many years later after it no longer was used as a school. It was approximately 2 miles from my home. Instead of using public transportation, I would walk 4 blocks to Atlantic Ave. and always get a "hitch" from a passing motorist who would usually engage me in conversation. I was dropped off at New York Ave. and walked 8 blocks to Putnam Ave, New York becoming Marcy at Fulton St.

In my senior year, the city was hit by a heavy snowstorm that closed down all public transportation. Unawares that all schools were closed, I walked the 2 miles to school trudging through at least a foot of snow and severe freezing wind. When I arrived at school with frostbitten ears and frozen hands and feet, I found that the only open room was the auditorium occupied by a few idiots like me. What I wish to emphasize was my great love of school.

In my time, Boys High had the scholastic reputation that Stuyvesant High and the Bronx High School of Science has today. Not every elementary school graduate who registered was admitted, and even worse, those who were admitted had to maintain a high average to remain. A student, at the end of his sophomore year, was eligible to be admitted to Arista Society, the high school equivalent to Phi-Beta-Kappa. One had to achieve very high grades and engage in extra-curricular activities. I made Arista throughout my stay at Boys. In my junior year, I made the soccer team as a member of the bench, not being on the first team. The coach was Harry Mabel who coached Morris before me. For my being on the team I received a minor B, a letter that I wore on my sweater. In addition, I was the asst. manager of the baseball team.

I progressed in my senior year to making the first team in soccer playing right back. My favorite playing sport was football, which I played in the gutter. We either played association, which did not include tackling or regular touch- football, lining up as in tackling football. However since scholastic football games were played as now on Saturdays, I would not violate my religious principles; consequently, I chose soccer. Coach Mabel, knowing that

I was a Sabbath observer, would permit me to leave practice on Fridays in time to arrive home before candle lighting.

Once, when we were playing Manual Training High on a Friday afternoon on a field in Ridgewood after the first half, he said: "Prager, go home," even though we were losing 1-0, so that I would not be *mehalel shabbos* (violating the Sabbath); that was one game that I will always remember. Towards the end of the first half, I tried to block a kick on goal by Manual's best player; unfortunately, I was no more than 5 feet from the kicker and the hard frozen ball hit me squarely in the face. Saving a goal, I could not feel my face for 2 days; it was that numb. Incidentally, I arrived home after candle lighting due to the long distance I had to travel. My parents did not scold me nor did they reprimand me.

We had an excellent team that was scheduled to play for the Brooklyn PSAL championship against Jefferson High on a Saturday at Hawthorne Field in Crown Heights. Even though the field was within walking distance from my home, nevertheless, it created a dilemma for me. Under no circumstances would my parents allow me to play on the Sabbath. I devised a plan, which would permit me to play without their knowledge. At the AZBO, we conducted our own Sabbath and Holiday services; thus, they would be under the impression that I was going to schul to pray. I dressed in my usual Sabbath clothes, left the house at the usual time of 9 a.m. and walked with my friend Itchka to the field.

Each player had to carry his uniform to every game; thus, I asked one my teammates to bring my uniform to the field. The game was played with excellent defense by both teams and ended with Jefferson winning 1-0. Being a defensive back made me feel good that the result was a lack of offense by our team. In fact, I made the Brooklyn All-Scholastic second team as right back. I showered, got dressed and arrived home in time to eat the Sabbath meal and sing *Zmiros* (Sabbath songs).

In my senior year, I advanced to Manager of the baseball team. Believe it or not, one of my many duties was the creation of the schedule for the season. It seems that Coach Otto Schonberg did not care to be bothered by this task and delegated me to do this; therefore, I spent much time on the phone with either managers or members of the athletic departments of the other schools to devise schedules. Other duties included buying and keeping track of all the equipment, keeping score of the games and hitting fly balls to the outfielders with a fungo bat.

I enjoyed attending all the football games, which were held at Boys High Field in Crown Heights. The soccer, football and baseball teams practiced daily at this field; this required our traveling via Tompkins trolley from the school to the field. Those who participated in these sports had their school schedules so created that the last daily session was left open so that we could go to practice.

Not wanting or able to pay the admission on Saturdays to attend the football games, I decided to join the Field squad in my junior year and was promoted to head this squad in my senior year. The squad maintained order in seating and resembled our present day security personnel.

Every student had a daily study period in his schedule, where he either did his homework, studied or slept; this period was held in the auditorium. Again order was required to be maintained, keeping noise and loud talking to a minimum; I was a member of the Study squad for 3 years. Being a good math student, I was on the math team for 2 years.

Towards the end of my senior year, an assembly was held in the auditorium where the entire student body was assembled to reward the school athletes with major and minor letters. Having received a minor the previous year, I was now called up to the stage and given the much-honored Block B for my achievement in soccer and a bronze medal for being the manager of the baseball team. When I showed Mama the letter, she asked me what I am supposed to do with it. I told her what it represented and that it was usually sewn on a sweater. Never did I expect her reply in Yiddish: “Mendel, let’s go tonight and buy a sweater.” You must realize that we are now in the midst of a severe depression and therefore I did not ask her to make such an unimportant expenditure. I realized later on in life that, although she never complimented any of her children, she was proud of their achievements without being demonstrative or sentimental. At the store, I selected a light gray color so that the red & black letter would be more conspicuous.

The class “year book” included pages dedicated to an Athletic Hall of Fame and a Scholastic Hall of Fame. The former consisted of 16 athletes who excelled on the various teams, performed in extra-curricular activities and, in most cases, were members of the Arista denoting high grades. The latter consisted of the top 16 scholastically in the class and who also engaged in various school activities. It was my good fortune to be selected to the former. I always looked back at this period of my life as being one of the happiest.

My lunch hour at Boys was always enjoyable. Mama would give me one or two sandwiches and I would buy a slice of pineapple cheesecake and milk daily. Lunch was held in the lunchroom on the top floor of the building and I would eat together with the football players, I always preferred football to any other sport.

In order to graduate in 3 ½ years, I took home study courses during 2 summers. I did very well in elementary and advanced biology, elementary and advanced algebra and Spanish; receiving good grades in my other subjects. I selected German as my other language because, speaking Yiddish, I was sure it would be a snap. Lo and behold, my lowest regents grade was in this subject, namely 78. I did not do too well in geometry either. On my English regents the essay part was a choice of several topics, one being a recent sporting event. Jimmy Braddock, a longshoreman, fought Jack Sharkey, the heavyweight champ and, despite great odds against him, he took the title. The essay counted 40 % and believe it or not, I was given the entire 40 %. My English teacher told me that I had the highest English regents grade in the entire school, that being 90%. Not being very proficient in poetry, I lost the 10% in that category.

In June 1935, I graduated from Boys High after 3 ½ years, a month shy of reaching the age of 17. I opted to major in accounting, which was my second choice, medicine being my first. The depression, which was still raging, and my family’s financial situation necessitated my change of profession. In fact, had I not been the youngest child

in my family, I would never have been able to attend college during the day. My siblings were all employed and therefore their support at home enabled me to accomplish this. I will always be grateful to them for allowing me to complete college in 3 ½ years instead of 7 years by going at night.

Speaking of my siblings, I would like at this point to relate how they earned their living. Previously, I wrote about Anne's and Irene's occupations, both working for the same employer all their lives. Irene would receive her salary semi-monthly and would give me 50 cents for spending money when I was a teenager. After a while she increased my "stipend" to one dollar. At the present time, this handout would seem meager however, at the time, it was quite generous.

At the age of eighteen when Morris (now called Murry) graduated from high school, he immediately went to work. His first job was in a factory that produced moth repellants. I can still remember the unpleasant odor that permeated his clothing when he returned home nightly. After a year or two, he went to work for Arthur Beer & Co., a converter of textiles. Murry had a gift for art and his ambition was to be a commercial artist and go to Pratt Institute. By saving so many years and earning quite a substantial amount, you would think that my parents would pay for his tuition. I was as disappointed in my parents' handling of this situation as was Murry; he certainly deserved better treatment.

We were now living at 1675 Lincoln Place off Eastern Parkway. The apartment consisted of 5 rooms- 3 bedrooms, a dining room, and a large kitchen. My sisters shared a small bedroom sleeping in one bed. Murry and I shared an even smaller bedroom, which had space for only one bed and a sewing machine. My parents slept in twin beds in a room just a bit larger than the other bedrooms, this room being off the dining room.

Sleeping with my brother produced several difficulties. Firstly, the bed was neither a queen nor a king size, and neither one of us was a midget nor a child. In order to be able to sleep, we managed by one of us lying in the usual manner by placing his head by the head post while the other would lie with his head touching the foot post. To make matters worse, Murry was a strong and loud snorer.

Fortunately for me, he would retire much later than I since he would go out almost every night with his friends. Since I was fast asleep when he went to bed, his snoring was no problem. However, since he had a very active weekend, he would retire very early on Monday night and thus, I slept very little that night.

My sister Irene loved traveling and evidently could afford going to the finest resorts. At the age of 18, she started to spend her summer vacations in a hotel called the Green Acres in the Adirondacks, not liking the Catskills. She was an excellent athlete playing tennis with Murry, ice-skating and horseback riding. At the age of 20, she went on a cruise to Cuba on the S.S. Morrow Castle, which many years later sunk in the Atlantic. Her best friend was Laura who would be our frequent guest at the Passover *Sedorim*, other Jewish holidays, Thanksgiving dinners etc.

Speaking of Thanksgiving dinners, I remember an incident, which occurred around this time and confirms my mother's good heart. We were all sitting at the dinner table when suddenly the door-bell rang. I opened the door and was surprised to see a young man around thirty dressed very shabbily with a patch over one eye. He evidently

went from door to door asking for a “handout”. I told him to wait a moment while I would get some money to give him. Mama, instead of giving him some change, invited him to join us at the table and celebrate Thanksgiving with us.

Why both my sisters never were married is a mystery to me to this day. Anne was always attracted to handsome men who, I surmise in retrospect, were interested in her physical attributes, which were many, rather than in making a commitment. She was pretty, endowed with excellent skin and a voluptuous body. I remember one young man in particular who was mad about her. He was a foreigner who had immigrated to the U.S. a few years prior to meeting Anne. Her objection to him was two-fold; she called him a “mocky”-slang for a foreigner- and he wore light tan shoes. She met Irving many years later and began dating in earnest. It seems Irving was separated from his wife but never divorced. After a year or two of knowing him, she tells my mother that they were married at City Hall and in a Rabbi’s study. None in the family believed her and, I daresay, neither did my mother although nobody confronted her.

Irene was an attractive girl although not as pretty as Anne. It seems the Almighty has a sense of humor because, whereas he over-endowed Anne in the bust area, he created Irene with an unusually flat chest. I remember my poor sister applying coconut oil to her breasts to enlarge them; unfortunately, it didn’t work. In addition, at a very young age Irene contracted acne and, in order to improve her facial skin, she went to a dermatologist who instead of helping the situation made matters worse by producing holes in her skin.

When Irene was about 19 or 20, she met a civil engineer whose name was Bob. They dated for a number of years and it seemed that eventually they would wed. Bob’s hesitation to do so, at least that’s what he told my sister, was that he was living with his elderly, sick mother and couldn’t leave her. Irene had no reason to disbelieve him so she kept going out with him for a number of years. After she saw no results, she decided to break off the relationship and began dating other men.

Several of these dates were very much interested in Irene. Once, a very distinguished gentleman drove up on a date with a chauffeur. She had met him at a United Palestine Appeal executive meeting. Since he was quite a bit older than her, nothing materialized. She was interested later on in a handsome and fine gentleman who wanted to marry her. It got to the point where he gave her an engagement ring and we were all sure that this was it. After a few weeks, she returned the ring and broke the young man’s heart. Very shortly after, Irene was looking for a child’s gift in a toy store and she meets Bob who tells her that he is purchasing a gift for his child.

## CHAPTER XI

After graduation from Boys High, I was admitted to CCNY Downtown – now known as Baruch School of Business. It was located in an office building converted to a college. It was a 17- story edifice at the corner of Lexington Avenue and 23<sup>rd</sup> Street; of course, we had no campus. I believe that many renovations and extensions have taken place since my time.

During the depression, Pres. Roosevelt created many alphabetic governmental agencies to alleviate the economic condition of the country; i.e. NRA, WPA, NYA, etc: The latter was the National Youth Administration, which aided college students by having them work at school. The maximum number of hours a student could work per month was 30 and the wage was 50 cents per hour; thus arriving at maximum earnings of \$15 per month.

The person who administered this at our school was an elderly math instructor. Knowing that he was inundated with applications for student aid, I went to his office and offered my services in processing the applications. Incidentally, every college was given a quota of the number of students who could receive this aid; thus, most of the applications were rejected since almost everybody applied. He was so grateful for my offer that he turned over the entire operation to me and I had final authority as to which student was accepted for this program. You can be assured that all my friends were accepted.

The various departments of the college would send in a request to me for the number of students that they can employ. One of these departments was the school library. Always liking books and magazines and realizing that working in the library would be the most pleasant, I selected this department for myself. I visited Mrs. Nelson, the head librarian, in her office and we immediately hit it off. In fact, a year later she told me that there was a special library fund that could increase my monthly hours from 30 to 60; thus, increasing my earnings from \$15 to \$30 per month. I believe that I was the only student at the school lucky enough to earn that much.

When the students went to the library for studying and needed a particular book, they consulted the files for the number of the book based on the Dewey system. They filled out a slip, which they would hand to me or to the other librarians who were not students but professional librarians, I being the only student librarian. With slip in hand, I would go to the aisle where that number would be located, obtain the book or magazine and hand it to the student who would then sign the slip which we retained until the article was returned.

Our library had 2 stories; books on the first story and magazines and bound theses on the upper story. Every day all the shelves and books were dusted. Despite this, I contracted hay fever, which my allergist attributed to my job. I remember reading U.S. News & World Report at every opportunity when things were slow and subscribing to this journal for many years after graduation.

Although the college was primarily a school of business, there were many students majoring in history and pre-law subjects. Among the latter were some girls and I am embarrassed to state that, when a young lady would hand me a slip, I would blush terribly. My hope was that she wouldn't notice my facial blushing.

Around this time, at one of the get-togethers at the H.H. of Boro Park, I met Laura, a tall, thin blonde with a lot of class who was a member of that group. We dated for about a year seeing each other almost every Saturday night. We enjoyed going to the Metropolitan Museum of Art listening to free classical concerts and occasionally to the Loews Boro Park. After taking her home I would be hosted by her mother, who would serve us cake and coffee and then I would leave around 2 am My trip home was extremely difficult, waiting for an hour for the BMT, changing at Atlantic Ave. for the IRT, waiting another hour for that train, and then walking home from the station. It was usually day- time at 5 am when I arrived home. There was no fear of being mugged in those days.

At one of the parties in Boro Park, a young, pretty, tall girl entertained the group by declaiming. Since my girl friend, Laura, was sitting on my lap, I must be frank in stating that I was not paying too much attention to the declaimer. At the close of the evening, I was prepared to escort Laura home when Laura's friend, Florence Zivitz, suggested that it would be more advisable that Zach Gellman, the declaimer's date, who lived in Boro Park should take Laura home while I take the declaimer home; she lived a few blocks from my home. I must have been introduced to this young lady but, as usual, I forgot her name.

I and the others thought this was an excellent idea except for Laura who adamantly refused to go along with this idea and I, therefore, took her home. When I arrived at the subway station, Zach, his date, Florence and her boyfriend David Alexander, are still waiting for the train. Not wanting to interfere with them, I stayed quite a distance from them without talking to them at all. When the train arrived, we all entered the same car and I found the mystery woman staring at me throughout the ride home. I must admit that I thought she was lovely but nothing beyond that feeling. I, later on, learned that she told her mother that night that she met a young man whom she would marry, and she did. This occurred in June 1936 when I was 18 and just finished my freshman year.

It was quite common in those days to attend a dance celebrating the end of the Yom Kippur fast. I had made a date with Laura for that evening asking her to bring her friends Lillian and Henrietta for my friends Maxie Eisenberg and Sandy Wasserman who had dated these girls previously. Maxie owned a car and we were off to Laura's home to pick up the girls. Upon our arrival, Laura met us at the door, not inviting us in, and informed us that Lillian had a headache so that the date was off. I, always being sensitive, could not understand why she didn't call us to tell us not to come. Also, I could not understand why she and Henrietta wouldn't keep the date despite Lillian's headache. I would never allow anyone to make a fool of me; thus, our friendship was over.

On *Simchas Torah* 1936, I told my mother that I was going to change the place of attendance of *hakofes* (seven rounds of marching with Torah scrolls) by going to the Hebrew Educational Society. I had never attended *hakofes* at the HES so perhaps it was *berschert* (destined) that I do so now. When I entered the lobby, I met Florence Zivits who told me that she is awaiting Hilda Friedfeld for *hakofes*. I inquired as to who was Hilda Friedfeld. She replied that she was the girl who declaimed in Boro Park and I immediately remembered her. As we walked outside the building, Hilda's sister Esther and her friend Esther Zomick approached us and informed us that Hilda was on her way to the HES.

When Hilda arrived, I was stricken with her class, clothing and demeanor. She was even more beautiful than when I last saw her. We went in for *bakefes* and, after about an hour, I asked her if she would like to take a walk with me. She said yes and we walked for about 30 minutes and finally sat down on a bench in a little park at the beginning of Pitkin Ave. At the time, I was wearing glasses and after staring at her for several minutes, I removed my glasses and said: "You are a very pretty girl." She began to laugh, which she did quite often. Her laughter intrigued me, as I was accustomed to living in a very serious household.

A week after I met Hilda, Murry and Gertrude Fishman were married. How they met creates a very interesting story. In June 1935, Gert received her 2-week vacation from R.H. Macy & Co. where she worked in the payroll department earning \$17 per week. Living then in Coney Island with her parents in a not too affluent home, she looked for a resort, which she could afford. Gert, as did her sister Lena, turned over her entire earnings to her mother who in turn would give her an allowance for her needs. Her father, Solomon, who was an insurance agent for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. was in poor health and at that time was convalescing at a sanitarium run by his employer. Gert found a small boarding house in the Catskills whose weekly rate was \$14 per week, including 3 meals a day.

On her first Sunday at this resort, a group of four young men checked into the boarding house in a pouring rain. It seems that they were headed for a hotel in Pennsylvania but wanted to stop for a meal and wait for the rain to subside; they were seated at the table with Gert and her friend. After the meal and arriving in her room, Gert began singing "*Im ein ani lemil?*". When Murry heard her voice, he immediately joined her in song; both of them being blessed with beautiful voices. They sang together entertaining all the guests till 4-5 am. Murry decided to stay for 1 week and Gert stayed on for another week. He didn't take her phone number so she thought he wasn't interested in her but she fell for him immediately as he was extremely handsome and talented. Several weeks later, Gert opens her door on West 23<sup>rd</sup> Street in Coney Island and who should be staring at her but her prince charming. The fact, that he was able to find her address, shows that destiny triumphs.

The first time I met her was when Murry brought her home to meet the family. I was immediately impressed with her quiet beauty, classy bearing and her intelligence. One must remember that Murry and I, although sleeping in the same bed, were not particularly close, perhaps due to the gap in age. At any rate, he made the introductions and then I went into my room and stayed there for the rest of the evening. I must admit, in retrospect, that I did not act civilly and that is why Gert has accused me many times of not liking her on that first visit. Nothing could be further from the truth, as I have always liked her. No wife could have ever loved a husband more than she loved my brother.

On October 10, 1936, their marriage took place in the Elsmere Hall, owned by a great-aunt of Gert. It was a very lovely and happy wedding, filled with much singing. Murry, being very much like his brother wasn't a great believer in making reservations so that when he arrived with his new bride at the Concourse Plaza Hotel to

celebrate his wedding night, no rooms were available. They ended up in the Hotel Theresa in Harlem where Fidel Castro stayed years later. Gert's cousin Jan Pierce, the celebrated singer, attended the wedding.

The newlyweds moved in with Gert's parents for a few weeks and then rented an apartment in Bensonhurst. Shortly before his marriage, Murry left Arthur Beer & Co. and went to work for Metropolitan Life as an agent. After 1 month, he realized this wasn't for him so he went to work for Macy's in the piece goods department.

## CHAPTER XII

On October 24, 1919, Helen Friedfeld was born to Harry and Sadie (nee Hecht). She was called Hilda all her life and discovered her legal name, Helen, when she was married and needed a birth certificate. One child preceded her by 18 months, a girl named Esther.

Her parents were married in June 1916 on a Friday afternoon. Harry's parents were Nechamia and Fraida, his father being one of the founders of Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin. Harry had six siblings: Max, Helen, Morris, Rose, Sally and May. Max married Hattie and was a haberdasher in Bensonhurst where he resided. Helen married Joe Fein and lived on Eastern Parkway; we are still very friendly with their daughter Connie who lives in California. I never knew the occupation of Joe who, I was led to believe, was not a very aggressive wage earner. Morris was a dress jobber in Chicago who was married to Lila. May was married to Jessie Spielholz who worked in the Post Office; May worked in the NYC school system as an administrative assistant. Rose and Sally never married, the latter working for the US Navy. Incidentally, when I was in the Naval Reserve, and in order to maintain my commission, was required to be tested monthly; she always graded my test papers. Of course, this was sheer coincidence. Harry's parents lived on Sterling Place in Brownsville.

Sadie's parents were Zvi Elimelech -called Hersh Malech- Hecht and Yitta Dreizel. Sadie also had six siblings: Joseph, Lena, Sam, Minnie, Lottie and Buddy. Joseph married Sadie and owned an apron factory. Lena married Izzy Rosenbaum who owned a grocery; they had two gifted twin sons. Fishy, who was an accomplished musician, was the leader of an orchestra that played at my wedding. Unfortunately, returning home early in the morning in June 1941 from the Catskills where he was performing, he fell asleep at the wheel of his car and crashed into a concrete abutment killing him instantly. His fiancée, riding in the passenger seat, went through the windshield tearing her face almost beyond recognition. She was exceptionally pretty and, fortunately for her, plastic surgery restored her face to almost the way she looked previously.

Their other son was Peretz, one of the world's greatest graphic artists known as Paul Rand. His contributions to the art world are legendary.

Sam married another Sadie; thus creating 3 Sadies in the Hecht family. He owned a black van in his piece goods business, which I would call, chidingly, a hearse. There were six sons in his family: Shloma, Moshe, Avraham, Yaakov, Peretz and Shalom. The first three were all rabbis having pulpits in Chicago, New Haven and Brooklyn, respectively. Yaakov, also a rabbi, was the founder and executive director of a Lubavitch enterprise called the National Foundation for the Furtherance of Jewish Education, emanating out of 770 Eastern Parkway, the home and headquarters of the Lubavitcher Rebbi. Peretz went into the printing business and Shalom owns a Judaica business on Coney Island Avenue in Brooklyn. Avraham had an excellent position as rabbi of a Sephardi Synagogue on Ocean Parkway until he made some very unwise comments regarding Israeli politicians that resulted in his being discharged from his pulpit and cannot enter Israel to this day.

Lottie married Bill Volet who was deputy NYS comptroller for many years as long as Arthur Levitt was the Democratic comptroller of the State. Minnie and Buddy were never married, Minnie dying in her thirties and Buddy working for the Bregstein Underwear Co. as head bookkeeper for most of her life. Lottie, Bill, their son Andrew, Buddy and her friend Bill Warfman were annual Passover *Sidorim* guests at our home years later when we were married.

Two girls were born to the Friedfelds after Hilda; Corinne (called Chippy because of her Hebrew name Zippora) born April 1, 1925 and Pearl born May 20, 1929. The family lived on the second floor at 338 Hopkinson Ave. between St. Marks Ave. and Prospect Place; this section of Brooklyn being on the perimeters of Ocean Hill and Brownsville. Sam and his family resided on the first floor. Both families did not have to pay rent since the house was owned by Hersh Malech, who lived around the corner on Prospect Place, his building housing a *mikey* on the first floor, which he managed, and his family living on the second floor.

My first introduction to the Friedfeld household was, at best, a lukewarm reception. As soon as I met Sadie, I immediately fell in love with her and, I believe, she liked me as well. Chippy was eleven with the most beautiful, almost white curls and with a face to match. Pearl was seven, extremely lovable and pretty as well.

It seems that Hilda, although, only seventeen, had been courted by wealthy suitors previously. One, in particular, was the son of one of the owners of Dilbert Bros., a chain of grocery stores in Brooklyn and Long Island. He would come to pick her up with a chauffeur-driven car. Therefore, when she related to me her interrogation by her father concerning my father's "business", I could understand Harry's concern about her falling for a poor boy. My understanding did not match my being uncomfortable in his presence. After asking Hilda what my father did for a living and she responding that he was in men's clothing, he actually referred to the phone book looking for the "Prager Clothing Co."; naturally none existed.

What made matters worse was the fact that he never greeted me for the first 2 years of our courtship and to add insult to injury forbade Sadie to say hello as well. Most of the time we met on her street corner to avoid friction. Her sister Esther joined the ostracism but not for the same reason. She being the older sister, found it hard to digest her younger sibling being so popular with boys. There was practically no rapport between Esther and me for about 2 years. Fortunately, things changed dramatically later on in our lives. I got along well with Chippy and Pearl right from the start, they treating me as a big brother. Whenever Hilda and I were together in the house, which was usually Friday nights, Pearl was instructed by Harry to chaperone us. He evidently trusted me as far as he could throw me.

If things weren't bad enough on the second floor of the building, the six boys on the first floor never greeted nor said a word to me in the 4 years that I visited Hilda. I was considered a "goy" because I did not cover my head; in fact, none of my Orthodox friends did. I was extremely happy that Hersh Malach and Sam, the father of the boys always greeted me warmly.

Hilda and I would see each other almost every night and three times on Saturday. We would *daven* together in the Hapoel Hamizrachi at Anshe Zedek on Park Place; I would visit her after lunch and at night we would go to the Congress Theatre on St. Johns Place. After the movies, we had a hot-fudge ice cream sundae. The cost of the movies was 35 cents and the sundae was 15 cents; this was my treat since from the 30 dollars a month I was earning at school I kept 10 and gave the balance to my mother. Very often on weekday nights we'd go to a different theatre that charged 10 cents and dispensed dishes and other gifts as well; we'd go "dutch-treat."

In the summer of 1937, at the age of 19, I wanted to get a job badly in order to start giving instead of receiving. Along Sixth Avenue in Manhattan were all the employment agencies of the city. The elevated trains that ran above this street did not in any way interfere with the activity going on below.

As soon as the college session ended, I began my quest for employment in earnest. I strolled along Sixth Avenue reading all the paper notes attached to the walls of each agency; each "help wanted" note specifying the type of work, hours and days of employment and the wage. Since almost every note stated 5 ½ or 6 days, I spent several days walking and looking for a company open only 5 days not wanting to work on the Sabbath. Finally I found a note desiring an experienced polisher to work 5 days for a salary of \$10 per week. My elation was great and I decided to bluff my way at least with the agency to obtain an opportunity to be interviewed by the employer. I walked up one story and of course I knew that I would be asked if I had experience as a polisher; that was the only question asked of me. Thank the Lord that she did not ask me what I polished or the firms that I worked for.

The agency sent me to T & P Optical Co. located in a building on the corner of 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Seventh Avenue. The owners were Messrs: Toscano and Pomerantz. When I arrived, I was ushered into the latter's office and his first remark was: "This is not a job for a Jewish college student." How in the world he knew I was Jewish and a college student was beyond me as I didn't tell him that at all. He kept trying to persuade me that the job would be very difficult for me and the only employees doing this type of labor were black and Latinos. He obviously knew that I had no experience in polishing and that immediately after the summer I would leave and return to college.

I literally pleaded with him to employ me since I was a Sabbath observer and could not find a 5 day job. I assume he pitied me because he hired me against his better judgment. When the head of the polishing department escorted me to the buffing machine and I gazed upon the polishers, I wanted to make a hasty retreat. They were all dressed in very old clothes, which were covered from head to toe with a pink powder, as were their faces. I am sure that you all are familiar with the shoe polishing machines used by cobblers; these machines were very similar.

The company manufactured metal eyeglass frames that had to be polished to a high degree of gloss. After a very short instruction period, I commenced working as a polisher. The powder immediately entered every orifice of my face and covered my hair and clothing. The working hours were 8 am-5 pm with an hour for lunch, which I brought from home. After work, we all went to a large room with a long, double-sided sink in the shape of a trough so that many were able to wash off the powder at the same time, precluding waiting on line. We used a detergent

that came in cans as those used by workers who are exposed to grease. Of course, I brought old clothes the following morning.

For two weeks I labored as a polisher and my health suffered as I was very often nauseous and vomited quite a bit. It bothered Mr. Pomerantz as much as it did me; consequently, he transferred me from polishing to a drill press machine. The arms of an eye glass frame have small screws, which attach the arms to the body of the frame. The drill press punches holes in the metal to be the receptacle for the screws. I would sit all day pushing a piece of metal with my right forefinger into a small hole on the machine and simultaneously kick a foot pedal with my right foot which would lower a long, thin metal pole which punctured a small hole into the piece that I placed with my finger.

Unfortunately, one day, being extremely bored and having my mind somewhere else, I didn't remove my finger fast enough and the press punctured the nail of my finger. Naturally, the pain was quite severe and blood flooded the nail. Perhaps God was looking after me that day because I didn't want to work on the Sabbath. Coincidentally, the son-in-law of Mr. Pomerantz, who was a physician, was visiting that day. He immediately cut the center of my nail to release the blood to prevent my losing the nail. I was told by Mr. Pomerantz to go home and come back when I felt better. Mac, being the son of Ruchel Prager, refused his kind suggestion and immediately was transferred to a different machine, which enabled me to continue working that day and for weeks thereafter.

Believe it or not, I received 3 raises that summer to the magnificent sum of \$16 per week. I told my parents that I would like to continue working and go to college in the evening. Mama agreed with my suggestion, but Papa refused stating that he wanted at least one of his children to be a college graduate; and I complied with his wish.

Since I wanted to graduate in 3 ½ years, I took two courses for 2 nights a week that summer; commercial law and economic geography. Every school night around 10 o'clock my devoted Hilda would stand and wait for me at the train station at Eastern Parkway and Utica Avenue, 8 blocks from her home. She walked me home 4 blocks and then walked home alone the remaining 4 blocks. In retrospect, it would seem to be a lack of consideration letting her walk home alone; however, she realized that I had to arise at 6 the next morning to go to work and also a girl walking alone at 10 pm in those days did not present the danger that exists today.

I must mention at this time, while I am relating to you her wonderful character, an almost daily episode that occurred while I worked in the college library. After graduation from Franklin K. Lane High School, Hilda went to work for her father at Pearl Dress Co. at 501 Seventh Ave. in the garment district as a model and head bookkeeper. Since she graduated taking a general course, bookkeeping was foreign to her. In order for her to be able to be hired by Papa Friedfeld, I became her teacher giving her textbooks in that subject and, in addition, would assign homework and actually test her.

About twice a week on her lunch hour, she took the Broadway bus on 37<sup>th</sup> Street to 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, walked 1 block to Lexington Ave. in order to sit in the library and stare at her boy friend; if that wasn't love, I don't know what love is.

The N.Y. Council of Hapoel Hamizrachi, which consisted of a delegate from each of the N.Y. chapters, would meet monthly at an office building at Broadway at 24<sup>th</sup> Street. At this time, I was elected as a delegate from the Park Place chapter and remained in that capacity for three years. I enjoyed these meetings immensely; especially, rubbing elbows with high dignitaries of our movement and those of the Mizrachi organization. These were world leaders who would occasionally visit the Council and address us. My knowledge of Zionism was greatly enhanced due to my position as delegate. Perhaps, having this knowledge enabled me to be elected president of our chapter at the age of 19; which looking back in retrospect, seems now to be a very young age to lead a group that consisted of older members.

My social life was now completely devoted to activities conducted by the H.H.; and, of course, jointly with Hilda. There was a Hachshara camp in Freehold, N.J., which prepared *chalutzim* (pioneers) to make *aliya* to Israel.

In June for the next 2 years our group rented a truck, which would hold about 20 persons and we would spend the day at the camp. As enjoyable as that was, the ride back and forth was even more so as we sang Israeli and Hebrew songs and cuddled during the entire trip.

Also, usually on the last Sunday in June, all the chapters chartered a boat to go up the Hudson River to Bear Mountain. All those desiring to go went to their chapter meeting place on Saturday night to pay for the trip. I was in charge of collecting the funds of my chapter and Hilda and I would bring the money and the list of passengers to the home of Mary Berman, who lived in Williamsburg and who later married Abe Reiss. By coincidence, their granddaughter Elaine married my nephew Shalom Mehler. For several years I took Hilda's little sister Pearl with us on the boat ride, starting when she was seven. Going on hikes, playing inter-chapter basketball games and social dances were other very enjoyable activities.

## CHAPTER XIII

In the spring of 1938, at the age of twenty, I was employed as manager at Auerbach's Hotel in Spring Valley, N.Y. Mr. Auerbach, the proprietor, as a widower married the sister of Sam Simons, the husband of my Aunt Mary. My duties included that of desk clerk; taking reservations, registration of guests, assigning rooms and preparation of guests' bills. Also, I was the *maître d'*; placing guests at tables guided by their marital status, age and gender. In addition, I was the head and only bookkeeper; making deposits, paying bills and keeping the books.

My employment commenced on Passover. During *chal hamoed* (intermediate days) I saw a headline in the N.Y. Daily News which, to say the least, had a severe traumatic effect on me. I cannot remember the exact wording of the headline but it caused me to go inside the paper to read the story. Hilda's grandfather Hersh Meilach Hecht was beaten to death in his home by his *mikva* employee; the perpetrator using a bedpost. He, apparently, bled to death. I immediately called Hilda to confirm what I had read, although it was silly of me to do so since all the facts related in the newspaper were sufficient to preclude confirmation. I guess that I just didn't want to believe this horrible event; also, the call was to console her.

Ten years later in 1948 we were living at Glendale Court in the East Flatbush section of Brooklyn. One evening, we received a visit from two police detectives who requested that Hilda come to the police precinct on Liberty Avenue to identify two suspects of the killing who were apprehended in South Carolina. I, naturally, accompanied her and when we arrived at the station we were told to stay in a room and look through the door where both were seated. Hilda immediately identified the older one as her grandfather's employee; it seems that the younger one was his nephew who persuaded his uncle that both should rob the home.

Hersh Meilach, for many years, collected funds to send to Israel and this fact was well known by his employee. Evidently, he arrived at home at a very unpropitious moment and caught them in the act of robbery. Both were convicted and received a sentence of 10-20 years and were released after 7 years for good behavior. I assume that this light sentence was due to the fact that the murder was not premeditated; also, no gun or knife was used.

Although there were girl friends in my past life, I was not prepared for the events that ensued at the hotel. Many females, both single and married, were looking for a sexual fling with the employees, whose additional duties included mingling with the guests at dances and all social activities.

I will just mention a few incidents that involved me. One of the guests was a woman about 35 years of age, with a child of 4 or 5 and married to a very rich man in his sixties. She stayed at Auerbachs the entire summer; her husband visited her weekends arriving in a chauffeured expensive car. She always eyed me up and enjoyed speaking to me. On one particular weekend, her husband did not show up. While dancing with me at our Saturday night dance, she asked me to please come to her room to fix the window, which, supposedly, was not functioning properly. Whether I was still a *yeshiva bocher* (boy) and unsophisticated or scared to lose my virginity, I said: "I'll be

glad to send up the maintenance man;” her reply was immediate: “Don’t bother.” She never had a broken window again.

Another experience that I had was with another woman who was very attractive with a body to match. I would say she was in her early thirties and married to a dentist who came out weekends. During the week she and I would sit at night after dinner in a swing for two and indulge in light petting. She did not need any repairs in her room, but, nevertheless, she invited me very often to her bedroom and couldn’t understand why a young man of twenty constantly refused her. In fact, she gave me her address in the city so that we could have an affair while her husband was at his office.

To complicate matters, she had a very pretty, younger sister who came up weekends and who also took a fancy to me. The married sister must have confided in her about my refusal to engage in sex with her. I was flabbergasted when the younger sibling advised me not to become involved with her sister, as she wanted me for herself. She, too, gave me her address, which I promptly discarded. There were also many single girls who were not immune to one-night stands. Mendel still retained his virginity, for better or worse.

I have asked myself many times what prevented this twenty-year old from taking advantage of the many opportunities afforded me. After all, at this age the libido is at its strongest. I conclude that there were many factors in my rejecting these advances. To begin with, having sexual relations with an *eishes ish* (wife of a Jewish man) would be adulterous; and, being an Orthodox young man would not allow me to violate the seventh commandment. My religious scruples also came into focus with unmarried women. Perhaps I was fearful that I would embarrass myself in the act, being a virgin; and, last but not least, I had a girl friend.

On the Labor Day weekend, many of the employees had to relinquish their rooms to guests, as the hotel was booked beyond capacity. I, and the others, would sleep in the lobby on the couches. I remember vividly moans and groans emanating from the many liaisons between the waiters and guests. Needless to say, I had very little sleep that night.

In the fall of 1938, Hilda and I were coming home on a Friday afternoon, I from school and she from work, traveling on the subway. I disliked what I was going to tell her but my patience with her father’s behavior towards me reached the boiling point. I told her that I did not consider myself unworthy of her despite her father’s feeling and that, perhaps, it would be better for both of us to discontinue our relationship. I liked her a great deal and we were seeing each other every day and enjoying every minute of it. However, being ostracized by her father and by her mother, under duress, for two years, I had occasional doubts whether I was in love with her. These doubts could have also been raised by my not understanding what love meant.

When I finished telling her how I felt, she began to cry and told me that she loved me and that her father’s objection was meaningless as far as she was concerned. If his attitude persisted, she was ready to elope with me when I was ready to marry her. Her loving, emotional words did not sway me and we departed.

Little did I know at that time how wise and resourceful my future wife was. A day later, on Saturday night, a basketball game and dance was scheduled between H.H. of Park Place and H.H. of Boro Park at the HES. In the middle of the first quarter, Hilda walks into the gymnasium escorted by a date. While playing in the game, I caught a glimpse of my ex-girl friend sitting in the stands and having a great time, laughing and joking with her new conquest. Since basketball was never one of my favorite participating sports, I never considered myself a good player; however, from that moment on, I played worse than ever. She, evidently, had very little interest in the game but came to make me jealous since after the second quarter, she left with her beau in tow.

If I had any previous doubts about my love for her, those feelings disappeared completely. I became a basket case not being able to sleep nor eat and realized how much I loved her. Walking around my house as a zombie, I was told by mother to reconcile with Hilda as soon as possible; since she could see how unhappy her son was and was worried about his health. To make matters worse, my friends told me on the following afternoon that she went that day to her new boy friend's home to visit his folks. One must admit Hilda was a fast worker in order to accomplish her plan. This episode also revealed who were my true friends. Itchka, my best friend, proved his loyalty by consoling me and telling me to contact Hilda as soon as possible. Maxie Eisenberg, on the other hand, advised her that she should not return to me because I'm too tough and she would never be happy with me.

After the worst weekend of my life, on Monday evening I phoned her to say that I would like to return a book that she loaned me. She seemed happy to hear from me and consented to meet me that evening. After going to her home, we took a bus to Prospect Park and spent one of the most delightful nights that I can remember; needless to say, we never separated again and I could not have found a more devoted, loving and considerate life partner. In fact, before our very short-lived separation, she said to me: "Mac, if we ever marry and have children, you will always come first" and she kept that vow throughout our marriage.

It appears that our breakup did create a great change in my relationship with the Friedfeld household. Hilda took "the bull by the horns" and finally told her father in no uncertain terms that, despite his objection of me, she would marry me and expected him to receive me civilly henceforth. He, grudgingly at first, commenced greeting me; Sadie was relieved and behaved very warmly, and Esther began to like me.

Being an accounting student, I became quite useful to Harry in his dress business. Every Sunday, Harry, Sadie, Hilda and I would go to Pearl Dress to work, Hilda and I working on the books and her parents opening the returns. At the end of each month, Harry and I took a physical inventory of piece goods, and finished goods and I would compare the result with a perpetual (book) inventory, which I set up, to ascertain if any difference showed up due to theft or poor records. In the evening around 6, Harry would treat us to dinner at Farm Food Restaurant located at 49<sup>th</sup> Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues; the meal cost an incredible 75 cents.

## CHAPTER XIV

I believe that the CCNY School of Business was either the only one or one of many few colleges in the country that required a thesis to be written to qualify for a baccalaureate degree. Several years after I graduated, this requirement was discontinued. In the student's senior year, one was given a choice of writing on an accounting or economic subject. Being always an activist in my religion and ethnicity, I decided on merging economics with the Jewish minority in the United States. The student had to submit the title and subject to Justin H. Moore, the Dean of the School of Business for approval. He was the personification of the term "WASP", who, incidentally, never passed the CPA exam after sitting for it seven times.

After submitting the title "Economic Discrimination of Jews in America", I received an immediate rejection; evidently, it was politically incorrect to use the word "discrimination." When I revised the title to "Occupational Difficulties of Jews in America," the dean was relieved and I obtained an immediate approval.

Now the year-long period of research began and I enjoyed every minute of it. Prager not being an especially Jewish surname and my facial characteristics passing for those of a gentile afforded me entrance to many financial district employment agencies, all being manned by WASPS.

It really is quite incomprehensible for a person in the year 2003 to realize the extent of bigotry and discrimination that existed in 1938. Jews and Catholics - especially those of Italian extraction - had to combat the quota system on applying to the Ivy League schools. Many of my friends who opted for the field of medicine were forced to travel abroad, i.e. Syria, Mexico and European medical schools. Employment opportunities in the fields of finance, utilities, insurance and architecture were practically non-existent for Jews and Italians.

When I interviewed the employment agencies, I disguised my reason for being there by telling them that I was writing a thesis on the significant role these agencies were playing in the personnel field. They were delighted to hear my ruse and proceeded to "spill the beans". They all gave me samples of the applications they submitted to those desiring employment.

Each and every one contained a line reading "religion". When I would question the agent as to the need for this line, he answered that he personally was not a bigot, but he had to abide by the wishes of his clients. I never told them that I was attending CCNY, but that I was a Columbia student.

The N.Y. Times want ads all asked for resumes of the respondent, including religion. In addition, rental ads in the newspapers always had the words "near a church"; thus, assuring that the apartment or house would not be rented nor sold to a Jew. Fortunately, years later, laws were enacted prohibiting these practices. However, it would be foolish to state that discrimination was completely eradicated as I will later on write about my personal experiences in this respect.

My thesis was a little over 100 pages and, unfortunately, I waited too long to have it typed by Hilda. I had to submit the paper on Monday at 3 pm. As luck would have it, my girl friend took sick on Friday with a bad case of

the flu and a high fever. Because of the Sabbath, nothing could be done till Sunday when I implored our next door neighbor's son to do the typing and ensure my graduating. I gave his mother the name "Mrs. Evsher hut yir" - translated - Mrs. Perhaps you have. Almost daily, this woman would knock on our door and say: "Mrs. Prager, evsherhut yir a tzibale (onion)" etc. The young man worked all day Sunday and on Monday till I P.M. and I was able to submit the thesis by 2:30. Of course, he was well compensated for his Herculean task.

The commencement exercises were held in the evening at the Uptown campus on 139th Street. Since we were given only 2 tickets, only my parents attended. The super of our building, who was Polish, also attended with his wife as their son also graduated. We all went home together on the subway and they invited us in to their apartment for drinks to celebrate this momentous episode in both families' lives.

Finally, after 15 years of schooling, I was ready to commence a career and start working at a steady job. Answering a great number of newspaper want ads for a junior accountant and stating that I was a Sabbath observer produced no responses. I even wrote to accounting firms whose names included "Prager" hoping that perhaps they would feel an affinity to their namesake; again no replies. It seems that every accounting firm in the city labored at least 5 1/2 days.

This dilemma lasted for a period of four months and I began to doubt my ever gaining employment in my chosen profession. With a very heavy heart I informed my parents that I was ready to "throw in the towel" and succumb to the inevitable. Since I was their only child who was still Orthodox, they were not too happy to hear of my decision. They too realized that their son would perhaps never obtain employment unless he violated the fourth commandment. To make matters worse, I could not sit for the CPA exam unless I worked for a CPA firm for one year.

At the end of May 1939, my first response to a want ad resulted in my being interviewed by Clarence Rainess & Co. a CPA firm located in the garment district at 570 Seventh Ave. My interview was conducted by the managing partner, Mr. Irving Schwartz. When he discovered that I had graduated four months previously and that I had not worked during that time, he asked me why that happened. When I told him the truth about my "caving in" and that I was not very happy about working on the Sabbath a very close and warm relationship began between the two of us. He was raised in an Orthodox home and in fact both his parents still remained devout Jews. He understood my dilemma and stated that he too went through the same situation when he graduated.

When I told my mother the starting salary was \$15 per week, she remarked that they must be crazy as junior accountants received usually \$5 weekly. Medical interns were not receiving any compensation; lawyers beginning their careers were fortunate in being paid at all. Since the hospitals and the professional firms realized that one could not sit for licensure examinations before having at least one year of experience, they took advantage of the situation. In my case, a CPA candidate was required to work for a CPA firm for one year before being allowed to take the exam and needed two additional years of accounting experience, one of which had to be with a CPA firm; thus, professionals were at the mercy of their employers.

Our firm consisted of approximately 15 persons; 2 partners, 4 senior accountants, 5 semi-seniors and the rest juniors. Most of our clients were in the garment trade; manufacturers of dresses, ladies coats and blouses. For the first few months, I assisted a senior or a semi-senior perform audits of our clients. After this period of indoctrination, a junior's work was evaluated and a decision was made whether to retain the person or to discharge him.

Our firm was noted for its large turnover of juniors and, of course, I was delighted to discover that I made the grade. In fact, I was called into the office of Mr. Schwartz and he informed me that he was very satisfied with my work and that he had plans for me in the firm; giving me a \$2 raise. I was now a semi-senior and performed some audits alone and accompanied a senior on the more complex audits.

After 64 years, I still remember the names of some of these clients. Lynn Gray Frocks, who's CEO, was David Schwartz and who later became the most successful dress mfr. in the country heading Jonathan Logan. Washine-National-Sands, a producer of chemicals sold to large laundry establishments; this company was located in L.I. City. J.T. Darling & Co. a purveyor of fresh fish to restaurants and cruise ships located on West 61st Street in Manhattan. I would wear my oldest clothes when making my monthly audits as the smell of fish would permeate my clothing and my body as well. Floradora Fashions, a manufacturer of \$2.87 dresses located on Seventh Ave. and 35th Street. Kay Cloak & Suit Co. located on 38th Street off Seventh Ave. Admiration Blouse Co. located on Broadway at 36th Street. Another one of my clients was a mfr. of formal dresses whose name escapes me. I enjoyed my monthly visits to this firm because very often Myron Cohen, a piece goods salesman, entertained management with his repertoire of jokes. He later left selling to become a famous comedian.

Another one of my clients was Raymodes Negligees located on Madison Ave. where most of the lingerie and negligee manufacturers were located. Very often when performing an audit at a fashion client, the accountant would be seated at a table in the show room. Thus, he would see all the models displaying the "line" to the buyers. One of these models at Raymodes was a tall, beautiful girl who always engaged me in conversation when she wasn't modeling. I could have easily fallen for her had I not been going with Hilda and had she been Jewish. One day, she invited me to go roller-skating with her on the following Friday night in Rutherford, N.J. where she made her home. I don't remember what reason I gave her for not accepting her offer which, of course, made me feel good. Whether I told her that I was religious and couldn't violate the Sabbath or that I was seeing a young lady or, perhaps, invented another excuse I really don't remember. What I do recall is that I told Hilda all about her and her nice proposal.

Being a fast auditor, I was sent to clients who were either out-of-town or were located at places that required traveling. One of these clients was located in Philadelphia. Every month I would arise at 5 am take the subway to Penn Station and take the train to Philadelphia and return home after 8 p.m. Another client was in Patchogue, L.I. Since Mr. Schwartz wanted to handle this audit, he would pick me up in his car at a mutually convenient spot and we spent a pleasant trip in conversation. I did not own a car nor did I know how to drive.

In the summer of 1939, Hilda and I decided to spend our evenings after work and our Sundays at the Washington Baths in Coney Island. Each of us rented a locker for \$10 for the entire season. Since I worked mainly in the garment center and she likewise worked there, we'd meet around 5.30-6 pm and have dinner either at Gross's Dairy Restaurant on Broadway at 37th Street or at a cheaper dairy restaurant on 36h Street. We'd eat very quickly and then take the train to Coney Island where we would arrive around 7.30 in time to enjoy an evening of swimming in the pool and just being together. We'd stay till 10 pm the closing time and return home around 11.

On Sundays, we'd be joined occasionally by my sister Irene, Hilda's long-time friend Rose Schneider and her beau Sandy Wasserman and his brother Jack- both of whom you met previously - and my friend Itchka. Incidentally, we introduced Rose to Sandy one week after we met and they were married one week after our wedding. We remained close friends until Sandy's death a few years ago, after which we lost contact with Rose who was quite ill. In the summer of 1940, we again rented lockers at the baths and repeated our wonderful time together.

## CHAPTER XV

During the entire four years that we were “going steady”, neither my parents nor my in-laws ever questioned Hilda or me as to when we intended to get married. In fact, Hilda, as well, never broached this subject. After seven or eight months of earning some money, I was able to purchase a gift for my girl-friend. When I gave her a gold watch with some diamonds, I did not have to say: “Now, we're engaged.” No formal engagement was ever announced. Unfortunately, one week after receiving this token of our friendship, she lost this expensive watch in a movie theatre. Mac, being the doll that he is, immediately purchased another watch without the diamonds and gave it to my darling.

After working one year, I was able to sit for the CPA exam in May 1940. Many candidates were able financially to take crash courses in accounting to prepare them for the exam; however, I was not one of them. In fact, I accompanied Hilda to her beauty parlor on the evening preceding the exam. Since I had always been good at taking exams, being blessed with a good memory, I never opened a textbook to study.

The exam was given in theory, auditing, commercial law and problems over 2 ½ days. Three months later, I received my grades. One had to receive a passing grade of 70% in each of the subjects. If you passed problems, you never had to sit for this again; however, you had to pass 2 of the other 3 to preclude you from having to sit again for all three. I failed theory with a grade of 65%. If you received a grade of 60% or over, you were permitted to lodge an appeal. I immediately appealed, not being aware that on appeal, the Board had the right to reexamine all four parts, including problems. Had I known this, chances are that I would not have appealed and sat for just theory in November. In October, one month prior to the next sitting, I received a notice that the Board of CPA Examiners in Albany accepted my paper in theory on review; thus allowing me to pass the exam on my first attempt.

At the age of 16 in 1934, my friends and I began to attend N.Y. Ranger hockey games in the old Madison Square Garden located on Eighth Avenue at 49th and 50th Streets. The cheapest seats were at the highest floor of the arena; one had to walk up four stories to take advantage of the 50 cents price of admission. Unfortunately, unless you came very early and obtained a seat in the first row, a part of the game was not visible; especially when the action was on the side where you were sitting. Those sitting in the first row would relate what was happening to those behind them.

The Rangers received its NHL franchise in 1926 one year after the NY Americans joined the league. “Tex” Rickard, the Garden president and fight promoter chose Connie Smythe from the University of Toronto to build the team. He assembled a talented roster, including future Hall of Famers Frank Boucher and Bill Cook, who with his brother Bun formed hockey's top line; Hall of Fame defenseman Ivan “Ching” Johnson; and second line winger Murray “Mudhooks” Murdoch, who would become hockey's first “iron man”, playing 508 consecutive games. The sportswriters dubbed the team “Tex's” Rangers and that was the origin of the club's name.

Prior to the start of their first season, however, disagreements with the Garden management caused Smythe's exit. On the eve of the club's first season, the task of guiding the Rangers was handed to one of professional hockey's pioneers, Lester Patrick. He directed his team to a first place finish in their opening season, holding the positions of manager and coach. Bill Cook won the league scoring title; a year later, they won the Stanley Cup. It was first and last time a NHL team has won the Cup in its second year.

The Rangers became known as “the classiest team in hockey” going to the finals four times in six years. Boucher won the Lady Byng Trophy - given to the player exhibiting sportsmanship and gentlemanly conduct combined with a high standard of playing ability- so frequently, that the league allowed him to keep the original silver trophy and made a new one for future recipients. In their first 16 seasons, the Rangers missed the playoffs only once, and only twice did they end lower than third place. They won the Stanley Cup again in the 1932-1933 season, a year prior to my attending the games. The names that I remember are Andy Aitkenhead, goalie; the Cook brothers, Boucher, Ching Johnson, Cecil Dillon, Murray Murdoch and Ott Heller, a defenseman.

Being always interested in sports, I was very successful in transforming Hilda in becoming an ardent fan in hockey and baseball. In fact, our first date a month after our meeting was a Boys High football game held, as usual, on a Saturday afternoon. We were dressed in our Sabbath finery; I with a hat and suit and she in a beautiful brown and green velvet suit with a hat to match and a pair of leather gloves. We walked over 2 miles to Boys High Field and since I had been on the Field Squad previously, we did not need admission tickets. In the middle of the game, it began to rain and “Sir Walter Prager” removed his jacket and covered Hilda with it. From that moment on, my future wife realized that Mac was altruistic.

That same year, I began taking her to the Ranger games and she immediately fell in love with hockey and the Rangers. Besides attending several games during the season, we started a ritual of celebrating New Year's Eve by going to the Garden with several other couples; the Rangers always playing the Boston Bruins that night. After walking to Times Square to be with the vast crowd at midnight, we all took the subway to go to one of our homes to have a festive party eating delicatessen cold cuts.

Hilda's sister, Esther, had a friend Rebecca who was married to Jack Blaustein. He was quite familiar with Phil Watson, a winger, who played for the Rangers 1935-1948 and made the Rangers All-Century Team. He earned his nickname of “Fiery” because of his aggressive manner of competing. After the games, Hilda and I were permitted to wait outside the locker room because of Jack introducing us to Watson. We would speak to many of the players who were extremely nice and friendly to us. The roster consisted of Davey Kerr, goalie. Lynn and Muzz Patrick- Lester's sons-, Neil and Mac Colville brothers, Art Coulter(Captain), Ott Heller, Alex Shibicky, Bryan Hextall, Dutch Hiller and our friend Phil Watson.

One Thursday morning in the beginning of August 1940 while taking inventory at Kay Cloak & Suit Co., something snapped in my mind and told me that it was time to propose marriage to the young lady who was my best friend for four years. Since I was one block from Pearl Dress Co., I suggested that we meet for lunch which

was not unusual when I was working near Hilda. She met me outside her building and we went for lunch at Dubrow's Cafeteria at the corner of her street. While sitting at a table and eating, I, in a not too romantic setting, said in a matter of fact manner that the time for marriage has arrived. I was not surprised at Hilda's reaction which was not one of shock since after seeing each other every day for four years, marriage at some point in time was expected. At this point, I must admit that neither of our parents ever inquired as to when we were getting married.

I daresay that today a girl's parents would not be as patient and tolerant of the suitor's intentions if the courtship lasted for four years. Hilda, knowing that as soon as I earned a living wage I would "tie the knot", was not exceptionally startled and surprised at my "proposal". After all, she had already received two watches from her intended without a formal engagement announcement and had made me "jump through the hoop" two years earlier using a very clever tactic; therefore, she knew who her husband would be but not when.

After lunch, we both went to Pearl Dress to inform her father of the latest news. Based upon his reaction, I felt that I could have told him about tomorrow's weather and he would have been just as excited. Actually, in retrospect, I could not criticize him because of the length of his daughter's relationship with me. We set the date of the wedding to be on Saturday evening on September 14th. On the following Monday evening the three of us went to Trotsky Caterers located in Trotsky's Restaurant on West 49th Street; they were one of the most popular kosher caterers at the time. They ran their affairs at the Hotel Sharon on West 46th Street between Broadway and Eighth Avenue. The hotel was a three story building built at the turn of the century and quite run-down. However, the ballroom was, at best, adequate for our needs. Papa Friedfeld made all the financial and menu arrangements and we were ready for the next step. I don't recall whether flowers were part of the deal as I don't remember ordering any floral arrangements. Taking care of the caterer was the only task assigned to him and his only cost.

Hilda and I on Monday ordered the wedding invitations and mailed them to my parents, who were vacationing in Sharon Springs - which they called Sheriff Springs - in the Catskills. Mama Friedfeld was also in the Catskills with her two youngest daughters. None of them had any idea of our plans and were surprised when they were "invited" to their children's wedding. Both of us engaged Hilda's cousin Fishy's orchestra, selected a photographer on Pitkin Avenue to produce a few stills of us only. You can rest assured, no album was created and no pictures were taken at the wedding. As Jews at that time were not known as imbibers, I did not spend a great deal of money on liquor.

When my father returned from his vacation, Hilda and the three men went to Pitkin Avenue to rent their wedding outfits; Hilda getting her wedding gown and veil and the men their white-tie suits (tails) and their top hats. The rental fee for the gown was \$25.00.

One of our clients was the National Safety Bank located at Broadway at 38th Street which was one of the few Jewish owned banks in the nation. My firm conducted annual audits of this financial institution and by coincidence we spent the entire week preceding my wedding at the bank. My future father-in-law had his business

and individual accounts there which afforded me the opportunity to examine the extent of his wealth. Evidently, I was satisfied with his financial condition since I went ahead with the wedding.

On the night of the affair, the photographer picked me up in a limousine at my home and drove me to Hilda's house. We were now dressed in our wedding clothes. As we left her house, all the neighbors threw rice at us; especially Mrs. Toscano who lived in the adjacent building. Then he drove us to his studio where our pictures were taken; after which he drove us to the hotel. Throughout the entire affair my wing collar, that I had never worn previously, kept separating itself from my shirt and you can just imagine what I looked like.

Since we were still on daylight saving time, the wedding was called for Saturday evening at 8:30 pm and actually started sometime later. We invited around 100-120 guests (I can't recall the exact number) and most attended. I don't believe we had a smorgasbord table; thus, we probably commenced with the ceremony. The bride, being as vivacious as ever, walked down the aisle with a great smile nodding to guests on both sides of the aisle in the manner of a boxer entering the ring. My parents and in-laws were very Orthodox Jews, as were many of the guests. Despite this, men and women were not separated during the ceremony.

I walked down the aisle with my parents with a demeanor as though I was on my way to be executed. The solemnity of this most important step in my life prevented me from acting gay and having a smiling appearance. In fact, under the canopy, while the Rabbi and selected guests were making the Seven Blessings, I began to feel very faint and turned white as I was told later on. Hilda's sister Esther, the maid of honor, was standing next to me and, noticing my condition, immediately held my arm to support me. After the ceremony, all went to their assigned tables, which were not gender separated; mixed dancing went on till 4 a.m.

We sat in the hotel lobby with our parents and siblings for about an hour and then retired to our hotel room. Since we were awaiting the arrival of our furniture, we rented a room at the Hotel Sharon for two weeks; not even thinking of making honeymoon plans. At exactly 7 am, the bride and groom on their first night together in bed are disturbed by a knock on the door. The store from whom we rented our wedding outfits came to pick up the clothing telling Hilda that her gown was rented to another bride for a wedding that afternoon. She told the messenger that her gown was wet with perspiration; his reply was: "Don't worry, we'll clean it." A few minutes later, we heard another knock. It seems that our conjugal relations would have to wait. Murry and Gert also stayed at the hotel that night and he wanted to know if his brother was satisfying his bride.

Around noon the following day, we decided to visit her parents at Pearl Dress. Her father would not allow a simple event as his daughter's wedding or the lack of sleep to prevent him from making his Sunday morning trip to his business; as usual Mama Friedfeld accompanied him. When we arrived, Papa could not look us in the eye as the thought of his first daughter sleeping with a man and losing her virginity was a deed he couldn't reject; however, it was very difficult for him to accept. Mama, although being a prude, was exceptionally warm in greeting us.

We stayed there for an hour or so and then went walking on Central Park West to examine the building in which my employer, Mr. Rainess and his wife resided. In the early evening, we went to Radio City Music Hall to

complete our “honeymoon.” I remember, as though it occurred yesterday, that we both felt as though we were walking on air. Whether it was our first day of being husband and wife or it was the result of our first sexual experience, or both, I really cannot explain. We returned to the hotel to spend our first night together without any interruptions by others.

Although most of the guests or residents of Hotel Sharon were shady characters: i.e. prostitutes, drug addicts and the like, my bride and I did not look down on them and they all could not have been nicer to us. We were living a life style quite different than theirs; however, I cannot forget their respect for us, and their daily greetings. In fact, the desk clerk was so happy to have us as guests, that he gave us free tickets to Broadway shows. After two weeks, we were ready to move into our first home.

## CHAPTER XVI

During our stay at the hotel, we went apartment hunting and found a lovely place at 390 Parkside Avenue in Brooklyn, one block from Prospect Park. The features that attracted us were the presence of a doorman and an elevator, both not being very common in the rental price range that we could afford. It was axiomatic that one should allocate a week's wage for a monthly rental of an abode. Since I was earning \$20 and Hilda was earning the same amount, we were able to pay \$40 for our apartment.

We had a fairly large bedroom, nice size living room - which was used as an eating area as well - and a full kitchen "in the wall". It contained an oven, refrigerator, sink and cabinets; the entire area was covered by a drape when not in use. Although the culinary part of our apartment was very limited in space, Hilda, being a great hostess, constantly invited our parents and siblings to Sunday lunches and dinners. Also, our friends and my fellow accountants at Clarence Rainess were at our home for parties and get-togethers quite often. We also made a "sweet-sixteen party" for Chippy and, believe it or not, no boys were invited, slightly different than today.

Hilda's first try at cooking occurred when she invited our parents and all our siblings for a late lunch on a Sunday afternoon. She was preparing for eleven persons. On the previous evening, we went shopping on Flatbush Ave. for the food to be dispensed on the following day. My poor wife was very apprehensive lest she screw up her first attempt at being a "bale busta" (competent housewife). She decided on serving as a main dish, potatoes with sour cream and cake and coffee for dessert. We bought a 25 lb. bag of Idaho potatoes and my contribution to the lunch was peeling the contents of the entire bag. I can still see myself sitting on a small ladder, which was ½ in the kitchen and ½ in the living room, peeling away. Unfortunately, not ever doing this type of work, most of the potatoes ended up looking like small pebbles. You can just imagine the laughter that ensued when Hilda examined my handiwork.

About 2 hours prior to the expected arrival of our guests, my wife filled four large pots with potatoes and placed them on the stove and started her extremely "difficult" debut in the culinary art. Before the cooking finished, lo and behold, all the guests arrived at once. My mother seeing four large pots on the stove and steam emanating from them could not hold back her immediate respect and admiration for her daughter-in-law, remarking in Yiddish: "Ilda, I didn't know that you are such a bale busta." Her inquisitiveness getting the better part of her, she began lifting the covers of each pot consecutively. After lifting the first cover, she exclaimed: "potatoes," she lifted the second cover and again cried out "potatoes?" She repeated this twice more and burst into loud laughter, as did all the other guests.

After two years of working for Clarence Rainess & Co., and receiving two raises to \$20 per week and laboring during the tax season - January through April 15 - till 10 p.m. Monday-Thursday and normal hours on Saturdays and Sundays, I felt that I was very much underpaid. Mr. Schwartz kept telling me that I had a bright future with the firm and should be patient as he was very pleased with my work. Be as it may, when Papa Friedfeld

suggested that I join the accounting firm who he engaged, I immediately concurred with his proposal when he informed me that George Muhlstock & Co. offered me a starting salary of \$35.00 per week. In May of 1941, I changed employers.

My new firm was located at 1441 Broadway, also in the garment center one block from my previous office. It was smaller than my previous firm and consisted of George, senior partner; David Medoff, junior partner and three semi-senior accountants, including myself; there were no junior accountants. Consequently, everyone on the staff was capable of handling audits alone; although there were audits that one of the partners accompanied one of the others. Most of our clients were lingerie and negligee manufacturers located on the East side of Manhattan on and around Madison Avenue between East 28 Street and East 34 Street.

When I joined the firm in 1941, we were one of the leading accountants in this trade despite our small staff. We grew very rapidly by gaining many new clients and, as a consequence, the number of employees grew substantially; forcing a move to larger quarters to 21 East 40<sup>th</sup> Street off Madison Avenue. My forte of being a fast auditor again was recognized and I was the one selected to handle out-of-town clients.

By coincidence, Philadelphia was again the city that I visited. Twice monthly I made the trip; the clients being blouse and dress mfrs. I enjoyed working for Muhlstock as George and I got along famously. One of our lingerie clients was Bernard Bregstein & Co. where Hilda's aunt Buddy was the head bookkeeper. After several months of auditing her company, George regretfully informed me that I was taken off this audit because Bregstein feared collusion between Buddy and me.

Other clients whose audits I conducted were: Pearl Dress Co., whose bookkeeper was my sleeping companion; lingerie mfrs; namely, Diamond-Walter Corp., Siren Silk Undergarment Corp., Miss Emily Lingerie, Inc., Max Gussow Lingerie Co., Benbasset Lingerie, Inc. Others included a lace manufacturer and a textile dyeing and finishing establishment; there were several others that I cannot recall at this time.

One other, in particular, comes to my mind. This was Wellwood Cemetery located in Farmingdale, L.I. whose business office was on Seventh Ave. at 41st Street. Since I handled this audit, I was offered a great deal in the purchase of cemetery plots. I was able to buy 8 graves in the private section very near to the entrance and administration building for \$400 payable over a period of 4 years with no interest. When I informed Mama about this, she thought that I was mad to be concerned about death at such a young age; but I always took advantage of a bargain.

In September 1941, our lease expired and we felt that we required a larger apartment; so, emulating my father's love for apartment hunting, I started to read the newspaper realty ads. As both of us were busy working, we were limited to ads, rather than scouring the neighborhoods in securing an abode. Our choice was an apartment at 189 East 34th Street, off Church Avenue, slightly less than a mile from our previous residence. It was a 3 story walk-up building with a large courtyard with entrances to the lobbies on both sides of the yard. Our apartment was on the third floor and consisted of a fairly large bedroom, living room and a full kitchen. The attractions of our new

residence was having a full kitchen, 4 short blocks to the subway station at Nostrand and Church Avenues and a reduction of the monthly rental to \$38.

At about this time, a serious issue arose in our marital life. Animated discussions between us emanated from things that my mother or her father said or did. Never were there disagreements resulting from our statements nor actions concerning either one of us. After speaking to our friends, years later, we discovered that our dilemma was not unique but was quite common; during the first or second year of marriage, arguments arose primarily about family matters. What irked me more than anything was my wife's refusal to speak to me after each and every argument.

I remember leaving for work with her every morning, stopping at a diner for breakfast, sitting next to her on the subway, arriving at our respective stations and not a word passed between us. When I returned home after a day's work, I was served my dinner in complete silence.

We would retire to our respective beds at night-Orthodox couples slept in separate beds because of *nidah* (the menstrual period); again no communication, verbally or otherwise. Many times I would attempt to begin a conversation and was always rebuffed. Two or three weeks would elapse before we recommenced conversing.

After suffering for about one year and being completely at a loss of a solution to this very grave problem, I turned to her father for advice. I expected him to recognize the severity of our marital discord and tell me that he would speak to her and have her change her ways. He floored me when he laughed and said: "She is the image of her mother; I've been living with this problem all my life." I was in a less jocular mood and replied that if she did not change, his daughter would be returning to his household very shortly; since we were still childless I would not hesitate for one moment in seeking a divorce. In very emphatic terms I repeated this ultimatum to my wife.

Evidently, Hilda realized that Mac was very much in earnest and would not hesitate to enforce his threat. She immediately ceased her childish behavior and became the loving companion that she was prior to the marriage and has never repeated her silent treatment of me regardless of any disagreement or dispute that followed throughout our marriage. In fact, whenever we had an argument, which is quite common in any marriage, each of us would nip it in the bud by saying: "Mac, I heard you, that's enough" or "Hil, don't belabor the point, I understand fully what you're saying." To allow the quarrel to continue or fester only leads to statements being made by both parties which are regretted when cooler heads prevail.

Fortunately, the episodes of our strong disagreements were very rare and our sons were spared a home filled with discord. In fact, they told us when they were teen-agers that they hoped to emulate their parents' relationship when they married.

## CHAPTER XVII

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland to start World War II, which was the costliest, bloodiest, most colossal war in the history of man. This war embraced all the continents but one-South America; North America became involved in the Aleutians. In 1933 when Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany by the aging General Von Hindenburg, he quickly succeeded in uniting the German people and molding them to his purpose. By 1936, the Third Reich had amassed enough strength to break with the tottering League of Nations and force the annulment of the Treaty of Locarno. Germany and Italy were preparing for war. They had a tremendous military advantage over the other countries of Europe who were still clinging desperately to the hope of peace.

In 1937, Neville Chamberlain succeeded Stanley Baldwin as Prime Minister of Great Britain. His foreign policy was based on appeasement. This policy was based on two principles: (1) that the Treaty of Versailles was unjust, in its treatment of Germany, and (2) that if these wrongs were rectified, Germany would re-enter The League of Nations and resume co operation with a peaceful Europe. The German people dreaded another war and reached out eagerly toward what Chamberlain described as “peace in our time.”

A crisis occurred in September 1938 when Germany demanded incorporation into the Reich of the Sudentanland area of Czechoslovakia. The independence of the Czech Republic - a new nation carved out of Austria-Hungary by the Treaty of Versailles – was guaranteed by pacts with France, and indirectly, Britain. Rather than risk war, Chamberlain, in a sudden dramatic move, communicated with Reichsfuehrer Hitler at Berchtesgaden; after which, he flew to meet with Hitler, Mussolini and Premier Daladier of France, at the historic Munich conference. On Sept. 9, 1938, an agreement was signed. The vital Sudetenland with its war industries, strong defenses and its power to resist was sacrificed. In return, Chamberlain came home with an agreement with Hitler that neither side wanted war, and that Germany and Britain would settle all future questions by consultation rather than by military action. This was Chamberlain's “peace in our time.”

On March 10, 1939, sudden revolt flared in Slovakia against the Czech government in Prague. On March 13, thousands of German troops moved into position along the now defenseless borders of Czechoslovakia. A day later, President Hacha was summoned to Berlin to confer with Hitler and after being intimidated, he placed his country under the “protection” of Germany. Three hours later, Hitler was in Prague.

Overnight, “appeasement” became a word despised-a symbol of weakness and failure. Frantically, Britain and France began preparations for war; England introduced a limited form of conscription and France deluded herself in the invincibility of its Maginot Line. It took the bitter, tragic lesson of 1940 to teach the democracies that there was no such thing as limited war when the enemy was prepared for total war. For France, the lesson came too late.

France reaffirmed her alliance with Poland and Britain signed mutual assistance pacts with Poland and Turkey and made formal guarantees of the independence of Greece and Rumania. All this was an effort to create a

bloc of small, powerful nations, to surround Germany with a periphery of strength to limit further German aggression. On March 24, 1939, nine days after the German entry into Prague, Hitler made demands on Poland. These demands included the return to Germany of the free city of Danzig and the right to construct a military highway between Germany proper and East Prussia. In return, Hitler promised Poland a free zone in Danzig and a 25-year non-aggression pact, which would guarantee the new Polish boundaries as permanent.

Poland, remembering similar promises to Czechoslovakia and strengthened by Britain and France, refused these demands. In April 1939, the two guarantors opened negotiations with the Soviet government, the one European nation which possessed an army capable of challenging Germany on the eastern front. For months the negotiations dragged on to no avail. Russia's reluctance was three-fold: (1) The failure of the Allies to include Russia in the Munich conference; (2) skepticism over their desire and ability to wage war against Germany; and (3) disgust at the blundering methods of Chamberlain. The principal Russian objective was to push its own borders as far as possible to the west, as a more impregnable defensive barrier. War, at this time, on the side of Britain, would not serve this purpose.

Suddenly, without warning, came the blow that shocked the civilized world—the German-Soviet non-aggression pact. The announcement came on Aug. 23, 1939, while the Anglo-French-Soviet discussions were still in progress. The Allies had suffered a crushing diplomatic defeat. Hitler's pact with Russia assured him freedom of action. Her eastern flank secured, and her enemies in the west weak and bewildered, Germany was now ready to invade Poland; two days later, Britain and France declared war.

The nations taking part in this opening campaign of World War II were Germany, Poland and Russia; the entire action was fought on Polish soil. The incredible speed of Hitler's armed forces in defeating Poland gave rise to the term “blitzkrieg”—lightning war. Thirty-five days after the opening gun had been fired, Polish resistance was crushed. The Polish campaign will go down in military annals as one of the most brilliant triumphs in the history of German arms. A Russian invasion force crossed the eastern Polish frontier; this sealed the doom of the Polish armies. On Sept. 18, Russian and German forces met at Brest-Litovsk.

For the 35 days of the Polish campaign and for approximately eight months afterward, the western front settled down to a period of strange, unbroken quiet. It was during this period that newspapers and statesmen all over the world took to calling World War II the “phony war” and “sitzkrieg”. The two mightiest systems of fortifications ever developed faced each other across the length of the Franco-German frontier. For miles back from the border, the Maginot line of the French and the Westwall of the Germans (also called the Siegfried line) bristled with supposedly impregnable, concrete and steel emplacements. In the Maginot line, the French had concentrated the cream of their troops, heavily reinforced by regular army units. In the Westwall, the Germans used veterans thrown in after the Polish campaign. Both lines were armed with the most destructive weapons ever devised. Yet for nine months nothing happened. Not a single major engagement developed along the entire frontier.

After the partition of Poland, Russia had forced non-aggression pacts on the three Baltic States, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In effect, these countries were incorporated into the Soviet Union, a development which actually took place several months later.

On Oct. 7, 1939, the Soviet government made demands on Finland similar to those made on the Baltic States. Specifically, Russia wanted certain islands in the Gulf of Finland as a protective screen for the great Naval base at Kronstadt. Negotiations proceeded in deadlock until Nov. 30, 1939 when the Russians bombed Helsinki, the Finnish capital. Although the Finns fought valiantly and inflicted great damage to the Soviet onslaught, they were no match for the Russians in manpower and equipment. Consequently, after less than six weeks, resistance ended and an armistice, with Germany as the intermediary, was signed on March 12, 1940. Russia received everything she asked for-and more.

On April 9, 1940, Hitler got impatient with the “phony war” and launched an offensive against neutral Denmark and Norway. In one day, he successfully occupied all of Denmark, which was a springboard to the north. The main action of this campaign was fought in Norway, with German, British, Norwegian and some French forces taking part. Hitler's reason for this attack included several factors. Firstly, he wanted to test the Allied war strength. Secondary German objectives were (1) to prevent the Allies from seizing Scandinavia as a base from which to attack north Germany and (2) to secure air and submarine bases as near as possible to Britain and the vital Allied shipping lanes.

Oslo, the capital, fell in one day. The same thing happened at Bergen, Trondheim, Stavanger and Narvik, the principal cities. Sabotage, espionage and treachery worked with excellent efficiency. The Norwegian government and population were infested with German agents and local traitors. Corrupt officials had been bribed and promised high positions in the “new order”. One of these officials was Quisling whose name later became the term used to describe a traitor. Officers surrendered their troops without firing a shot. After a strong attempt to recapture Norway, the British had to withdraw and the campaign came to an end on June 10, 1940. Exactly one month earlier, Neville Chamberlain was forced to resign and was succeeded by Winston Churchill, the first lord of the Admiralty, as prime minister.

At last England had a leader who understood the situation. The Norwegian experiment was successful. The Allies had revealed themselves as weak and very much unprepared for war. On May 10, the very same day that Churchill took office, the Nazi armies struck again. Poland and Norway were dress rehearsals to test enemy strength and experiment with new weapons and military methods. The battle of Western Europe had begun. In this engagement, the armies of Germany, Italy, Britain, France, Holland and Belgium participated - an aggregate of some 4,000,000 men.

When this battle was swiftly concluded, the face of Europe was completely altered. Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg had ceased to exist as nations. France, called the greatest military power on earth, was smashed. Her armies were broken; two million of her soldiers were captured. Britain, battered, retreated to the protection of her

own island. Never, in so short a space of time, had such a far-reaching military decision been accomplished. On May 15, the Dutch army surrendered and 13 days later King Leopold of Belgium surrendered his entire army to the Germans. Now the way was open to attack France, not by bridging the Maginot Line but through Belgium. Hitler's armies were successful beyond belief.

After the Belgian surrender, and the Allied decision to evacuate, one phase of the Battle of Flanders yet remained to be fought. Defiantly, the British army fell back on Dunkirk, the one channel port still in Allied hands. Fierce rear-guard actions by the remaining French units covered their retreat; so that their British comrades might escape to fight the enemy once again.

Dunkirk is still looked upon by military experts as a miracle. Way beyond the expectations of the British high command, which was that 25% of their army would be saved, 330,000 men (including French, Dutch and Belgians) were taken off the bloody beaches of Dunkirk. From the British coast across the channel, every available boat set out for Dunkirk. Women, sometimes children, piloted the rescue boats; this motley fleet shuttled back and forth until every man was safe in Britain.

On June 16, Premier Paul Reynaud of France, realizing the helplessness of the situation, resigned and was replaced by Marshal Henri Petain, victor of Verdun in World War I. On June 17, after more German successes, the 84 year old Petain asked for honorable terms of armistice. On June 21, while fighting was still going on, Hitler presented his harsh terms in the same railway car at Compiègne where the Armistice of Nov. 11, 1918 was signed. In addition to stripping France of practically all its defenses, the agreement called for the military occupation of more than half of the area of the country, with the French people paying the cost of the occupation—an estimated 3 million francs per day. The Germans occupied the entire west coast of France in addition to much area in the north. All its naval bases were to be demilitarized and she was specifically forbidden to render any form of assistance to Britain for the remainder of the war.

By far the most provocative provision of the armistice called for the complete demobilization and disarmament, at French ports, of all French naval vessels. This provoked a bitter storm of protest in Britain, which had agreed to the French surrender, only if the French fleet were put under British control. The direct result of this French concession was British military action involving the seizure of all French vessels in British-controlled waters, which reached its climax in the British attack on the French fleet in the harbor of Oran, Algeria. Later, to allow the French to protect themselves against British attacks, Hitler permitted the French fleet to be mobilized. This, and other controversies rising out of the armistice terms, caused a breach between the British and French governments, which was never healed.

The collapse of France, in less than eight weeks of active fighting, shook the entire world. The government—by then functioning in the city of Vichy—became a haven for collaborationists; and under the guidance of Pierre Laval, vice premier in the Petain cabinet, the Republic was abolished in favor of a totalitarian regime. In Eastern Europe, repercussions of the French collapse were felt within a week of the armistice. With Franco-British

guarantees now proved worthless, Rumania was literally torn asunder. Russia demanded the annexation of Bessarabia and northern Bucovina. Rumania acceded, but turned to Germany for further protection; this was to no avail. Hitler ceded most of Rumanian Transylvania to Hungary, and a smaller area to Bulgaria; this was Hitler's reward to two little satellites and it served to bring them closer into the Axis camp.

Never in the history of the world, have a people responded so magnificently to national crisis as did the British people in the dark days following the French debacle of June 1940. Fate saved Britain after Dunkirk, when Germany made the mistake of not invading England and concentrated instead on finishing France. Some members of Britain's ruling class wanted to make peace with Hitler immediately. But Britain's common people, and their leader, Winston Churchill, would not allow it.

Three days after Dunkirk, ammunition and equipment factories were working around the clock and thousands rushed to take up arms. For 15 and 16 hours a day, men and women sweated over machines, working to the point of exhaustion. Tanks and planes rolled from the factories in an unprecedented stream. This was a miracle comparable to Dunkirk.

On June 19, just after France asked for an armistice, the Germans struck the first major blow at Great Britain. At first 100 planes a day dropped their bombs on British cities. Soon it was 200 planes; before long, nearly a thousand. Yet with ever increasing strength, Britain struck back. Both sides were soon dropping their bombs on open cities, killing civilians by the hundreds.

The German plan appeared to be this: (1) Systematic bombing of British cities and military objectives to destroy morale and the will and power to resist invasion; (2) Destruction of the British sea lanes by bombing and submarine attack, to shut Britain off from supplies and reinforcements from America and the Empire; (3) Destruction of the Royal Air Force and its bases to allow a combination sea-borne air-borne invasion to land on Britain, unhindered; (4) Finally, after this softening process, actual invasion of the British Isles by parachute troops, and army units transported in specially built barges assembled on the French, Dutch, Belgian and Norwegian coasts.

The plan never succeeded. In the cities, the people of Britain buried their dead and returned to work. In the air, the RAF waged one of the most magnificent underdog battles in history; and it won. By the end of August, 1000 German planes were hitting Britain in a single day. All parts of England and Wales were raided, and many points in Scotland, but the principal German effort was directed at London. On August 21, no less than 200 enemy aircraft were destroyed by the RAF and for days thereafter, similar losses were suffered by the Luftwaffe - the German air force. This broke the back of the German offensive and gradually, the bombing attacks slackened.

The British success in warding off an invasion of its soil can be attributed to three main factors: (1) Although outnumbered, the British fighter planes were superior to the Germans' in almost all technical characteristics, i.e. speed, fire power and maneuverability; (2) The British planes were operating close to home bases; thus, short-range fighters could be refueled and used over and over again; (3) Indirect American assistance in the form of planes, armaments, shipping, manufactured goods and food.

The National Defense Act of 1920 provided for a possible return to conscription in an emergency by making it the duty of the war department general staff to prepare plans for mobilization. The research and planning undertaken by a joint army and navy selective-service committee, getting underway in 1926, were embodied in the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940. It was the first conscription law legislated in time of peace. The Senate voted for the bill 47 to 25 and the House 232 to 124. On Sept. 16, Pres. Roosevelt signed it- and by proclamation called upon all males from 21 through 35 years of age, residing in the U.S. and its territories, to register on Oct. 16 for selective compulsory military training.

The president could not induct more men than Congress appropriated; not more than 900,000 men were to be in training at any one time. They were to serve for 12 months, unless Congress declared a national emergency. The Service Extension Act of August 18, 1941 changed this to 18 months. Men inducted were not to be employed beyond the limits of the western hemisphere and the U.S. possessions including the Philippines, a limitation removed Dec. 1941, following entry of the United States into the war. Amendments were now made to the Act, specifically changing the ages for registration from 18 to 65 years of age, though only the 20 to 45 year groups were at this time eligible for induction. Also, the act prolonged the service period to the duration of the war plus six months.

Eventually, the Selective Service system comprised 6,443 local boards, one for each area of about 30,000 inhabitants, and 505 appeal boards. The whole organization was run by Brig. Gen. Lewis B. Hershey who took over the reins on July 31, 1941 and remained in that position to the end of the war. On Oct. 20, 1940, 16,632,146 men were registered. Six subsequent registrations under the act as amended were held in 1941 and 1942. After that men were required to register on attaining their 18th birthday. On Sept. 30, 1941, a little more than a year after enactment of the act, 14,700,000 registrants out of a total of 17,400,000 or 85% were classified. Of these, 77% were given deferred status, with those deferred because of dependency forming 4/5 of all deferred at the time, and placed in Class III-A, and the rest placed in Class I-A - men available for military duty. Being a married man, I was classified by my local board as III-A.

## CHAPTER XVIII

Now that the draft was in operation, I decided to apply to the FBI as a Special Agent. In order to be accepted, one had to be either a lawyer or an accountant. I took a written exam in accounting, which was held in the FBI offices in the Federal Building in Manhattan; a few days later, I was physically examined. After several weeks, I was notified that there were no openings available. Evidently I passed both examinations since, had it not been so, they would have rejected me on failing either one or both of the exams. Little did I realize at the time, that the real reason was perhaps my being an alumnus of CCNY, where a great number of Jewish students were members of the Young Communist League. This is a supposition, as I have no proof to substantiate my accusation.

Two months later, on December 7, in the midst of peace discussions with the United States, Japan struck a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. At the same time, Japanese naval forces attacked Guam, Midway and Wake Islands. Their troops launched a series of invasion moves against Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaya and the Philippines. A few days later, Germany and Italy came in on the side of Japan. At Pearl Harbor, the US suffered heavy losses in ships and aircraft and in the Philippines, similar damage was done to a large number of planes. Five battleships were sunk; namely, the Arizona and the Oklahoma permanently; and the California, West Virginia, and the Nevada were beached and heavily damaged. Three cruisers were moderately damaged and three destroyers heavily damaged plus 188 planes destroyed.

On “the day of infamy”, as expressed by Pres. Roosevelt in his speech to Congress declaring our entrance into the war, Hilda and I were visiting my parents in their home on President Street where they were now living after our marriage. Television was not yet in existence so the news was broadcast over the radio. It was a Sunday so the other visitors at my parents' home were Morris Berger, his wife Jeanette and their infant daughter, Dorothy. Morris had been a foster child in our home for four years starting when he was 14 years of age. When he left our home he joined the Army and decided to become a career soldier. He was now 22 and reached the rank of Warrant Officer. He immediately left to report to his unit.

The virtually limitless industrial potential of the United States was immediately put to use, producing vast amounts of ships, aircraft and armaments, which was responsible for a relatively rapid change in our precarious situation.

The blow dealt to American naval power at Pearl Harbor dashed all hopes of getting reinforcements and supplies to the Philippines. Japan now had both air and naval supremacy. She was now able to invade these islands and poured troops onto the island of Luzon. By the end of December, two large Japanese armies were converging on Manila in a move to encircle the defending American - Filipino units. Gen. MacArthur, however, eluded the trap, evacuated Manila, which fell on Jan. 2, 1942 and withdrew to the Bataan peninsula. Gen. Wainwright, who replaced MacArthur after the latter was sent to Australia, held firm until March 31 when Japanese infantry forced a breach in the Bataan lines and on April 9, they overran the entire peninsula.

Of Wainwright's entire force of 43,000, some 36,000 were captured, killed or wounded in this battle. Wainwright with the remaining force of soldiers, marines and sailors and around 3,000 civilians escaped from Bataan and fled to Corregidor. This island fortress, however, was completely cut off from outside aid. Japanese units stormed the "Rock" and took it on May 6. With the fall of Corregidor the Japanese had conquered the last point of resistance in the Philippines, although American and native guerrillas still fought in the remote islands.

On May 4, 1942, U.S. carrier-based planes attacked a Japanese task force headed toward New Caledonia and New Hebrides and opened a naval battle unique in history in that it was the first major sea engagement fought entirely by planes based on aircraft carriers. This unusual contest ended on May 7 in a Japanese defeat, this was called the battle of the Coral Sea. The American bombers sunk seven warships, including a carrier, and several transports. American losses were the carrier Lexington, the carrier Yorktown badly damaged and a destroyer sunk.

The American forces scored another great naval victory a month later at the battle of Midway, June 4-7, when both land and carrier-based planes repulsed a Japanese naval armada of some 80 ships that attempted to attack the island. When this engagement ended after four days of furious fighting between rival air forces, the Japanese armada limped to its home bases, minus four aircraft carriers, two cruisers and three destroyers which had been sunk by American bombers and torpedo planes. U.S. losses were the carrier Yorktown, which had been repaired after the battle of the Coral Sea, and a destroyer. The battle of Midway, which was similar to the battle of the Coral Sea in that it was almost exclusively an air action, was a decisive victory since it halted a major Japanese effort to capture Midway and Hawaii. For the Japanese Navy, this marked the end of any real strategic offensive capability. They would never again possess a fleet of large carriers and well-trained air groups. From now on, the war would be fought with a great increase in US naval might.

In April 1942, I received the very good news that Hilda was carrying a new member of our family. A month later, more good news arrived in my obtaining a CPA license after my concluding the three year requirement of employment in accounting. In September, we made our annual move to a new apartment to 921 Montgomery Street in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn.

On August 7, 1942, U.S. marines landed on the Solomon Islands in the first real offensive after the outbreak of the war. A division of marines secured a beachhead on Guadalcanal island; capturing a Japanese airfield. In November, the enemy launched a land and sea offensive to retake the island. This drive reached its climax in the naval battle of the Solomons. After three days of violent fighting, the Japanese were decisively defeated and the crisis had passed.

The expected date of our child's arrival as predicted by Hilda's obstetrician, Dr. Warwick, was the first week in Dec. 1942. Since this was my wife's first experience in child-bearing, we didn't realize that a woman's first child usually arrives later than expected. Suffice it to say, I began phoning her every day from a client's office from the first of December onward. After almost four weeks elapsed and still no baby, I asked her if she was really pregnant. Incidentally, Hilda worked every day for her father till her ninth month, picking up large and heavy ledger books.

Finally, on a Saturday night after the conclusion of the Sabbath on Jan. 2, 1943, Hilda began to have contractions signifying the onset of labor. I immediately called Dr. Warwick who advised me to drive her to Beth El Hospital, about a ½ mile from our home. The residents or interns examined her and advised me to go home as she was a long way from giving birth; so I left and departed. An hour later, Hilda called me to pick her up as she was told that she was experiencing false labor pains. As soon as we arrived home, she began to have severe labor pains so I called Dr. Warwick and I became somewhat belligerent telling him that he left my wife in the hands of inexperienced medical personnel and that I expected him to go immediately to the hospital and that I was bringing her there as soon as I hung up the phone. Sure enough when I arrived at Beth El, he was there to greet us.

This time I remained in the hospital while Hilda went to the labor room; it was now 10 P.M. I noticed that if I sat in the men's bathroom I was able to hear her moans and groans; and, thus, I felt as though I shared her pain and that she was not alone. After several hours, she was transferred to the delivery room and I was no longer hearing any sounds from her. I then went to the waiting room and sat with other expectant fathers. At around 4 A.M., Dr. Warwick came to the waiting room and said: "Mr. Prager, you are now the father of a boy who entered this world with a cane and a monocle," meaning that he was almost an adult weighing in at 10 lbs. 12 ounces. I presume that his relatively large size was due to my wife's gaining a great deal of weight during pregnancy and that he was born 3 ½ weeks beyond the predicted date. I was then permitted to see Hilda who was being wheeled to her room.

Needless to say, I visited her every evening after work except Friday night because of my not being able to drive. She remained in the hospital ten days and couldn't attend the bris - circumcision ceremony - held eight days later on the following Sunday morning. One of my clients was named Kenneth and I always liked that name and receiving the approval of Hilda, we decided to name our son, Kenneth. Since both our parents were alive, we named him Elimelech, after Hilda's grandfather and Dovid after my great uncle. I previously wrote very fondly about both of them.

I was very perturbed when my son cried in a very hoarse voice when being circumcised. He sounded as though he caught a cold while being in the hospital. Unfortunately, I was correct in that assumption. As soon as we arrived home, we called our pediatrician, Dr. Shore who informed us that Kenny had contracted a bad ear infection, which he immediately began to treat. Hilda had nursed her son for ten days while at the hospital and was now advised by Dr. Shore to stop nursing because of the infection. It is quite possible that Kenny's problems with his hearing emanates from that time.

In retrospect, his constant crying, day and night, was probably caused by ear aches. Our pediatrician, when informed of his crying, discarded this reason and we had complete trust in him. At night, we took turns in wheeling him in his carriage, shaking his crib and holding him. Consequently, we did not get much sleep. Incidentally, because of the war, the carriages were called "victory carriages"; and were manufactured poorly and with very weak material causing Hilda to replace these three times.

The daily news of Hitler's treatment of the Jews in Europe, to say the least, was extremely aggravating to me. I told Hilda that I couldn't look at the young men in uniform while riding the subway each and every day. Especially, since in most cases they were much shorter and thinner than I was; and most of them were gentiles. Jews were being beaten and dehumanized - at this time we were not informed about concentration camps or gas chambers - and I was hiding behind Kenny's diaper. I informed her that I made up my mind and was going to 90 Church St. to apply for a naval commission. She became distraught and began to cry as though I was already a casualty of the war.

Her feelings did not deter me and I did apply in May 1943. I took the physical exam passing easily. Then, a few days later, I went for an interview. The ensign who interviewed me was a picture poster of a WASP; tall and handsome with blonde hair and blue eyes. When he spent a good deal of time interrogating me about my years at college, it did not at that time ring a bell about my attending a bastion of Jewish communism at CCNY. It was "deja vu all over again" as Yogi Berra would say. It was the FBI interview again.

A few weeks later in June, I received a letter from the Navy informing me that there were no Supply Corps officer billets available at that time. This excuse was ludicrous since we are in the middle of a war, building and adding ships to our fleet and "no billets available at this time". Later on, in my naval career, an incident occurred that confirmed that there was either a quota for Jewish Naval officers or antipathy towards Jews by individuals in the Navy. It is no coincidence that almost all recent US presidents served their military time in the Navy. In Europe, as well, the sons of royalty all were naval officers. Perhaps the Navy was an exclusive club when Mendel decided to join. After my military service was over, I met a handful of Jews who were naval officers; but they were few and far between. The Army's percentage of Jews in their officer's corps far exceeded that of the Navy.

When one wished to apply for a commission in any of the armed services, he was required to submit his present draft status and the number and location of his draft board. This served a dual purpose: firstly, if he was already classified in 1-A - selected for active duty-, he was ineligible for receiving a commission. Secondly, if his application was rejected, his draft board was notified immediately and he was summarily drafted. Within a week, my status was changed from 3-A to 1-A and I was ordered to report for a physical exam at the NYC Selective Service Center on Lexington Ave. and 45'h St. Since a draftee was able to select which branch of service he preferred, Hilda made me promise her that I would choose the Army for two reasons. If you selected the Army, you had to report for duty in three weeks; if you chose the Navy or Marines, you had to report in one week. Having me home the additional two weeks was very important to her. Also, since she had been reading and hearing of many naval ships being sunk with many aboard frightened her; whereas in the Army soldiers were killed individually. One torpedo or one bomb killed many at one time while one bullet killed one person at one time.

I passed the exam with "flying colors" and then went on line to be selected for a specific branch of service. You finally arrived at a desk where enlisted men representing each branch were seated. Always being partial to the Navy since childhood, but promising Hilda that I would ask for the Army, I chose the latter. The young Navy man

then informed me that since I was a college graduate – which was on my record before him - and the daily Naval quota of 50 draftees was not yet filled for the day, my choice could not be honored and had to join the Navy. You can just imagine my joy when my real wish was achieved and that I did not renege on my promise.

In the summer of 1943, we rented a house in Mt. Freedom, NJ jointly with Jeanette Berger, whose husband, Morris had been serving in the Army for several years prior to Pearl Harbor. Their daughter, Dorothy was now a year old. The date of my entry into the US Navy was July 30, 1943 and since I had a seven day leave, I had to report for active duty on August 6. On that day Hilda escorted me on a bus to Penn Station in N.Y.; leaving our son of six months with Jeanette. The trip from Mt. Freedom will always be etched in my mind; my wife's heavy sobbing for 1 ½ hours and my realization that I was leaving the woman whom I loved and adored and an infant son whom I was just getting to know. One must realize that for a couple who had seen each other every day for seven years, except for the summer of 1937 when I was managing Auerbach's Hotel, this was a very traumatic experience.

We arrived at Penn Station around 5 p.m. and then Hilda had to leave and return to our child in Mt. Freedom. I can still remember vividly our ardent kisses and embraces and her constant sobbing as we took leave of each other, even though we knew that we would see each other in seven weeks upon the completion of my boot training. After my sister Irene left her office, she came to the station to see me off; we were always very close.

The train left around 8 p.m. with a small contingent of recruits from the NYC area. We headed towards Pennsylvania picking additional draftees as we progressed through several cities. The largest group was picked up in Jamestown, PA., the heart of the anthracite coal district. This procedure lasted all night so very little sleep was had by all.

We arrived around 6 a.m. at the U.S. Naval Training Station at Sampson, NY, located between Syracuse and Rochester. There were 200 recruits on the train and we were immediately separated into 2 companies of 100 each. I and two other Jewish men were placed in Company 170. We were all standing at attention on the side of the train in our civilian clothing. We were told to bring no clothing, just toiletries.

After several minutes, a Chief Petty Officer appeared before our company and asked if there were any college graduates present and, if so, to step forward. Mendel and the other two Jews stepped forward. My co religionists turned out to be accountants; whether they were certified or not, I can't recall. He looks at the three of us and points to me and says: "You are the company clerk." You, the reader, have as much knowledge about the duties of being a company clerk as I had at the time. But being selected for a prominent position 15 minutes after entering the Navy, certainly made me feel very good.

Now, we were ready to receive our sailor's clothing, a mattress and a duffle bag to be used as luggage. Then we were escorted to our sleeping barracks, which contained double-decker bunks and a foot locker. Being the company clerk, I was given my own office and was then informed of my duties. It was my task to assign duties to all the members of my company, i.e. kitchen, cleaning and other tasks. A boot (recruit) worked one week at his assigned duty and then was assigned another task; and so it went. Of course, I did not have any of these

assignments and, most importantly, was excused from daily calisthenics and marching drills. I literally, lived the “life of Riley.” Every Friday night, Jewish services were held in the chapel. The leader of the service was a cantor who was assigned to Sampson for the duration of the war and an alumnus of Yeshiva Torah Vadaath. The Rabbi was Reformed and a career chaplain who attained the rank of Admiral. I enjoyed the cantor as he had a beautiful voice.

After 5 weeks of training, a bulletin was issued requesting typists, who if proficient would be immediately advanced to SK 3/c (Storekeeper third class), equivalent to sergeant in the Army. Since I never felt unequal to the task, although I had never typed a word in my life, I joined the other 2 Jews and several others in my company in taking the typing exam. To this day, I cannot believe I passed; perhaps, my being a CPA helped, as later events in my naval career would illustrate. I was now a SK 3/c with a patch on my uniform and, more importantly, an increase in pay.

Our seven weeks of training now came to an end. Whether it was the tradition in boot camp to present the company clerk with gifts at the end of training or whether my comrades just liked me, I still don't know. At any rate, they presented me with a bracelet and wallet. We were all now granted a 7 day leave to return to our homes.

The joy of reconciling with my wife and child was beyond belief, as I stated before, I was never separated from Hilda. Of course seeing the rest of my family was very much appreciated. Unfortunately, the week flew too quickly and on the first night of Rosh Hashonah, I had to return to Sampson for future assignment. I stared at my son of 8 mos. in his crib and burst into violent sobs, not knowing if I was ever to see him again. I was escorted by Hilda, my parents, Hilda's parents and, perhaps, other members of our families to the subway station at Eastern Pkwy. at Utica Ave. I didn't cease crying till I arrived at Penn Station.

## CHAPTER XIX

Upon returning to Sampson, I received orders to report to the Naval Aviation Technical Training Center (NATTC) in Norman, Oklahoma. My train trip was uneventful except for my meeting a young Jewish girl who was returning to Chicago, her home, from a visit to N.Y. I enjoyed speaking to her as the ride would have been extremely boring. Incidentally, throughout my stay in the Navy, I wore my wedding band; thus, my association with members of the other gender was platonic. At her leaving me, she wished me luck and thanked me for conversing with her.

The first impression I received on arriving in Oklahoma was the lack of hills; the ground was extremely level and of a reddish color. Perhaps, this was due to the presence of oil in the ground. I was assigned to an upper bunk in one of the barracks and ordered to report to a Lt. King who was a supply officer in charge of procurement of all naval supplies. As I was a storekeeper, it was logical that I would be assigned to him.

After perusing my record and qualifications, he was pleased to have a CPA in his charge. He informed me that the base was losing a very large amount of oil drums that were assigned to the various hangars and departments. My task was to develop a system whereby these losses would be minimized. After a day or two of analyzing the problem, I came up with an idea that I thought would be the answer.

I requested two seamen, stencils, white paint, a log book and a truck. It is amazing that Lt. King never inquired as to why I needed these items, but complied with my request. One seaman was to spend his time in stenciling all drums as they arrived at the base with a number using the white paint so the number is easily read against the black drum. When a requisition is received by my office for several drums, the same seaman would enter the numbers of the drums and the name of the department or hangar making the requisition in the log book. The other seaman was the truck driver, delivering and picking up the drums. When the drums were returned to us, the first seaman would enter the date and time of return next to the original entry of delivery. The mystery of missing drums ceased and practically none were missing after this procedure went into effect.

Perhaps my superior, in an off-hand conversation with other officers, related what I had accomplished; because, after two weeks of my stay at NATTC, I was transferred to a Lt. Jerry Spann who was running the Ships Service Center at the base. The center consisted of five ships service stores where you could buy all beverages-including a low-alcoholic beer-, candy, ice cream, clothing, supplies, magazines, newspapers, etc. A large dry cleaning and laundry plant, barber shop for men, beauty parlor for women and a cobbler shop were also included in this center. All personnel in this department received extra pay in addition to their regular pay

Lt. Spann was also a supply officer and an accountant and needed another accountant, especially a CPA in his department. He was an exceptionally nice human being, handsome and married to a slightly older naval officer also stationed at the base. We hit it off immediately as friends and co-workers even though he was my superior officer.

I was given the title of Controller of the NATTC Ships Service Center and, in that position, was responsible for the preparation of monthly financial statements which were signed by me and Lt. Spann. In addition, I was required to make rounds of all 5 stores every other night for 4 hours. There were three watches of 4 hours each from 8 p.m.-8 a.m. To go from store to store we used motorbikes; I gave the name "Betsy" to mine. In the six months that I rode my bike, I only had one slight accident. On a rainy night, when the ground was slippery, I took a turn much too quickly and was thrown off the bike to one side while the bike proceeded to go in the other direction. Fortunately, I only suffered contusions and abrasions and no bone fractures.

I developed strong friendships with three individuals; Nick Wienschel, Al Watson and Sue Halliday. Nick was a lawyer and an executive with one of the leading retail merchandise establishments, i.e. Allied Stores, Federated Department Stores. He was married and lived in N.Y. City. Al Watson was an executive at Texaco in Sacramento, Cal. and extremely gregarious. He was divorced and since he was tall, handsome and loaded with personality, women-including the married ones-were quite willing to enjoy his favors. He always described his conquests to me in detail. I guess I enjoyed listening to him and getting a thrill vicariously. The Protestant chaplain was a young man married to a beautiful, vivacious young lady who worked in the office of the Center. The chaplain was an introvert and not exceptionally good looking; so the match was not made in heaven.

Al swooped down on his prey and completely had the innocent wife in his clutches before she even knew what hit her. There was no doubt in my mind that she was more than willing to satisfy her sexual desires with a man who oozed machismo. I could see her lascivious glances at Al whenever he was in her presence. They would enjoy their trysts in a nearby motel once or twice a week when her husband was on watch at the base. After the war, when I spoke to Al on the phone, he informed me that she divorced her husband a short time after their affair.

Sue Halliday was a WAVE (U.S.Navy enlisted woman) from Lexington, Kentucky. She was not very pretty, did not possess a svelte figure, was not an extravert but she had a great deal of character and gave her all in friendship. Of course she was immediately told of my being married -she saw my ring- but that fact did not deter her from enjoying my company and I hers. Our friendship flourished by the evening walks we took when I was not on watch. When Hilda visited me a few months after my arrival at the NATTC, I introduced Sue to my wife and they hit it off immediately.

Sue had a close WAVE friend named Penny who was from Arkansas. When Hilda remarked that she was Jewish, Penny couldn't hide her amazement by saying: "You are the first Jew that I ever met. I thought all Jews had horns." Knowing Penny, I knew that her statement was not anti Semitic but the result of living all her life in the back woods of the Ozarks.

When Hilda arrived, I set her up in the Biltmore Hotel in Oklahoma City. She would take a bus that went specifically to the base and did this daily. One night we accepted an invitation from the rabbi of a congregation in Okla. City who was Orthodox. I can't recall whether his pulpit was in an Orthodox or Conservative synagogue. We spent a very enjoyable evening with the Rabbi and his rebbitzen who were approximately in their late thirties. You

can just imagine how I felt eating kosher Jewish meat after being in the Navy for approximately six months. Since Hilda had been with me for two weeks, she, too, missed eating meat.

One Saturday night, we decided to enjoy the local atmosphere by going to a “night club” near Norman. When we entered the saloon, we were taken aback by the element that frequented these places. It was a scene out of a western movie. All the men were half drunk, dressed in cowboy outfits while the women were only slightly more sober and similarly dressed.

The band consisted of two fiddlers and a piano player, whose repertoire was limited to the square dance and other such music. After three weeks, it was time for Hilda to leave and rejoin Kenny.

On Saturday nights and Sundays, I would frequent the local USO in Okla. City, usually with my friend Nick. These recreational facilities were established for military enlisted men throughout the world. Young ladies volunteered their services to dance and converse with the service men and WAACS (women soldiers) and WAVES also congregated there. On one of my visits, I was playing ping-pong when a young, tall and very pretty WAAC asked if she could engage me in a game. Of course, I didn't decline her offer.

After playing a few games, we danced and I learned that her name was Loretha Pounders, who lived in Okla. City and was presently on a two week furlough. She was a dress buyer for a dept. store and was looking forward to the end of the war when she would come to N.Y. to further her career. Although she knew of my marital status, she liked me and invited me to her home to meet her family. I enjoyed her company as she had a very vibrant personality and a happy disposition. When she had to return to her base, I accompanied her to the train station and we bid each other good-bye. I received one or two letters from her after the war as I had given her my address to contact me, if and when she came to the big city.

While I was in Oklahoma, U.S. forces were making headway in defeating the enemy; on land, sea and in the air. The American ground forces launched an offensive, which drove the Japanese out of Guadalcanal by Nov. 10, 1943. This success opened the way for an attack on Truck Island, Japan's major naval base in the south Pacific. Truck was the Japanese equivalent of Pearl Harbor and guarded the Pacific sea lanes to the Japanese mainland. A large force of marines launched a successful invasion of Tarawa atoll in the Gilbert Islands, which neutralized the effectiveness of Truck.

In early February 1944, Task Force 58 under Admiral Mitscher attacked Truck with an enormous force of eight carriers and six battleships. Warned by radio intelligence, the Japanese had withdrawn the majority of their heavy surface units immediately from the area. However, the Americans had a field day against the few light surface ships they found. In two days of raids, American aircraft destroyed most of the ground facilities and wiped out practically everything afloat; Truck was now out of the war.

In the Navy, an enlisted man was able to apply for a commission as an officer after 6 months of service. When I advised my superior, Lieut. Spann, that I was going to apply, he replied that he needed and wanted me to

stay in my present position and would promote me to S/K 1 class, a jump of two rates; also, that I could remain in the States for the duration of the war.

However, the difference in naval life between being an officer and enlisted man was so great, that there was no doubt in my mind that I preferred the life of an officer even at the risk of going to sea and placing my life in jeopardy. In February 1944, I went before a board of four senior officers on the base, ranking from Lt. Comdr. and higher. Each of them had my service record before them and they interrogated me; primarily wanting to know why I wanted a commission. After about an hour or so, I was dismissed not knowing their decision. My friend, Nick Weinschel, and two others also appeared before the board immediately after me.

I was given a leave of 14 days to go home for the Passover holidays which were in the early part of April. On *chal hamoed* (intermediate days), I received a telegram from Lieut. Spann advising me that I was granted a commission on March 7 and was now an Ensign in the U.S. Navy. What surprised me was the fact that he signed the telegram "Jerry"; perhaps, now that I was a fellow officer, we could address each other by our first names.

After the holidays on April 14, I returned to Oklahoma to be sworn in as an Ensign in the Supply Corps of the U.S. Navy and to gather my personal effects to ship them home. Incidentally, the shipment was either lost or stolen since it never arrived at its destination. On the first day of my return, I walked out of the base in a sailor's uniform, went to a store selling naval officer's uniforms and returned to the base clothed as an Ensign. I can still remember the startled look on the face of the sailor guarding the gate who saw me an hour before in sailor's garb and now returning as an officer and having to salute me. My friend Nick and the others did not receive a commission; later on in the war, I discovered the reason for Nick's rejection.

On the next day, I was detached From NATTC and ordered to report to the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, outside of Chicago, for temporary duty. I reported there on April 16 and detached a day later to begin a leave until the 28<sup>th</sup> when I was to report to the Naval SupplyCorps School at Wellesley College in Wellesley, Mass.

Wellesley College at this time was a school for girls only: it may have become co-educational later on. One of the buildings situated in a quadrangle of 4 buildings was occupied by the Navy to house the Supply Corps students. Almost the entire Corps consisted of midshipmen who would receive their commissions as Ensigns upon their completion of the five month course. I and three or four others were already Ensigns.

Our building faced two edifices across the quadrangle occupied by the girl students. Since almost all in the Corps were not married, the girls were thrilled with the opportunity to help in the war effort by being exceptionally cooperative in their social intercourse with their new guests. I use the term "intercourse" advisedly based upon the sexual conquests that were related to me. It is quite possible that many of these incidents were exaggerated due to the usual male braggadocio: however, I was witness to many liaisons that were quite real.

Many of the girls, knowing that our windows faced theirs, would dress and undress frequently without attempting to shield their nudity; thus granting a sexual charge to their young, hungry guests. The College had a large and exceptionally beautiful lake which was the site on Friday and Saturday nights for "skinny dipping". Being a

young married man with an overactive libido, I was tempted to join these escapades. However, I was able to restrain my “evil impulse” and stayed faithful to Hilda.

We attended classes every day except on Saturday or Sunday from 8 am to 3 pm. In the afternoon, we engaged in calisthenics, football and baseball games. On Saturday mornings, inspections of dress and rooms were held followed by an outdoor Corps assembly. At 11 am we were dismissed till 4 pm Sunday when we returned to our quarters.

While Wellesley was in session till the middle of June, I was not able to bring Hilda and Kenneth to live me. On Saturday afternoons I would visit them by going by train to Carroll Street in Brooklyn – where they were residing in my in-laws’ home – and return on Saturday afternoon.

On one weekend, for some reason, I did not go home and on Saturday night I decided to visit Boston which is close to Wellesley. Aimlessly, I entered the lobby of one of the better hotels – I believe it was the Copley Plaza – and just strolled around.

After a while, I was accosted by an Ensign who asked me if I had any plans for the evening; I told him that I had nothing in mind. He asked me to do him a favor by joining his party that consisted of his fiancé and a woman in her thirties who was without an escort. If I would escort her, we would all go to a night club for dinner and dance and I would be his guest. Firstly, I would never deny a request from a fellow Ensign and secondly, I liked the offer. After a very enjoyable evening, we returned to the hotel where they were all staying. After thanking him profusely for his generosity and thanking the lady for her company, I took my leave and departed for the railroad station to return to Wellesley.

Unfortunately, the last train going to Wellesley had already left and the station was full of military personnel sleeping on benches. I could not see myself sleeping on a bench so I decided to call my lady friend at the hotel and ask her if I could visit her in her room and stating that I would sleep on a chair or couch. She had lost her husband several months previously when his ship was sunk. Being a Navy wife, she couldn’t refuse me.

Arriving at her room, I thanked her, removed my coat and jacket and proceeded to go to sleep on an upholstered chair placing my legs on an ottoman. She had been asleep when I called and I felt awful that I awakened her. Since I had trouble falling asleep on a chair and she becoming aware of my discomfort, she suggested that I come to bed where I would be more comfortable. I undressed and joined her: neither one of us made any effort to become more intimate.

She told me that I would have to leave at 8 am since she was meeting the other couple for breakfast and didn’t want them to know that I spent the night with her. I immediately fell asleep and left her room in the morning being extremely grateful to her for her kindness. I sincerely hope that she met a nice man and remarried.

## CHAPTER XX

On Saturday afternoons after inspection, I would go to Brooklyn via the NY Central Railroad to the Grand Central Terminal and then proceed by subway to the Utica Ave. station at Eastern Pkwy. On May 13, 1944, I was met at the subway station by Hilda and Gert, my sister-in-law; a practice never before experienced. For some reason, I did not anticipate any serious motives for this action; in fact, I thought it was a very warm reception for my homecoming. The three of us walked along Schenectady Ave. towards President St. where my parents were living with my two sisters. After walking one block, they informed me that my sister Irene had taken her life during the night by leaping off the roof of the apartment building in which my family resided; Irene had her birthday that same week reaching the age of 32. Upon hearing this tragic news, I was not able to walk any further and immediately sat down on the stoop of the nearest building in complete shock.

Irene and I had an unusual sibling relationship; full of great respect and love for each other. I use the term “unusual” because of the seven year difference in our ages, traveling together every morning on the subway, she to her office and I to school; and, most importantly, her always confiding in me. She adored Kenny and enjoyed visiting him at the Friedfeld home on Carroll St. a block away. She always asked Hilda’s permission to wheel him in his stroller and frequently bought his clothing.

In retrospect, I feel guilty by not doing more than I did in seeking medical help for her mental illness which I detected on more than one occasion. On one of my leaves at home, I watched her cross the street in a daze not mindful of oncoming traffic, completely oblivious to the risk of being killed. Also, she sent me a letter while I was in Wellesley asking me if I knew of any young men to whom I could introduce her. These two instances should have immediately alarmed me to the severity of her illness. Perhaps, being 26 years of age and not having any previous experience with mental patients, I was not capable of handling the situation. Also, I had not spent much time at home for almost a full year. Five years before her death, she was rejected for a life insurance policy for health reasons. A year prior to her demise, she applied for admission to the WACS to serve her country and was turned down again for poor health. These rejections plus an ill-fated love affair contributed to her severe depression.

Another incident that I can never forget and that was told to me after her death was the fact that Irene realized that she required medical assistance and a few days prior to her demise she called for an ambulance to take her to a hospital for treatment. When the ambulance arrived, my mother sent it away. Unfortunately, in a Jewish home at that time, mental illness was a greater shame than committing a crime. Also, how could her daughter ever find a man to marry who knew that she once suffered from this illness.

When I finally reached my parents’ home, the scene that greeted me can never be forgotten. My parents were sobbing hysterically, my sister Anne was sitting in a stupor, not believing what her sister had done. I wanted to see Irene before she was removed. She was lying in a wicker basket on her bed; I did not open the basket because I

wanted to remember her as she looked in life and not in her present condition caused by a fall of six stories. Since she died on the Sabbath, her body was removed by the undertaker after sundown.

I immediately notified my superiors at Wellesley that as a Jew I was obliged to sit *shiva* for seven days and would then return. Evidently they inquired of a Reformed rabbi and they informed me that I must return after sitting for three days which I did. This was the first time in my life that I was subjected to the practice of *shiva* and I must be frank in saying that I, personally, have never been a great supporter of sitting for seven days as a captive audience. The repeated questions that are asked by well-meaning people who pay their respects to the mourners, i.e.: How old was the deceased? What was the illness? Did the deceased suffer a long time? etc. Many of the visitors spend their time conversing with each other in another part of the room on matters not at all related to the reason for their presence. Quite often loud laughter is heard which may or may not annoy the mourners.

When my mother died years later on *eruv Shevuoth* ( a day prior to the festival of Pentecost), many of my friends told me that my mother must have loved me because she knew how much I was averse to this religious practice and her timing allowed me to sit less than one day. Judaism dictates that if a burial occurs a day prior to a Jewish holiday, the mourners sit for only a few hours and then celebrate the holiday.

Throughout 1942 and 1943, the Russians persistently demanded the opening of a “second front” in Western Europe to relieve the pressure on the eastern front where Hitler had committed the bulk of his armies. The Allies promised an invasion of Europe, but with the stipulation that the offensive would not be undertaken until their armies were fully prepared for this gigantic task. By the summer of 1944, sufficient men and material had accumulated in England to make the venture feasible, and on June 6 the Allies struck. An armada of 4,000 ships, protected by a canopy of aircraft, started to disgorge troops on the Normandy beachheads between Cherbourg and Le Havre. The Nazis had expected additional landings in the Pas-de-Calais area and consequently dispersed their forces. Their failure to assess correctly the Allied strategy enabled Eisenhower, supreme commander of the Allied invasion forces, to establish a 60 mile beachhead and win the port of Cherbourg in the following three weeks.

The Germans contained the Allies in their cramped beachhead until July 26 when a U.S. armored column burst through the Nazi lines at St. Lo. This unleashed an Allied offensive of tremendous power. Additional U.S. armored forces widened the gap and were soon running wild throughout France. Three weeks later on August 15, another army of U.S. and French troops landed on the Mediterranean coast of France and pushed rapidly northward.

Allied forces captured Paris on August 25 and raced toward the German frontier. British and Canadian troops broke through the German lines and advanced toward Belgium. By Sept. 15, Eisenhower had six armies drawn up along Germany’s western borders. His blitzkrieg had chased the wehrmacht out of all but a small section of eastern France. The Allies also penetrated Belgium and the southern part of the Netherlands.

Returning to the war in the Pacific at this time, on April 18, 1943, U.S. code breakers pinpointed the location of Japanese Admiral Yamamoto, the planner of the attack on Pearl Harbor, flying in a Japanese bomber

near Bougainville in the Solomon Islands. Eighteen P-38 fighters located the bomber and shot down Yamamoto. On April 21, Pres. Roosevelt announced that the Japanese executed several airmen from the Doolittle raid on Japan. A day later, Japan announced that captured Allied pilots will be given “one way tickets to hell.” In May 1943, U.S. troops invaded Attu in the Aleutian Islands and the Japanese ended their occupation of this island.

Army and Marine divisions under Admiral Chester Nimitz, the Commander of Naval forces in the Pacific, landed on Saipan in the Mariana Islands on June 15, 1944 to begin a bloody three-week battle for control of the island. Next, on July 21, Army and Marine units invaded Guam, 100 mile south of Saipan, and three days later, marines moved on to Tinian Island. This was an important turning point in the Pacific war, as the American seizure of the Marianas brought the Japanese home islands within reach of the U.S Army Air Forces’ B-29 bombers, which in late November began to fly missions against the Japanese homeland.

In the middle of June 1944, when the semester at Wellesley College ended, I was able to bring Hilda and Kenny with me. I rented an apartment in the city of Wellesley from a Mrs. Neal, an Irish woman in her sixties who immediately took a liking for us and behaved as a mother to us and not as a landlord. She owned a two-family house, we occupying the first floor and her family living above us.

Every day at 3 pm Hilda and Kenny would come by bus – a 15 minute trip – to visit me. We would be through with our classes in the afternoon and then participate in calisthenics and sports. Hilda would be amused watching me do the exercises, which I always disliked, and I made sure to stay in the rear so that I would not be noticed doing nothing; I did enjoy playing football. On Saturdays after inspection which ended at 11 am, I went to our apartment and spent a most enjoyable time with my family till 4 pm Sunday when I returned to the school.

Every Sunday morning we took bus rides to Worcester and other cities close by and especially to Boston where we would spend the day at the Commons, which is the name of a large and beautiful public park. Kenny adored a torn and ragged small blanket which he held close to him and which he called “banky”. On one Sunday morning, as we were on the bus headed for Boston, he forgot to take his “banky” and all hell broke loose. His screams and sobbing were so bad that we were compelled to return to our home without ever getting off the bus. Needless to say, that episode assured his never leaving the house without his comfort “crutch”.

Prior to this time in my life, I never indulged in tasting or drinking alcoholic beverages. On one Saturday afternoon, we were invited to the home of a fellow student who was married and lived across from our house. He invited several other students and their wives or girl friends.

After a little while, mint juleps were served to all and I informed my host that I never drank and thanked him for his hospitality. That was the first mistake that I made since getting me drunk would, evidently, be a source of amusement to the other guests who were no novices in the art of drinking. Every one kept telling me that mint juleps, which I never heard of, were very mild and that one drink would certainly have no effect on me. Never being a “party pooper”, I acquiesced and tasted my first mint julep, which I am sorry to say, enjoyed immensely. If one

tasted great, two or more would taste even better. After three or more, I was completely inebriated. To this day I don't remember what happened from that moment till the following morning.

Hilda told me later that my "friends" took me home and that she had to undress me and put me to bed. I awoke Sunday morning with no hangover or any ill effects; that was the first and last time I was drunk. It is quite possible that this incident created an immunity to imbibing since I have been drinking from then on and have never had any difficulty holding my liquor.

My classmates knew that I was Jewish since in our many conversations we spoke about religion. However, when Hilda joined me, many of them asked me why I married a gentile; my wife not looking like the stereotyped Jew. I was the only Jew in the entire student body and they probably had not met many Jews in their life. They also expressed surprise when they discovered that I was not one of them.

On one Friday night, Hilda and I were invited to go "skinny dipping" in the lake with the rest of the boys and girls. Of course, we were taken aback at their suggestion since we knew that several of them were married and couldn't believe that they would allow their wives to be seen nude and, perhaps, be fondled by other men. We could understand unmarried persons indulging in this "sport", but never married people. We, of course, made our excuses and spent that Friday night as we always did by lighting the Sabbath candles, making *kiddish*, eating the Sabbath meal, singing *zmirros*, saying grace after meals and maintaining our Jewish heritage as it should be on a Friday night. I am quite sure that there are other Jews who would have jumped at the offer that was made to us, but being religious, we had no difficulty in rejecting the invitation.

A month before we concluded our instruction at the Navy Supply Corps School, each of us was given a choice of three desired assignments, including sea duty or shore duty. I chose in order of preference; aircraft carrier, battleship and cruiser. I wanted to go to war and fight and not sit on a Navy base. Unfortunately for me, at this time in the war, amphibious operations in the Pacific were the prime priority of our military strategy. Island to island hopping and invasion and conquest of these targets would enable the U.S. to build airstrips for our Air Force to bomb Japanese conquered territories and its homeland as well.

Consequently, almost my entire class was assigned to amphibious ships: i.e. APA (attack transports that carried Marines and the Army to the targeted island and landed these troops via LCVP-landing craft vehicle personnel-onto the beaches; AKA (attack cargo ship that replenished ships in combat with food and military supplies); and LST (landing ship tanks).

On August 25, 1944, I received my orders to proceed on Sept. 25 to Seattle, Wash. and report to the APA Pre-Commissioning School in connection with the USS Bollinger (APA234) which was built in Vancouver, Wash. and very soon to be commissioned and staffed. I was to be the assistant supply officer and the disbursing officer of this new ship. After completion of my course on Sept. 13, I went on leave and returned to my family until Sept. 25 when I began a four day cross-country train trip. Fortunately, being an officer, I traveled first class in a Pullman berth.

It seems that the Almighty either has a sense of humor or was testing me since Yom Kippur arrived on one of the days that I was traveling westward; thus, adding hours to my fast. The few officers that were traveling with me had great empathy for me and kept pleading with me that I should at least have a drink, if not food. However, Mendel, alias “nails”, would not succumb to temptations of the flesh when his soul was of greater importance. By coincidence, when I left Hilda and Kenny at the age of six months, a year previously, it was Rosh Hashona night.

On Sept. 28, I reported to the APA Pre-Commissioning School at the Hotel Fry in Seattle. It was not a “school” since there were no students or instructors. The entire hotel was requisitioned for boarding naval officers awaiting their assigned vessels for commissioning and also for officers assigned to gun crews on the merchant marine ships.

Each room was quite large and furnished with a double-decker bed to accommodate 2 officers. In the eight weeks that I spent at the Fry, I was fortunate in not having to share my room with another occupant, except for one night. During these two months, nothing of any significance occurred since I was just marking time until my ship was to be commissioned. Being a religious person, I missed attending synagogue and therefore availed myself in this regard by visiting Reformed and Conservative temples on Friday night. Even though we accomplished nothing during the day, we had to remain at the hotel until the evening.

On my first visit to a Reformed temple, I was shocked to see every congregant sitting bare-headed and the rabbi not wearing a head piece as well. I did not remove my hat and, perhaps, the ushers had respect for a military officer as they did not ask me to remove my hat. The rabbi then commenced to light the Sabbath candles, a full three hours into the Sabbath, invoking the blessing in Hebrew. A large choir of men and women, many being non-Jewish, began singing Sabbath psalms in English accompanied by a magnificent organ. I must say, in retrospect, that this ex-yeshiva bocher was certainly entertained, if not inspired.

After the musical program, the rabbi, instead of sermonizing, gave a book report on a then current best-seller “Gentlemen's Agreement”, which was later made into a movie co- starring Gregory Peck and John Garfield. The book's theme was on the existence of anti-Semitism in the U.S. displaying instances of rejection of Jews in hotels and clubs. At the conclusion of the service, all were invited to attend a collation, which I don't remember attending. Also, I can't recall any of the congregants or the rabbi welcoming me to their House of the Lord. On several other Friday evenings, I visited a Conservative synagogue and was welcomed warmly by many of their members. I remember one middle-age couple who befriended me and invited me to their home.

In my entire naval career, I never experienced anti-Semitism directed to me personally. However, I will now relate an incident that demonstrated the existence of this evil in our democratic society. On one of my visits to the Conservative synagogue, I met a lovely young and pretty girl with whom I spent time in many conversations. She, of course, knew of my marital status so that our friendship remained platonic.

On one Saturday afternoon, as I was reading in my bunk, the door bell to my room rang and as I opened the door, I was greeted by a young Ensign who became my new roommate. He was the gunnery officer of a merchant

ship and for some reason was assigned temporarily to the Fry. We engaged in a very cordial conversation and he, being at sea for quite some time, inquired as to my social plans for the evening.

I told him that I had no plans, but if he desired, I would call a young lady friend of mine and ask her if she had a friend who would complete a double date to attend a movie. He was thrilled with my suggestion, but informed me that he had no money or a clean shirt to wear for the evening. I told him not to worry since I will lend him the money and the shirt.

All four of us had a wonderful time and after the movie, I suggested that we go to a diner and have a sandwich and some ice-cream. As we were sitting and eating, the topic of our respective colleges came into the conversation. When his date mentioned her alma-mater as being the Univ. of Wisconsin, he, not knowing that any of us was Jewish, began a virulent outpouring of hate against the Jewish students at that school. It seems that he attended Wisconsin and took issue with two main factors; they being, that his college being a state school admitted Jewish students who falsely obtained Wisconsin addresses in order to attend at a much reduced tuition. Secondly, his college was a hotbed of Jewish communists, a fact that I agreed with without saying so publicly.

You can just imagine the looks on my co-religionists' faces when he kept ranting about Jews in general. Without being detected by my guest, I discreetly cautioned the girls not to respond. After we returned to our room, and I was already in my lower bunk, he thanked me for giving him such a wonderful evening and asked me how I enjoyed myself. I still remember my retort which was, "I would have enjoyed the evening much better if I weren't a Jew." Complete silence followed. When I awoke the following morning, I discovered that my room-mate had left in the middle of the night leaving a note filled with contrition and asking for forgiveness. He mentioned that I treated him as a fine human being and he reciprocated with gratitude filled with hate. He said this episode taught him a lesson that will live with him for the rest of his life. A few days later I found an envelope under my door with the money I had loaned him.

## CHAPTER XXI

Finally, on Dec. 3, I received orders to report to Astoria, OR. for the commissioning of my ship the U.S.S. Bollinger, which was held six days later. That day, I boarded the vessel which was to be “my home” for the next year. In addition to my supply and disbursing duties, I was the insurance officer, coding and decoding officer, member of the Summary Court Martial Board which consisted of three officers, head of the Chief Petty Officer Mess Audit Board, President of the officers’ ward room, one of the debarkation officers, and last but not least the “S” Division officer. As I write about my experiences aboard ship, I will describe several of the above duties.

Each member of the crew was assigned to a division depending upon his duty performed. Thus, all seamen were assigned to the deck division; radio operators to the communication division; engine room personnel to the engineering division, etc. Each division was headed by officer, i.e. the deck div. officer was the First Lieut.; communication div. by the Communication Officer, etc. I was the officer in charge of the Supply division which consisted of the storekeepers, cooks and bakers, laundry personnel and the steward mates.

At this time in the Navy, all Negro personnel were assigned to serve the officers and were not in any of the other divisions, other than the “S” division. Their duties comprised being waiters in the officers’ ward room, cooking for the officers, cleaning the officers’ rooms and making sure that the officers have clean, laundered clothing daily. The only military duty assigned to them was manning the anti-aircraft guns during combat. There were about 50 men in my division, including 12 steward mates.

Every morning at 7 a.m., the entire ship’s complement would gather on deck for muster; each division officer standing in front of his division and proceed with a roll call to assure the presence of every man. After muster, all would go to their mess to have breakfast; after which all would commence their respective duties.

After muster, I would retire to my room to put on my phylacteries and do my daily prayers. I always drew the curtain to my room so that I would not be disturbed during my communication with my Maker. The steward mates, seeing my curtain drawn, would know that they had to return later to clean my room and pick up my clothing for the laundry. I received nothing but respect from them and my fellow officers for my religious beliefs. In fact, my room-mate, Ensign Reilly loved to engage me in theological discussions regarding Judaism and Christianity. He was a devout Catholic from Bronxville, N.Y. and was engaged to a beautiful girl, whom I later met. He was particularly interested in Judaism’s stand on birth control since he would practice the rhythm method when he married.

Each member of the crew wished to ingratiate himself with his division officer because the latter was responsible for his promotion to a higher rate and increased pay, granting him leave to visit his family and defending him at “Captain’s Mast”. When a sailor went “on report” for an infraction, he was ordered to appear on the Captain’s deck and the Captain of the ship would administer punishment. This procedure was held for minor infractions and the usual punishment would be loss of pay for a specified period. The most common “sins” were

not being in proper uniform, i.e. not wearing his hat, unbuttoned shirt, etc. and fighting. Unfortunately, our commanding officer was a clone of “Capt. Bligh” and exacted discipline far beyond what a normal captain would desire. Thus, our ship probably employed this procedure much more often than any ship in the fleet.

If a more severe act occurred, the culprit would be ordered to appear before the Summary Court Martial Board consisting of three officers; I being one of them. There was a prosecutor and defense counsel who pleaded their case. The punishment usually meted out was a reduction to the next lower rate, and occasionally incarceration for a period in the ship’s brig. The decision of this Board was final and could not be appealed by the defendant nor by the Captain. There was one instance where the Captain called the members of the Board individually to his cabin to request us to change our verdict of not guilty; not one of us bowed to his demand and that was the first and last time he interfered with us. He very well knew that his action was against Naval regulations and that if we reported him, he would be censured.

My disbursing duties consisted of paying the officers and crew semi-monthly. I would set up a large table in a large area with a large amount of cash. At all times I had to have in my possession a minimum of \$100,000. I paid bills for supplies that were not obtained from Naval Supply Depots with checks signed by me. My Bureau of Supplies and Accounts Manual instructed me as to which articles I could buy and those I could not.

Once, I was called up to the Captain’s cabin and he attempted to ingratiate himself with me by calling me Max instead of Mr. Prager as he called the other officers; incidentally, I was the only officer aboard ship whom the Captain addressed by his first name. Perhaps, he had an ulterior motive as I soon discovered his reason for being so nice to me; and he wanted to set the modus operandi with his disbursing officer for the future. Being a graduate of Annapolis and being in the Navy for some time, he must have been successful with other disbursing officers in the past.

He purchased a beautiful, large and very comfortable lounging chair for his cabin which he showed me and even asked me to sit in it and give him my opinion of his purchase. He then proceeded to hand me the invoice which he wanted me to pay. I, being very familiar with the contents of the BuS&A Manual, knew that his purchase was in the personal category and could not, under any circumstances, be paid for by government funds. Also, I knew the regulation that if a commanding officer of any ship or base requests his disbursing officer to expend any funds for a prohibited purchase, the latter can do so only if the former signs a statement authorizing the payment and that I was doing so under protest.

You can just imagine the look on Carter Printup’s face when I recited the regulation to him. He returned the chair and never held this incident against me; in fact, his respect for me rose. Whenever we watched the movies on deck at night, he always made sure to sit next to me and converse. Once, while watching a movie, he asked me if, after the war, I could find a good employment position for him in New York. It seems that he was under the impression that all New York Jews were wealthy since he came from a small town in Georgia.

I was the assistant to the Supply Officer, Lt. (jg) R.C. Zell, a career Navy man who was commissioned to officer's rank at the outbreak of the war. This position was in name only as he had 2 assistants, one of whom was a Chief Warrant Officer-a commissioned rank- and the other was a Warrant Officer, not commissioned. All three procured supplies-food and material- and supervised the crew's mess.

Naval officers receive a uniform allowance when commissioned and annually thereafter. Their wardrobe must consist of 2 navy blue dress uniforms worn ashore, usually at night; 2 white dress uniforms for warm climates which I never wore; 4 work uniforms, 2 khaki and 2 grey. In addition as part of their pay, they receive a monthly meal allowance. Aboard my ship as President of the ward room, I purchased the food, phonograph records and other recreational items. I, enjoying classical records, bought many symphonies, concertos and operas. I assigned one of the other officers to purchase jazz and other records that he thought would be enjoyed. I set the monthly amount that each officer would be assessed for the above.

Each officer was assigned a battle station to which he went during combat. Also, each of us was assigned "watch" duties to be performed 4 hours on and 8 hours off, each and every day. It was a Naval tradition that Supply and Disbursing officers automatically became coding and decoding officers aboard ship and performed these duties on "watch" and at their battle stations. To accomplish these tasks we sat in a small room adjacent to the radio room.

After a coded message was received by the 3 or 4 radiomen on duty, they slipped the message through a small opening in the wall separating the two rooms. There were 2 different kinds of coding equipment; one was the electric coding machine (ECM) and the other, whose name eludes me, was used rarely. If the message was sent on an ECM, the decoding was done on that machine and if the message was sent on the other machine, then that machine was employed.

The coded message would read like this: xjydl pdieg siqvd, etc., always 5 garbled letter words. Every month the Communication Officer received a manual specifying the daily codes to be used in the machines. On receiving the message, I inserted that day's code in the machine and then commenced to type the garbled message. A ticker tape would then emerge from the machine and state in perfect English the contents of the message.

At the beginning of each message, the security thereof would read "Top Secret", "Secret" or "Conventional". After pasting the strips of the tape to a sheet, I would immediately bring the top secret and secret messages to the Captain for his perusal. I remember reading one top secret message when, towards the end of the war, the USS Indianapolis was sunk with hundreds aboard; no survivors. To this day, the mystery of the cause still prevails. There were rumors that the ship was carrying atomic bombs.

We left Astoria and arrived at Seattle on Dec. 23. We loaded supplies and then left for San Francisco where we received our landing craft-LCVPs and 2 LCMs- and the crew to man them. We departed the same day for San Pedro in the L.A. area for our ten day "shakedown" period. We arrived in San Pedro on Dec. 29 and commenced this period which is going through many and varied sea tests to probe for any flaws in the ship's performance.

After completing our “shakedown” on Jan. 12, 1945, we left for San Diego to undergo amphibious training and pick up the beach party assigned to our ship. This group consisted of Lieut. Whitaker, Beach Platoon Officer; Lieut. Ned Siner, Platoon Executive Officer-a Jew- and Lieut. F.E. Holstein, Platoon Medical Officer, a radio operator and several Medical Corp men. This group would establish communications with our ship prior to the landing of personnel on the beaches. When an invasion of an island took place, every APA in the attack force would set aside bunks for the wounded in addition to its sick bay which held about 12 bunks. The wounded would be treated by the pharmacy mates in the beach party and sent back to the APAs by LCVPs.

On the very first day of our training, we suffered our first fatal casualty aboard ship. The victim was a member of one of the LCVP crews named Victor Passerman, a young Jewish lad from Detroit. It was at dawn when visibility was very low that a boat (LCVP) was being lowered into the water and the cable from the davit broke. There were two men in the boat at the time, one of whom was Passerman. The other sailor was thrown clear of the boat into the water and escaped uninjured except for shock. However, Passerman fell with the boat and hit his head against the hard metal deck of the boat. After one half hour, he died of a cerebral hemorrhage and a fractured skull. Had he worn his helmet that was mandatory, it is possible that he would have sustained minor injuries. His body was taken off the ship and sent to the San Diego Naval Hospital for disposition.

We stayed in San Diego until Jan. 29 when we pulled in to the repair base for our availability period until Feb. 13 when we embarked an air wing detachment of marines and headed for Pearl Harbor. We arrived in Pearl on Feb. 19 and left on the 21<sup>st</sup> for Majuro in the Mariana Islands and arrived there on Feb. 27 and dropped off the air wing. We stayed there for one day and left for the island of Eniwetok.

We arrived at Eniwetok March 1 and a day later we were on our way for Iwo Jima. At 0600 on March 14 we sailed into Iwo Jima and saw signs of continued action. The island was not secured as yet although 90% of Iwo Jima was in the hands of the marines. We immediately began to load cargo belonging to the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division and on the night of March 15 we took on 1400 marines from that division who were mainly artillery battalions.

From our ship, which was only 5000 yards offshore, we could view constant dive bombing and strafing by our planes and also continuous naval gunfire executed by a few destroyers lying offshore. Machine gun and mortar fire was plainly audible at all times. At night we could see many star shells illuminating the north eastern tip of the island where combat was still going on by the 5<sup>th</sup> Marine Division sector. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division also had a few small pockets of resistance to eliminate and therefore was not ready to evacuate as was the 4<sup>th</sup> Division who had secured their sector.

The army had come in a week before and was going to be used for garrison work and also to eliminate any guerillas or snipers that would probably continue to exist for quite some time. The Seebes were doing a marvelous job on construction work on roads, tunnels, airfields, etc. They would be there for a while giving us a first rate air base on this island.

Although the cost in lives was great-over 4,000- and other casualties ran very high, the importance of Iwo was appreciated when we saw the many B-29s landing and taking off on their to and from Japan aerial bombing missions. This island was an excellent emergency landing base and ultimately would repay the high cost in saving the countless lives of bombing crews and planes.

Also, it was used as a base for fighter escort planes for the B-29s and B-24s in bombing raids on the island of Japan. All day long we witnessed P-51 Mustangs coming and going even before the entire island was secured.

At 1800 on March 16, Iwo Jima was officially secured although many snipers and guerillas were still operating. On that day, we were fully loaded with troops and cargo and waited for all the other attack transports and cargo ships to be loaded before shoving off from Iwo.

At 0800 on March 20, the entire convoy, Bollinger included, left Iwo Jima for the next destination, Guam where all the APAs were to leave their boats-LCVPs and LCMs- for the replacement pool. At 1500 on Thursday March 22, we arrived at Guam and saw a fairly large island that looked to be well set-up. It was the largest island we had visited since we left the States, excluding the Hawaiian Islands. We had our boats taken from us and on the morning of March 23 we were off again.

On March 27 about 1500, we arrived at Eniwetok for fueling and just stayed there overnight. At 0600 on March 28, we left this island and headed for Pearl Harbor with our valuable cargo of valiant and tired marines.

The second tragedy that struck the Bollinger was another death of one of our crew members. He was a carpenter's mate named Johnson who was married and the father of three children. While steaming from Eniwetok to Pearl, we hit a typhoon and Johnson wanted to secure the large, heavy steel plates that were on deck. He released the bar which secured the sheets of steel and, in a flash, the ship pitched acutely and resulted in the plates falling and pinning him against the bulkhead. The plates, weighing about ten tons, crushed his chest and heart. He lived for about 4 hours and during surgery, he died on the operating table.

This was the first and only burial at sea that I witnessed and cannot forget it. Being a friend of the head doctor, I was in the sick bay when his body was placed in a canvas bag which was the sewn so that the body would not fall out. A weight was placed at his feet so that he should sink to the bottom of the sea and not float. The entire ship's company and the troops we were carrying stood at attention on the boat deck. All the ship's personnel were dressed in their blue uniforms, officers included. An American flag was draped over the body and six pallbearers then carried the body from sick bay to the boat deck where it was placed on a "horse" near the rail.

A gun salute was then given by a Marine detail and the Chaplain then performed a religious burial ceremony. Taps was then played by the bugler and Johnson's body was slowly dropped into the sea.

A few days later, one of the Marines we were transporting and who was a Jewish boy from Howard Avenue in Brooklyn, suffered a sudden fatal heart attack. He was about 35 years of age and married. Since we were due to arrive at Pearl Harbor within a day, his body was kept for transportation to his family.

On April 4, we arrived in Pearl and just remained there overnight and early in the morning we headed for Maui, a nearby island. A big home-coming celebration was awaiting the victorious Marines who were returning from Iwo Jima. A Navy band was playing martial music and native Hawaiian women and girls and Waves were on hand to distribute leis-pronounced lays- to the men. Then a few girls dressed in straw skirts performed the traditional Hula dance amid great pleasure and enthusiasm displayed by the grateful audience. Even a fat and not very pretty Hula girl looked very tempting after several months at sea.

We debarked the troops and unloaded our holds which were filled with cargo and on the morning of April 6 we headed back to Pearl for an availability period of approximately 2 weeks. The term “availability” refers to awaiting a decision by COMSOPAC- Commander South Pacific- for our next assignment. Also this time period gave us an opportunity to take on provisions, supplies and repair minor damage to the ship. Since we were at sea for two months, we required the above. We arrived on the afternoon at Pearl and docked.

We stayed in Pearl for a little over 2 weeks performing all the tasks mentioned above and had the Bollinger completely repainted externally and internally. On April 22, we got underway and headed for Port Hueneme in California. Nothing of any importance occurred there and left that city for San Pedro where we arrived on April 29. We stayed there for a few days and then headed back to Port Hueneme on May 2 to load 400 Marines and Sea Bees, including 25 officers.

On May 5, we sailed for San Francisco with the troops and arrived there the following afternoon where we took on about 50 officers and about 150 enlisted men who were to form military government teams and about 150 men of a hospital unit. This entire personnel were to be taken by us to Okinawa where our forces were currently fighting the Japanese.

## CHAPTER XXII

We arrived in San Francisco in the afternoon of May 6 and stayed there until the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup> when we departed for Seattle and arrived there on the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup>. Since we expected to remain there for at least 2 weeks, I grasped at the opportunity of having Hilda come out to Seattle and visit me. We hadn't seen each other for over 8 months so we were both salivating at the thought of "touching" each other and more.

On the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup>, I went to pick her up at the train station. That morning I had to go to the bank to pick up Japanese currency which I will relate to later on. Whenever I had to go to a bank, I took my 45 caliber pistol strapped to my side in a belt and escorted by my 2 disbursing storekeepers. I had made a reservation for Hilda at The Olympia Hotel which was one of the better hotels in town.

I requisitioned a jeep for my trip to the bank and, with the 2 sailors in the rear of the Jeep, I arrived at the train station to reunite with my wife. After several minutes, I see Hilda coming towards me and crying, which I thought were tears of joy. Lo and behold, amid sobs she points to a Wave and exclaims "You see that girl? She is the worst anti-Semite I ever met"; and begins to relate to me the reason for her anguish.

It seems that Hilda had a seat on the train and she was sitting next to this bigoted Wave. Unfortunately many servicemen did not have seats and had to remain standing or sat on the floor throughout the entire trip. A young soldier standing next to Hilda asked her if she would allow him to sit on her armrest; and, of course, my gracious wife responded affirmatively; even suggesting that he take her seat for a while. Evidently, the young man looked and sounded Jewish so the Wave went into action with her hatred towards all Jews. She construed his request as a sample of Jewish aggressiveness; saying "He's probably a NY City Jew". Not knowing my wife's religion, she spewed her venom for quite some time.

I didn't ask her why she allowed the 'bitch' to get away with this conduct and also why she didn't tell her that she was Jewish. I knew the answer and that was Hilda's living in a Jewish "ghetto" in Brownsville all her life and not knowing any Gentiles, except for the Toscano family, the next door neighbor. The tirade emanating from the Wave actually scared her into silence.

After she calmed down she got into my jeep, sitting in the front with me. We drove to the hotel, checked in and went up to the room. I will leave it to the reader's imagination as to what occurred immediately after we found ourselves alone. You can just envision the pent-up passion that engulfed us after 8 months of absence. After being in heaven for a short period of time, I left my beloved and rejoined my 2 storekeepers who dutifully remained in the jeep. They shot meaningful glances at me throughout our trip back to the ship knowing full well what went on in the room.

Hilda and I spent the most enjoyable five days together; it was just like a second honeymoon, although we never had a first. Of course, the time flew as usual because we were both so happy and on the afternoon of the 16<sup>th</sup>

we said our farewells not knowing when we would see each other again. On that very same day we were off to Pearl and an invasion.

Because of the Japanese currency that I picked up in Seattle and also the top secret and secret communications that I decoded, I was able to fit pieces together and arrived at the conclusion that we were in the first phase of an invasion operation. The target was not known to me but it could only be one of two places – the mainland of Japan or one of the islands presently occupied by the Japanese, probably the latter.

We embarked about 850 Negro troops who were to be stevedores at the target and about 30 officers. Thus, the personnel that we were carrying consisted of sea bees, a Navy military government contingent, hospital personnel and Army working gangs. This all illustrated that we were carrying a rear echelon or echelons that would hit the beach a few days after D-Day; time would tell.

By coincidence, one of the military government officers, whose name was CDR Harper, was one of the officers who granted my commission at the NATTC in Norman Oklahoma. I finally had the opportunity to ask him why I was given a commission and my friend Nick Weinschel was rejected. Nick's qualifications were at least as good as mine; he being an attorney and a top executive in a large mercantile enterprise. I really was not surprised at his response when he told me that although the selection committee knew that we were both Jewish, Nick's physical appearance and manner could not be mistaken for that of a non-Jew while I did not look nor sound Jewish; so much for bigotry in the Navy.

On the afternoon of May 16, we departed from Seattle. Hilda had a plane ticket for N.Y. to leave at 2000 that night hoping that she would not be bumped for a military officer. I received a letter from her when we arrived in Pearl on May 23 that she was taken off the plane in Billings, Montana and had to resume her trip by rail. We stayed in Pearl 1 day and debarked about 287 officers and 60 troops. We said good-bye to "Rabbit Tracks" Romanick, our executive officer and received our new "exec" LT McGlothlin. We took on 8 additional boat crews and some new passengers and at noon of May 24 we shoved off for Eniwetok, an eight day cruise.

Meanwhile, getting back to the European theatre, the Russian offensive in the east was in large part coordinated with a similar Allied offensive in the west that started Feb. 23, 1945. Some eight Allied armies swept up all the industrial cities on the west bank of the Rhine River. German resistance had become ineffectual and the Wehrmacht appeared thoroughly demoralized and disorganized. As a result the Allied armies raced at will through the Reich, meeting only scattered opposition. Exploiting this chaotic situation in the west, the Russians opened their march on Berlin on April 19. The Russian and Allied armies met on April 26, while other Soviet columns to the north had already broken into Berlin on April 21. On April 28, Benito Mussolini was executed by Italian anti-fascists. Three days later on May 1, the German radio announced that Hitler had died in action in Berlin. On May 2, the Russians captured Berlin. Five days later (May 7) the Germans surrendered unconditionally; the following day, May 8, the war in Europe ended.

We arrived at Eniwetok on June 1 for what we thought would be a short stay; however, evidently there was a change in invasion plans and we remained there for 18 days. While there, I went swimming every other day and visited the officers' club on the beach every day where I learned how to drink hard liquor. The cost of a full glass of bourbon, scotch or rye was a dime and when I see a bargain I take advantage of it. I didn't know the difference among the various whiskies but when I discovered that bourbon was 100 proof, I thought that was a bigger bargain than the others. Every day I returned to my ship, which was anchored in the lagoon, and slightly inebriated. I would immediately go to my bunk and sleep until my watch.

At this time, I would like to relate my religious activity aboard the Bollinger. Of the entire complement of our crew consisting of 50 officers and 550 enlisted men, there were 10 Jews, 3 officers and 7 sailors. The other 2 Jewish officers were Ned Siner, an accountant from Spring Valley, N.Y. who was the executive officer of the beach party engaged in amphibious invasions. He was a very nice fellow who never made his religion known to others and never attended services. The other Jewish officer was Lt. Mendelsohn, the Marine officer attached to our ship. Having such a name, he could hardly hide his religion; he too never attended services and neither did the Jewish sailors.

When we were carrying troops, which was quite often, I had the opportunity to hold Friday night and Holiday services in my office. It was always in the mimeographed "plan of the day" which was given to everyone on board. When services began at night after dinner, a boatswain would use his little "pipe"- a little whistle- and then announce over the loud speaker: "Jewish services are now being held in the disbursing office." The first time this announcement was made, the entire crew immediately knew that Mr. Prager was a Jew and, from that time on, I received nothing but the greatest respect. About a year after I returned home, I received a large certificate from the Jewish Welfare Board thanking me for my efforts in bringing God into the lives of those who were going into the "valley of death". I remember vividly when I intoned Kol Nidre on Yom Kippur eve, a young Marine of about 18 or 19 years of age hugging me and crying "I have never been to a synagogue in my life."

On June 18, we left Eniwetok and headed for Ulithi. On the evening of June 21 around dusk, both DEs-destroyer escorts-, who were our protection against attack, picked up submarines on their sonar detectors and sped immediately each to their target. Both began dropping "ash cans"- drums containing explosives- as depth charges were then called. After a long interval, this operation ceased with no definite evidence that the enemy was hit. That very same morning our radioman picked up SOS calls from ships in the area in which we were cruising; one was a merchant ship and the other was a ARL (repair ship-landing craft) who were attacked by subs. These waters were the most dangerous in the Pacific since this area were the Caroline Islands, still held by Japan, and a haven for submarines. Incredible as it may seem, I was a spectator to the entire event standing on deck and cheering for our boys.

We arrived at Ulithi, which is at the north-western part of the Carolines, at noon on June 22. We then received a report from one of the DEs that it sank one of the subs the previous night and the other escort stated that its contact was not a sub at all.

We finally left Ulithi at noon of June 28 and headed for Okinawa and a little excitement. In the late afternoon of July 2, we arrived at Okinawa and saw a very large island well inhabited by the Army, Navy and natives. There were many well-built roads already constructed and it looked like we had done a good job in making this island one concentrated air base with many air fields. They were already flying B-24s from there and soon they would be flying 1000 B-29s daily. Their fighter support came from Iwo Jima.

Our ship immediately went into a 6 hour watch-6 hours on and 6 hours off- and all 40mm guns were manned. We disembarked the troops at night and very soon thereafter began to unload our cargo holds. One of my military duties was one of the debarkation officers. We had 10 debarkation stations, 5 on each side of the ship; my station was called "yellow 8". I held a yellow flag and when the troops at my station were ready to debark, I would wave my flag to the LCVPs that were rendezvousing about 100 yards from the ship and one of them would arrive at my station to load the troops. Five men at a time would scale down a large rope net into the landing craft.

While I was on my watch (midnight to 6 a.m.) in the coding room, we received a FLASH RED (air raid) alert and all cargo lights were immediately extinguished; the ship had already been blacked out. This occurred at 0330. Each ship in the harbor had 2 of their boats circle them and make smoke to hinder visibility to the attacking enemy aircraft. It was a very effective defense against air raids. In a few minutes, you couldn't see the sky or more than 20 yards on either side of you.

The FLASH WHITE (all clear) sounded at 0500 with no ships being hit. The following morning the Captain announced that one Kamikaze (suicide plane) had been shot down and he made no mention of any damage to our ships. Unfortunately, this news was incorrect as we later learned the Navy suffered its greatest losses of the war at Okinawa from the Kamikaze attacks. Ships all around us were sunk and we were just lucky in not being one of them. The Japanese, knowing that the war was lost to them, resorted to suicide attacks.

After we embarked elements of the Sixth Marine Division –about 1500 officers and men- we left in the afternoon of July 8 headed for Saipan. We arrived there on the 12<sup>th</sup> and hung around there just overnight and on the following day sailed for Guam. Two days later we arrived at Guam and immediately began to disembark our troops and cargo.

We received word that day that we were to leave for San Francisco upon completion of our discharge of the troops. This, of course, raised our morale 1000% and the air was filled with jubilant outcries. Even though I was not to benefit personally by this trip back to the mainland as much as the officers and men who had wives and family on the west coast, it still felt good to know that civilization was only 15 days away. We were to sail alone –not in a convoy- directly to San Francisco doing 17.5 knots which was a very good speed.

On the afternoon of July 15, we set sail for the U.S. and a bit of relaxation – drinks and entertainment. After a very pleasant, enjoyable and cool trip, we arrived in San Francisco on the morning of July 29. We stayed out in the stream for 2 days and then moved to Oakland for some minor alterations and repairs. During this time, generous liberty was granted and I had a fairly good time but kept thinking of home mostly.

On the night of August 9, we returned to San Francisco and stayed there one day embarking 1700 Army officers and men who were replacements for troops at some Pacific island. We sailed from Frisco on Friday night August 10 for our next stop Eniwetok. On the morning of Aug. 23, we anchored in Eniwetok harbor after a very uneventful trip from the States except for a slightly important announcement on August 14 and that was that JAPAN SURRENDERED UNCONDITIONALLY !

Incredibly, the news aboard ship was received with no display of joy or enthusiasm. It was the feeling evidenced by a very tired man after a long, arduous task and success was finally achieved. No hilarity, no gayety – just thankfulness and inward relief. Of course, our feelings were somewhat curbed by the knowledge that we would still be out here for a while. Some said six months – others guessed at two years. I felt that I would be released in about a year. My hope, and that of my shipmates, was that I would serve out my time in the States; that was merely a hope and as days passed I felt my hopes were in vain.

A point system of discharge was released by the Navy and it was terribly unfair. Firstly, no credit was given for overseas duty or combat service. Thus, the man who sat at a desk in a shore billet for three or four years was discharged as quickly as a man who was at sea and had engaged in several combat operations. Also, a man who was married and had 3 children and a single man claiming a mother as a dependent received the same number of points, 10 for dependents.

To make matters worse, Admiral Jacobs, the chief of the Bureau of Naval Personnel, when confronted by civilian and Naval criticism about the injustice of not granting credit for overseas duty, responded with an incredible reply. This erudite and venerable Admiral, without cracking his face, stated that Bu Pers had no way of determining who had or hadn't sea duty. That statement was so ridiculous and utterly fallacious that a young seaman exclaimed: "that old boy is nuts". In other words, if his Bureau is inefficient, the men who had seen action were to suffer. This was an illustration of Navy justice.

During our twelve days of cruising, an ALNAV – a Naval announcement – was published requesting 30,000 USNR officers to transfer to USN and remain in the Navy. Not one USNR officer on the Bollinger even contemplated doing so. In fact, none of the USN officers, except for Lt. Zell, the Supply Officer of our ship, intended to remain in the Navy when their enlistment expires. The Navy had to learn that autocracy and plain meanness was not considered to be discipline. During war time, they could get away with stupid regulations that didn't make any sense and only increased the dislike of the men and officers for anything that resembled the Navy.

The main reason for the Japanese surrender was the dropping of an atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6 where over 78,000 people were killed. A second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki three days later. There is

absolutely no doubt that the number of Japanese casualties caused by these attacks pale in comparison to the number of dead and wounded that would have been the result of an American invasion of the Japanese mainland. The estimated number of American casualties was beyond belief, considering the ferocity and loyalty of the Japanese soldiers in defending their homes. On August 15, Emperor Hirohito accepted the Allied surrender terms.

That same day, Gen MacArthur was made supreme commander of the Allied forces in the Pacific to receive the Japanese surrender. On Sept. 2, 1945, a Japanese delegation headed by Mamoru Shigemitsu, the foreign minister, and Gen. Yoshijiro Umezu, of the Imperial General Staff, boarded the battleship U.S.S. Missouri in Tokyo Bay and there signed the document that officially ended World War II, six years and one day after it started.

On August 27, we left Eniwetok for Ulithi and arrived there 4 days later. We departed for Leyte in the Philippines on Sept. 3 and arrived there on Sept. 7 when we disembarked all our troops and cargo and were ready to sail to Manila to pick up supplies. We left Leyte on the afternoon of Sept. 8 and arrived in Manila two days later. After loading supplies, we refueled the ship and left one day later for Subic Bay which was a 4 hour trip. There, we unloaded our 2 LCMs - landing craft medium tanks- and immediately left for Lingayen Gulf where we arrived on the morning of Sept.12.

I went ashore at Lingayen and was horrified at the prevailing conditions that met my eyes. The place was extremely dirty and full of insects. The natives were fairly well- dressed, if you call a plain cotton dress the latest fashion. Most of them were bare-footed; children smoked and the women smoked large, fat cigars. The women also carried large and heavy bundles on their heads without balancing them with their hands.

Morality was low or non-existent. The girls and women had sexual relations with any sailor or soldier, either for no compensation or for some food or toilet water. Young girls could be seen loitering around the tents that housed our soldiers and lying on the cots having intercourse. I saw a young girl of no more than 9 years of age performing oral sex on a soldier. No doubt, poverty was the cause of this promiscuity. The venereal disease rate was very high in this area and it was no wonder. The natives sold a very strong brew or liquor that made the imbiber drunk in a very short time. In this state, the soldiers were unable to take any prophylactic precautions and just did what comes naturally. As a result, they contracted a VD from most of the women.

On the morning of Sept. 20, we left for Osaka in Japan with elements of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Division of the Sixth Army. We had undergone rehearsals several days prior to our departure and were all set to “invade” Japan. This was the first occupation landing on the shores of this city, the third largest in Japan with a population of 3 million.

After 5 days of cruising at 12 knots, the convoy which consisted of 25 ships, steamed into Watakayama Bay adjacent to Osaka. We arrived there at 0600 on Sept. 25. We immediately set condition I-able –invasion condition- and the debarkation of the assault troops began. About 1/3 of the troops were in the assault phase and the balance were in the reserve phase. Everything went according to plan and thus we all felt good. It seems that the “invasion” at Watakayama was to have taken place sometime in November, had the war gone on. A plan had already been

formulated and we were following that operational plan to the letter, except for the exclusion of aerial support and naval bombardment.

Upon gazing around at the terrain, we all felt mighty grateful to the Almighty that we were not coming in here under actual combat conditions. The terrain was all mountainous and our troops would have had to look up into the muzzles of Japanese guns. The casualties would have been catastrophic. Also, upon further examination, one could see concrete gun emplacements all over the beach that seemed to have escaped any effects of our aerial attacks. Along the beach were many industrial plants that looked like those of steel, refining or smelting establishments. They appeared quite modern and were fairly large. Near them were homes black with soot. We used about 1000 POWs as working parties to unload our cargo and that of the other ships in our task group.

At 1700 of 26 Sept., we got underway with about 20 ships that were already unloaded as we were and headed for the Philippines. The trip was uneventful except for hitting the fringes of a typhoon. This occurred the afternoon of Sept. 29 and lasted until the night of 30<sup>th</sup>. This was the first real storm that the Bollinger ever experienced and it was a bit rough, to say the least. Fortunately, there was no damage to the ship nor to any of the personnel.

We arrived at Subic Bay on the afternoon of Oct. 1 and picked up our 2 LCMs that we left there prior to going to Japan. We stayed there 4 hours and proceeded to Leyte where we arrived on the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. A day later, I received my promotion to Lt. (jg) after a long wait of 19 months. I went ashore at Samar and went to the officers' club which was the largest and nicest that I had ever seen in the Pacific. The liquor was very good and the brands varied.

We left Leyte on the morning of Oct. 7, and sailed for Tolumo which is right near Davao, the capital of the island of Mindanao; and on the afternoon of the next day we arrived at our destination. We embarked elements of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and a week later we set sail for Matsuyama on the home island of Shikoku, the smallest of the Japanese islands and on the afternoon of Oct. 21 we arrived there.

We just hung around until 0800 the following day and commenced disembarking our occupation troops. Everything went smoothly and by the following day we completed unloading our cargo. The following day liberty was given to 1/3 of the personnel and similarly done for the next 2 days so that everyone had an opportunity of stepping foot on Japanese soil.

Three days after our arrival at Matsuyama, I found myself with large Japanese yen denominations which I had to convert into smaller ones to distribute to our crew to spend on liberty. Therefore, I had to go to a bank ashore. What intrigued me most about my task was the thought that I could just envision Germany or Japan entering a conquered nation and changing their currency for that of the occupied country. They would just appropriate the money at the end of a gun.

Since we were anchored off shore, a boat from our ship took me and my storekeeper Lynch to the beach and then we walked through a small town. I was very much surprised at what met my eyes even though I had an idea as to what Japan would look like.

The homes were all 1 or 2 story wooden dwellings; the entrances were sliding doors and the interiors were very crudely furnished. Of course, I couldn't really say that what I was seeing was a typical Japanese home because the island of Shikoku was considered to be the poorest, least educated and least modern of all 4 Japanese home islands. There were no chairs, beds, bureaus, tables, etc. The natives ate, slept and sat on mats. They did not wear shoes in the house; instead, their feet were covered with slippers or nothing.

The men wore clothing like ours, except for their shoes which were wooden. I assumed that this was a war-time necessity and not the normal foot covering. The women wore blouses and trousers which were pegged around the ankles. The very old men and women wore kimonos and a few younger women wore the same.

All the people appeared ugly to me, more than I had anticipated. Of course, there were a few exceptions and, occasionally, I would see a fairly pretty girl or a good-looking boy but they were rare. I was impressed favorably with the appearance of the little girls who looked like dolls, they were that cute. They all were their black, straight, lustrous hair in bangs over their foreheads. Most were chubby and possessed healthy coloring in their cheeks. Surprisingly, none of the people seemed poorly fed. The women were fatter than American women and there were few skinny ones among them. This could have been a result of the fact that the entire island was agricultural and farmers' wives usually are better fed than city women. The men were short and thin, although broad-boned.

The city of Matsuyama had a population of 130,000 and was 50% destroyed and the rest was pretty well shot up. Requisitioning an Army jeep, I drove through miles of rubble and debris caused by our aerial bombing. It was amazing how some buildings remained undamaged amid the ruins of acres of land. The schools, shrines and public buildings were intact giving evidence to the pin-point bombing of our planes. It was incredible that our attacks were so precise that these edifices were intentionally permitted to go unscathed.

Yet, upon further analysis, you must realize that there was a reason for this type of bombing. The public buildings were needed when the occupation forces arrived. Schools house children and shrines are religious centers even if they were worshipped by the "sons of heaven."

Finally, arriving at the bank, I saw a financial institution that looked like most in the U.S. The men and women appeared more intelligent, much cleaner and better dressed than the average Matsuyaman. The bank's staff consisted of 1/3 men and 2/3 girls; the latter all wearing blue smocks. Upon our entry into the bank, I found all the officers dressed in formal dress like those worn by their diplomats and they and the girls standing at attention in 2 lines and bowing to us. My transaction was conducted with one of the bank officers who spoke English very poorly but who understood my request. The men and the girls were constantly eying us as we were the first Americans they had ever seen.

I would describe the feelings of the inhabitants of this island to the American occupation as that of fear coupled with wonderment. I don't think that many of them were very angry at us or resentful; perhaps, because they were mainly farmers and fishermen and not very knowledgeable of nor interested in politics. To them, the end of the war brought relief, even in defeat. If they were more educated or sophisticated, perhaps, they would have hated us more but those whom I saw seemed like a very simple people. They did what their government decreed and they all were scared to death of the military establishment.

I understood what MacArthur meant when he said that the occupation was progressing smoothly. The Japanese seemed very anxious to cooperate; whether they were sincere or not only the future would tell. Fortunately, history proved that this occupation was the most successful and beneficial to both the victor and the vanquished.

On the morning of Oct. 27 –Navy Day-, we and 3 other APAs left for the Marianas on Magic Carpet duty. This was the name given to the operation of returning military personnel from the various areas of the Pacific. We arrived in Guam on Oct. 31 and saw a large group of marines awaiting us. They were the lucky men going home, most of them to be discharged from the service. We embarked 2050 enlisted marines and 120 naval officers.

On the morning of Nov.15, we arrived in San Diego and there awaiting the marines was a marine band and a large welcoming crowd. We immediately disembarked them and then we received orders to go to Long Beach for repairs and availability. We stayed in San Diego until that evening and then left for Long Beach where we arrived on the following morning.

We had our engines overhauled, boilers re-bricked, ship painted and additional bunks installed, allowing us to accommodate more passengers. We stayed in Long Beach until Dec. 11 when we departed for Eniwetok. While at Long Beach, 27 officers and about 150 men left our ship, thus, cutting down our complement as we no longer needed them.

A very joyous note was added on the morning of Nov. 30 when Carter Alston Printup, our commanding officer was relieved and replaced by Capt. William Julius Richter USN. The change was definitely for the better, even though we knew nothing about our new CO. There just couldn't be two Carter Printups in the Navy. Our new skipper seemed like a nice guy and we all emitted a long sigh of relief when "old sourpuss" was piped over the side for the last time.

To illustrate the type of person our new CO was, I will relate an incident that occurred on the first day our new Captain took command of our ship. Sometime during the late afternoon, I heard my name called over the loud speaker requesting my presence on the Captain's deck. When I arrived there, he asked me if there was any evidence of anti-Semitism aboard the ship. The question astounded me because I couldn't understand how he knew I was Jewish, being on the ship only one day. Secondly, in the midst of a war, I assumed there were more pressing issues on his mind besides ascertaining the presence of a universal evil in our midst.

When I answered in the negative, he began to tell me the reason for his question. It seemed that he, when attending Annapolis, had a very close friend who was Jewish and, when the latter arrived at his first billet upon graduation, he was met by the grossest anti-Semitism and many times ostracized by his colleagues. Consequently, after being in the Navy for one year, he resigned his commission and left the service. Capt. Richter vowed that, when and if he became a commanding officer of a ship or a base, he would eradicate any semblance of this horrid behavior.

After 2 days of sailing towards Eniwetok, we received diversion orders sending us to Samar in the Philippines to pick up a Naval contingent and bring it to San Francisco; we were due there on Dec. 20. On Dec. 15 we again received a change in orders advising us to go to Tacloban on Leyte Island to pick up an Army group instead.

After a very rough trip, we finally arrived at our destination at 0800, Dec. 20. On the next day, we loaded the Army personnel consisting of 54 officers, 30 nurses, 2035 enlisted men and 40 enlisted Naval personnel. At 0800, Dec. 22, we left for San Francisco.

I would now like to relate two interesting events that occurred on this trip. Whether the end of the war created a devil-may-care attitude among the Army men and the nurses or whether the latter saw an opportunity to make a buck, many of the women made a small fortune doing what comes naturally with the Army soldiers aboard and the sailors of our ship.

Since New Year's Eve occurred on the trip and the only custodian of liquor aboard ship was the medical department, Dr. Irbe, my friend, invited me to a party in his office that night. The male participants in the festivities were the two of us and the other doctor; while the three females were Army nurses. Already being a veteran drinker, I did not fear getting drunk so I had a great time in imbibing. Each of us paired off with a girl and as luck would have it, my companion for the evening was a Jewish nurse from Brownsville in Brooklyn. I can still remember the two of us sitting on the floor and reminiscing about our neighborhood. The immediate thought that came to my mind was that the Almighty was again protecting Hilda or perhaps me as well.

After a very pleasant trip, we arrived in Frisco on Jan. 6 at 0900. We immediately disembarked all our passengers and then anchored in the stream. Now, a very serious problem arose relative to my being discharged. Being a disbursing officer and the custodian of large amounts of cash and checkbooks, I could not be relieved of my duties until the Navy could find a replacement for me. Almost all supply and disbursing officers were in a hurry to go home and were not interested in remaining in the service. I could see myself hanging around for a minimum of 6 months.

Perhaps my daily prayers helped. When Capt. Richter heard of my dilemma, he assured me that I would be relieved in a few days. He had a friend, a Lt. Cdr. WAVE in San Francisco at the Twelfth Naval District who would help me in getting home. He made an appointment for me to see her which I did a day later. She, too, was a doll, and empathized with my predicament. She asked me if there were any supply officers aboard the Bollinger who

were USN or USNR staying in the service. When I answered in the affirmative, she wrote orders directing my Captain to transfer all my funds and public property in my possession to Lt. R.C. Zell USN, the Supply Officer of our ship. Had Richter not intervened, a long time would have passed before my release.

On Jan. 16, the transfer was consummated and I was detached as Disbursing Officer of the Bollinger and assigned to the Twelfth Naval District for temporary duty for separation from active service. I was supposed to be detached from the District 3 days later and proceed to the Separation Center in New York; however, not being able to get transportation, I left Frisco on the evening of the 22<sup>nd</sup> and arrived home on Saturday morning on Jan. 26. Perhaps, it is only a coincidence or an act of God that on the same day I returned to my son, Kenny, his *zivik* or *basherta*, as we would say in Yiddish, was born. Jeannie entered this world on Jan. 26, 1946.

## CHAPTER XXIII

Arriving at my in-laws home on Carroll Street in Brooklyn where Hilda and Kenny resided during my 2 ½ years in the Navy, my joy and anxiety in the thought of being reunited with my child and immediate family after a period of 16 months was beyond description. Although I had seen Hilda 8 months previously, holding her in my arms again was sheer bliss.

I can recall my walking up the stairs to the second floor apartment, my arms laden with many toys, including a wooden horse, and seeing my wife and son at the head of the stairs. Their incredible happiness at seeing their husband and father returning from the war unscathed was indescribable. As soon as I entered the first room at the top of the stairs, the kitchen, I enveloped both in my arms and couldn't release them for quite some time. It was amazing that Kenny, who was 20 months old the last time he saw me, sat on my lap and wouldn't leave me for the rest of the day.

My in-laws apartment was in a 2 family house and consisted of a kitchen, a very small master bedroom, an adjacent even smaller bedroom, dining room, living room and an exceptionally small bedroom leading to an outside porch. Hilda and I occupied the small adjacent room to my in-laws' bedroom which had space for only one bed and no other piece of furniture. Kenny slept in his crib which was in the master bedroom, not allowing her parents much space to live in comfortably. Her 3 sisters slept in the living room and the other bedroom. My father in-law had a favorite expression that if people liked each other and got along well, then the abode they lived in was unusually spacious. However, if the occupants disliked each other, then even a very large home was too small.

While I was in the Navy, I had decided not to return to George Muhlstock & Co. for two reasons. Since I worked on the Sabbath with that firm, I realized that my religious scruples were more important to me than financial benefits. Also, being extremely independent, I arrived at a decision never to work for anyone in the future. Only later in my life did I discover the many benefits that resulted from this move. Had I remained with this or any other accounting firm, even as a partner, I would have had to retire at the age of 65 or sooner, instead of 84 when I did retire.

A most important additional benefit was the opportunity to take as many vacations as I desired and as often as I liked. Being my own boss was a significant factor in my happiness throughout my life.

After I was home for about a week, I visited my old firm to advise them of my decision. While I was away, the firm expanded quite a bit taking advantage of the prosperous economy during the war. When I left to enter the service, Muhlstock needed a partner to continue using the name "& Co.," a legal requirement. Consequently, I became a partner in name only and received \$500 a year while I was in the Navy. He now had a real partner and no longer needed me in that capacity.

We had a very amiable chat exchanging inquiries about our respective families and about my naval experiences. He then handed me a check for \$1,000 as a bonus for serving our country which I thought was a very

nice gesture. When I told him that I was not returning and proceeded to tear up the check he was flabbergasted. We shook hands and remained good friends. His firm was still my father-in-law's accountants as George was a cousin of Manny Zeller, a partner in Pearl Dress Co.

While I was away, two of Hilda's sisters got married. Chippy (Corinne) married Al Moskovits who, together with his family, emigrated from Romania in 1941. They had a spacious home on President Street as they were people of means. I had met him previously when I was on leave and immediately became very close friends and remained that way until his death in 1999. Her other sister, Esther, was introduced to a discharged Army Lieut. and they married after a very short courtship. Joe Saltz was born and raised in Baton Rouge, La. He was a history major in college, and received his commission after graduating.

At this time, the problem of supporting my family arose. Since I was still in the Naval Reserve Supply Corps, I decided to use my experience to start selling to the various ships' stores existing on naval bases. I created a company with the name "Kenhill Mfg. Co." employing my son's and wife's names. I made trips to naval establishments in Boston and to those in the N.Y. metropolitan area selling men's T shirts and ladies underwear. I received the merchandise from Al's relatives who manufactured T shirts for the armed services during the war from their plant on Canal Street under the name of Moro Mfg. Co. and the lingerie from former clients.

Unfortunately, the income generated from this source was not sufficient and I had to explore other means of support. Buddy, Hilda's aunt, recommended me to Ella Clayton, a woman in her 70's, who owned a dress shop on East 56<sup>th</sup> Street off Madison Ave. She was my first client in my attempt at starting my own practice. Since there was no space for me to work during the daytime, I would arrive at 7 p.m. and leave around 10 p.m. As I had no car, I would travel via subway. My fee for this work was \$25.00 a month. Mrs. Clayton leased space to Janet Lawson, a milliner, who also engaged me for \$25.00 as well. Fortunately, I was able to obtain quite a few clients receiving \$15.00 – \$35.00 a month and was able to achieve a weekly income of \$75.00 which at that time was not too bad.

In February 1947, my parents offered to have us live with them and we jumped at their suggestion since we were living in very cramped quarters at my in-laws. My parents' apartment in a 4 story building at 1625 President Street consisted of 2 bedrooms, living room and kitchen; all rooms were much larger than those at Carroll Street. My sister Anne gave up her room that she had shared with Irene previously and willingly slept on a couch in the living room. It was a large room affording ample space for a crib for Kenny. This apartment was one block from Carroll Street so we were able to enjoy our both families on the Sabbath, holidays and joyous functions.

Wanting to enjoy privacy for a short time, we rented an apartment for the summer in Brighton Beach in an apartment house. Unfortunately, it was located on the fifth floor which was the top floor and was extremely hot because of the sun baking the roof all day. In addition, there was no elevator and I would place Kenny on my shoulders every time we had to go to our abode. Despite all these faults, we were ecstatic in being able to finally be alone after so many years of being separated and then living with others. Also, the three of us would go to the beach on Sundays and have a great time together.

One of my former clients in May 1947, discovering that I did not return to Muhlstock, offered me the position of controller in their lingerie manufacturing establishment at a salary of \$150.00 per week. When I informed them that I would not work on the Sabbath or Jewish Holidays and would have to leave before sunset on the eve of those occasions, I was very much surprised at their willingness to consent to my demands.

The company was a family concern consisting of a father, mother and two sons. The original family name was Slutsky and was changed to Slayton. The parents, who were elderly, were semi-active in the business and came to work every day except on Saturdays and Jewish Holidays. Mr. & Mrs. Slayton not only respected me for being an Orthodox Jew but as time went on began to like me very much as did their sons. Roy, the older one, was in charge of production and Murray was in charge of the sales department consisting of a large number of sales representatives.

There were two different companies called Siren Silk Undergarment Co, Inc. and Miss Emily Lingerie, Inc. Siren produced ladies' pajamas and Miss Emily produced slips, petticoats and nightgowns. Although, I never received great grades in my cost accounting courses in college, I always liked this phase of accounting. In fact, I attribute my success in passing the CPA exam the first time to the many questions on all four parts of the exam pertaining to cost accounting.

Perhaps, Roy detected my expertise in this field since he asked me to set up a new factory in Ephrata, Pa. for Miss Emily. The workers at this plant were almost exclusively Mennonites. The women at the sewing machines all wore caps and were dressed very modestly. A few months later, I was asked to set up another plant in Selinsgrove, Pa. for Siren. I made several trips during the year via rail to both factories. My weekly salary was now \$200.00 per week. Incidentally, our accounting firm was my former employer, George Muhlstock & Co. Perhaps, I was wrong when I thought I detected a resentment by George every month he came to conduct the audit. He no longer was as friendly to me as he was when I worked for him. I think he would have preferred that I remained with him.

Murray and I made several trips to the Pa. factories in his car and we became fast friends. When the Dodgers and Yankees played in the World Series in October 1947, he took me to my first Series game which was played in Ebbets Field. We had excellent seats and watched the Dodgers win the game in the ninth inning when Cookie Lavagetto hit a double off the right field wall knocking in two runs winning the ball game 3-2.

While working for Siren, I was building a small practice knowing that I could never work for anybody and that I must be my own boss. This necessitated my working nights and not spending much time with Kenny. Were it not for the fact that I was Orthodox and able to spend Shabbat at home, Kenny and I would be total strangers. I visited clients every Sunday so that Saturday was my true day of rest.

After one year at Siren, I informed them of my decision to leave as I wanted to work for myself and not because I was unhappy with them. They were extremely disappointed to hear this and immediately offered me a salary of \$15,000.00 per annum excluding bonuses and an opportunity to buy shares in the two corporations up to

49%. I thanked them for this generous offer and told them that I wanted to start my own accounting practice. They would not take no for an answer and Roy suggested that he speak with my father in-law to persuade him to change his mind, thinking that it was his idea that I leave. Since Mr. Friedfeld was a dress manufacturer, he would realize how attractive was their proposal and would guide me correctly.

What was amazing was the unanimous opinion of my parents and my in-laws who advised me to reject this wonderful offer and to go out on my own. I never realized at the time how much confidence they had in my ability. I will never forget my mother's advice to me when she said that I should never have business partners in my life except for the Almighty. One would suppose that poor parents such as mine would encourage their son to accept such a fabulous financial improvement in his life; to this day I am still surprised at their decision.

Around the time I left Siren, Hilda and I thought it was time to leave my parents' home and strike out on our own. We perused the real estate sections of the newspapers in April 1948 and answered an ad for an apartment in a new 2 family house at 4514 Glendale Court in the East Flatbush section of Brooklyn. The house was owned by a newly married couple, Jerry and Florence Gerber. Her father owned a retail men's clothing store on Pitkin Ave. in Brownsville. At that time, in order to get an apartment, one had to give a bonus to the landlord; in our case it was \$750.00. I believe the monthly rent was \$400-450. We occupied the second floor which was larger than the one at street level where the Gerbers lived. Our house was one of 8 newly constructed attached homes with patios.

Our apartment consisted of a kitchen and dining area, which you entered, 2 bedrooms and a living room. Our adjacent neighbors on our left were a newly married couple, Lila and Bill, who had a boxer dog as a pet. We would sit on our adjacent attached patios and have a great time together. In fact we fell in love with the dog and the feeling was mutual as he spent much time in our home, constantly having saliva running from his mouth all over our floors and furniture. Boxers are well known for this characteristic. We found an Orthodox synagogue a few blocks from our home and I immediately volunteered to audit the books pro-bono, a practice followed for many years in the various religious institutions that I joined.

On August 2, 1948, we were blessed with our second son, Dennis Mark. Ten days after his birth, the practical nurse whom we engaged for 2 weeks, Mrs. Lehmann, a refugee from Germany, noticed his penis changing color to blue which, of course, signified a loss of blood flowing to his tiny organ. It seems that the *mohel* tied the bandage much too tight. We immediately called our pediatrician and fortunately he corrected a very negligent act that occurred at the circumcision.

A much worse and more life-threatening event occurred two days later. Fortunately, Hilda went into the child's room to check on him and, lo and behold, Dennis's lips were blue and he was gasping for breath. It seems our nurse was negligent in burping him after he was fed and the milk was closing his small and narrow trachea. Since we had no time to call our regular pediatrician, we called the nearest doctor to our home, Dr. Wollowick, whom we knew from the synagogue and whose office and home was on the next block.

When we informed him of the problem over the phone, he came immediately recognizing the severity of the situation and possible consequences. I remember him driving to our home, parking his car in the middle of the street and running up the stairs to examine our sick child. His next remark completely put us in shock. He stated that only the Police or Fire Dept. Emergency Squad with oxygen could save our son. He called them and in a very short time, the Fire Dept. arrived and placed an adult oxygen mask on our child's face, not having a mask for an infant. God was good to us at that moment, as He has been to us throughout our lives, saving our new-born son's life. Dennis immediately began to cry and his lips returned to a normal pinkish color. Kenny, standing outside with his friends kept repeating "That's my brother."

One night as Hilda, Kenny and I were sitting in the living room, we heard a loud noise emanating from the kitchen. When I ran into the room I couldn't believe what met my eyes. An entire set of dishes except for 3 plates were shattered and strewn all over the kitchen floor. Mrs. Lehmann was not only a horrible nurse but a poor housekeeper besides. She placed the dishes in the closet in such a manner that if one opened the door of the closet, every item would fall out. Having a sense of humor, I took out the remaining dishes and threw them on the floor making it a complete job.

In addition, she again almost caused a calamity regarding Dennis's health. She convinced us that she was not to blame for his predicament but that he was allergic to cow's milk and that caused his problem. Fearing a reoccurrence, we would have believed anything. She, living in Washington Heights, where many German Jews lived, recommended a physician from her neighborhood who was a specialist in these types of allergy. The next evening this "professor" arrived in a chauffeur-driven limousine and after examining Dennis, he was confident that the child was allergic and should be immediately given goat's milk.

When we informed our pediatrician of this change in diet, he did not agree and told us that we were hurting the child by reducing his nourishment. After several weeks of feeding him with goat's milk, our son's loss of weight was alarming, to say the least. Finally, we realized our mistake and returned to his previous diet of cow's milk. Evidently, this experience has not hurt Dennis since, thank God, he is 6' ft-4" tall and by no means under-nourished. But, in retrospect, I must say that the first two months of his life were no picnic. It is quite possible that these events soured Hilda in having more children, although I always wanted a larger family.

Now, having our own home, Hilda and I started a practice that we followed throughout the lives of our parents. Every Sunday I would drive to Crown Heights to pick up my parents, Hilda's parents and occasionally Anne and Hilda's sisters and bring them to our home where Hilda served them lunch and dinner. This gave them an opportunity to see their grandchildren and nephews. Regardless of the weather, be it rain, a snow storm, or excessive heat, Hilda and Mac performed the Fifth Commandment of honoring their parents. We can honestly say today that we are rewarded by having our children and grandchildren honoring and loving us in the same manner that they observed in our relations to our parents.

My practice continued to grow at this time. One of the firms which I audited while working for Muhlstock decided, for some reason, to leave him and asked me if I was interested in taking over their account. That was like asking a dying man in a desert if he wanted water. This was my first big break in building a practice because the fee was \$450.00 per month, far in excess of any fee that I was earning. The client was Diamond-Walter Corp. located on East 29<sup>th</sup> St. off Madison Ave. in the lingerie district. The owners were Harry Diamond and Paul Walter, an Orthodox Jew who loved Hebrew liturgical music. Every month, when I came for the audit, he would sit opposite me at a desk and the two of us would sing liturgical melodies.

As a Xmas bonus, I received a TV set that cost close to \$500.00 and it was the first and only TV set on our block. Every Tuesday night we would watch Milton Berle on the Texaco Hour and enjoy the show immensely. Some of our neighbors would join us on these evenings.

Another client that I now obtained was Tuban Mills, Inc., a manufacturer of T shirts for the armed services. It was located on Greene Street off Canal Street. The owners of this firm, was my brother-in-law Al and Leo Rapaport, also a refugee from Hungary and quite a few years older than his partner. Leo had worked for Al's father in Europe for many years as the right hand man of the elder Moskovits. For some reason, he preferred going into business with Al instead of with the father.

The Slaytons, still hoping that I would change my mind and return, hired me as a consultant for their two plants in Pa. I would advise them as to the proper pricing of their garments and ways to increase production without incurring additional cost. After one year, they evidently saw that I was serious in building my practice and discontinued my services.

Being in the Supply Corps Naval Reserve, necessitated my retaining my knowledge of Naval regulations by taking book exams monthly at home and being recalled every summer for temporary duty for 14 days. My first recall was in July 1948 to attend the Navy Ship's Store Office in the Bush Terminal in Brooklyn. We had classes every day, other than Saturday and Sunday and would visit plants that were suppliers to the Ship's Store. One of those we visited was the Colgate-Palmolive establishment in Jersey City. It was extremely interesting to see how tooth paste and the other Colgate products were manufactured. My duty was from Aug. 16-29.

While living at Glendale Court, two young people we knew died of Hodgkins disease. At night while in bed attempting to fall asleep, we would hear our landlord, Jerry, who was no more than 25 years of age, coughing the entire night. Although we expected his demise, it hurt terribly to witness such a young person suffering and finally dying. Another young girl about 19 who was the sister of my dentist Dr. Cohen and was his assistant died around the same time as Jerry from the same illness. She was unusually pretty and full of personality and I still remember what she looked like.

Our neighbors to the right of us were the Mittlemans, a very nice couple of our age. Since they had a son the same age as Dennis, we would be mutual baby-sitters for the children. This arrangement gave the four of us an opportunity to go to a movie on a Saturday night. Actually, both mothers attended to this task while the men stayed

in their respective homes. If the husbands were needed in an emergency the wives would phone for help. As luck would have it, their son always decided to defecate in his diaper while Hilda was baby-sitting and I would get a call to assist her. Dennis always stayed clean when Charlotte baby-sat for him. We kept in touch with the Mittlemans for many years later when they moved to Florida and opened an ice cream parlor.

In 1949, a fellow congregant of my synagogue, Herman Litt, approached me with the idea of forming an accounting partnership. He was 25 years my senior and had a small practice and worked alone with no employees. He was approached by someone who was willing to give him 2 clients in fields in which Litt had no expertise or even how to handle the audits of these companies. Herman, never being aggressive, was ready to turn down this offer of two lucrative fees. Fortunately, before doing so, he contacted me and inquired if I would attempt to audit these firms.

I thought it was a good opportunity to increase my income by joining Litt in a partnership even though I was not heeding my mother's previous advice of never having a partner. I discovered a year later how wise she was in her statement. We rented an office in The Guardian Life Insurance building at 207- 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue –later called Park Avenue South – on the corner of 17<sup>th</sup> Street. As he was my senior, I suggested that we call our firm Litt & Prager. I kept this name throughout my career, even after Litt passed away.

We hired 2 accountants and a secretary to complete our staff. One of the accountants was Bernard Rubinson who stayed with me for many years. He and I had an unusually pleasant relationship.

One of the new clients was a Wall Street brokerage firm, Robert Gordon & Co. and the other, whose name escapes me now, was a public company drilling oil in Pa. I had as much experience and knowledge about the brokerage business and oil drilling as the man in the moon. However, this “minor” detail did not deter me from accepting the challenge and told Litt he could depend on me.

One must understand that in the case of the Gordon audit, besides the usual audit procedure, Securities Exchange regulations were many and quite complex. The brokerage firm had to file monthly financial statements with the N.Y. Stock Exchange divulging the financial solvency of the company. I was completely ignorant of any of the regulations but, fortunately for me, Robert and his partner brother took a liking to me and guided me through my ordeal. I remained their accountant for 14 years till 1963. They began having liquidity problems and the NYSE “suggested” that they engage a more prestigious firm with extensive brokerage experience.

As regards the drilling company, which I audited jointly with Litt, again there were unique factors that an auditor and tax preparer had to be familiar with. I did quite a bit of research and learned the business “on the job” so that I wouldn't “foul up” the books or the tax returns. An important fact to know in accounting for drilling companies was the deduction of depletion on their tax returns. These two events illustrate that never in my 63 years of practicing accounting did I ever refuse to accept a client because of lack of expertise in the field of endeavor. I was blessed with self-confidence which has been a boon to me professionally and in every facet of my life.

The president of this company was a man with no business ethics. After 10 months of handling this account, we decided to resign as his accountants. A few months later, we received a phone call from the office of the Federal Attorney requesting the two of us to report to them and to bring with us our letterheads and stationery. I immediately suspected what our ex-client had done. As soon as we arrived, the Federal Attorney, who was a woman, showed us a financial statement on paper whose letterhead read our firm's name, typed and not printed. I remember responding to her that we were not that poor that we couldn't afford to have our letterheads printed. Several minutes later, she stated that she knew it was not prepared by us but had to interview us to confirm her suspicion. Subsequently, this crook was convicted and received a jail sentence.

After one year, I realized that I was doing all the work, bringing in new clients while Herman was sitting in the office most of the time and not bringing in new revenue. I made an appointment to visit him at his home at night to discuss my dilemma. He lived a few blocks from my home and I didn't want to have our conversation while others were present in the office.

As soon as I arrived, he surprised me by telling me that he knew the reason for my visit. I then told him that our "real" partnership had to end and that we should continue the name, office and employees. However, I would retain my clients and he would continue to service his clients. We would share the expenses of the office i.e. rent, supplies and secretary. Whoever employed one of the accountants would pay him. We maintained that modus operandi for many years until his retirement.

## CHAPTER XXIV

One of the worst snow storms N.Y. City ever suffered occurred in the winter of 1948 while living on Glendale Court. I awoke one Saturday morning and could not look out of the kitchen window which faced the porch. Snow covered the entire window and porch reaching the roof of the house. I tried to open the door leading to the porch but was unable to do so. Making matters worse, poor Kenny was suffering from a bad case of bronchitis and running a fairly high fever. Incidentally, both children suffered from this illness for many years into their teen ages. Hilda and I knew that calling our pediatrician was useless because no cars could battle this storm.

Fortunately, I knew that across the street lived a physician. I had never met him or his wife but that didn't deter me from requesting his help in an emergency. I called him on the phone, related our problem and he informed me that he was an anesthesiologist and hadn't treated patients for respiratory ailments since his days as an intern. He was a captain in the Army serving in Europe during the war. Since the Army needed anesthesiologists badly, they assigned this duty to him.

Our Father in Heaven must have shined His grace upon us when our neighbor consented to come across the street to examine and treat Kenny. In order to allow him to enter, I had to shovel all the snow blocking the entrance door and when I finally succeeded in my task, I phoned him to come over. How he was able to fight the very high snow drifts still amazes me. When he finally made it and entered our home, he introduced himself as Sidney Cohen, whose wife Andrea and his daughter, Miriam, 3 years of age, were the rest of his family. He stated that Kenny had a bad case of bronchitis and since all drug stores were closed he, fortunately, had some sample antibiotic drugs which would help in lowering the fever.

A close friendship developed between us and lasted for many years even after we both relocated to other homes. Discovering that I was an accountant, he asked me to prepare his income tax returns which I did for about 30 years. One night as I was preparing his returns, he was sitting in my apartment and suddenly received an emergency call from the Williamsburg General Hospital. He and a few other doctors owned the hospital.

A young pregnant woman who had a heart condition was in her seventh month and necessitated an immediate Caesarian section delivery in order to safeguard the mother's health and that of the children, she was carrying twins. I was shocked when he asked me if I would accompany him and view the delivery.

After arriving at the hospital, located in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, we immediately went to "scrub up" and change our clothing to surgical robes, scuffs to cover our feet and surgical masks. This was excellent in my case because I and, perhaps Sidney as well, didn't want the other doctors to know that a CPA was a member of the team. Always wanting to be a doctor in my youth, this was going to be an experience that I would never forget and, as you can see, I never did.

When we entered the operating room, I was shocked to see a young woman on the table, almost completely nude. She had a very large abdomen containing two living creatures and had a blue circle in the center of which was

an X marked thereon. Two surgeons, one on each side of her, were covered with large rubber aprons over their gowns. Sidney went to his place handling the anesthesia. I and the patient's obstetrician, whose name was Dr. Berkowitz, stood a few feet behind the operating table.

After the surgeons made incisions on the woman's lower abdomen, I then realized why they required the rubber aprons. A great amount of water gushed out onto the floor and all over the surgeons, accompanied by quite an amount of blood. The mother was delivering two boys who were immediately placed in incubators. After a few moments, it was discovered that one of the children was born dead and hope was expressed that the other would survive. Unfortunately, Sidney informed me a day later that he too did not live beyond a few hours. Even though I did not know the mother, I felt awful on hearing this news.

Since Dr. Berkowitz was an Orthodox Jew and Williamsburg was the home of a large number of Chassidim, especially those who were followers of the Satmar Rebbi, his obstetric practice consisted primarily of the wives of these Orthodox Jews. Years later, when he and I met at many Chassidic functions, I having many of them as clients, he would always address me as Dr. Prager. I never corrected him as I didn't want to get Sidney in trouble for having a non-physician present at a surgical procedure.

Several months later, while I was auditing the books of my friend, Artie Newman, who was a partner in Newman-Perlman a firm in the diamond center, one of the diamond polishers asked me if I would prepare his tax return. I, of course, agreed as I wasn't turning down any prospective clients.

When I returned from the Navy and was still living with my in-laws, I prayed at the *shtiebel* of the Koshenitzer Rabbi, Rabbi Hopstein, on President Street. My father-in-law was President of the congregation and, while I was away, would take Kenny with him on Saturday mornings to this synagogue. During my 10 days of leave after returning home, I still had to wear my Naval uniform. When I was given the honor of chanting the *haftorah* – portion of the Prophets- on my first visit to the *shtiebel*, I heard many of the congregants, who did not know me, remark that they were surprised at this young man who looked like a *goy* perform so well. This was where I met Artie and we became good friends, together with his wife Rachel. Discovering that I was an accountant, he engaged me to be his auditor and tax preparer. Our relationship lasted till his death in 1997.

The young man, who lost his twins at birth, came to my home on Glendale Court with all the information necessary for the preparation of his income tax returns. When I perused his medical bills, I was taken aback at the bills he submitted; Drs. Cohen and Berkowitz and Williamsburg General Hospital were among those listed. Immediately, it struck a bell in my mind. To confirm my suspicion, I asked him what caused these medical expenses. Sure enough, he was the husband of the young lady who had undergone the Caesarian. That was quite a coincidence. Fortunately, two years later, she gave birth to a normal boy.

I met my first tax client in 1947 when I started my practice. Naturally, I couldn't afford an office or a secretary; therefore, I engaged a telephone answering service at 60 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. It still is a very prestigious building and I used that address on my stationery. Miss Bayworth, who ran this service, took a liking to me and

volunteered to introduce me to her clients who possibly needed an accountant. One of her clients was Arthur Reik, who was starting a wholesale diamond business and also couldn't afford an office. It is amazing how many future clients I obtained from this one recommendation.

He induced his father, Theodor Reik, to leave his accountant and engage me for tax work. Dr. Reik was a psychoanalyst and the only living disciple of Freud. He wrote many books in his field and gave me some of them as a gift. He introduced me to a psychiatrist whose tax returns I prepared for many years starting in 1950. I have never met a wierder person than him, who was supposed to treat people with mental problems.

He lived in the East 80s off Fifth Avenue, living in one apartment while his wife and son lived in the same building in another apartment. My visits to him were always in the evening and I always found him in bed. I never inquired why he was never dressed and resting in bed. Very often, he had a young lady in his bedroom and he always introduced me as a friend and as an FBI agent. Your guess is as good as mine why he did this.

In order to prepare his tax returns, I had to audit all his checks for the year and I saw that many of the payees were the names of women. Therefore, I assumed that they were either nurses who tended to his medical needs or young ladies who tended to his other needs. Either way, it was not my business to ask for an explanation and perhaps embarrass him. I was his accountant till 1969 when he died. Hilda and I both went to the funeral which was held at Frank E. Campbell Funeral Home on Madison Avenue and 81<sup>st</sup> Street. Although he was a Jew, I am quite sure he never practiced his religion. Consequently, no Rabbi or any other member of the clergy was present.

Through him, I became the accountant of the N.Y. Psychiatric Center in 1963, whose head was Dr. Scanlon. In 1966 the name was changed to the Scanlon Medical Group until 1970 when they disbanded and formed the Murray Hill Classes which lasted till 1972.

I acquired two additional accounts through the good graces of Arthur Reik; one was his father in-law who was in the import business and the other was the husband of his ex-wife, whose business I can't recall. Arthur prospered as time went on, but, unfortunately, he passed away at a young age in 1970 and his wife, Mignon, continued the business from an office on Fifth Avenue and 49<sup>th</sup> Street in the Diamond Center. Believe it or not, she is still my client. Without doubt, the Reiks are my clients of the longest duration, spanning 56 years

In 1948, my father in-law introduced me to Bea Fuchs, a customer of his who ran a dress shop on Coney Island Avenue in Brooklyn and she engaged me as her accountant. She persuaded her nephew, Paul Gilbert to hire me as his accountant. He operated a dress shop on Pitkin Avenue in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn.

Bea, several years later, formed a partnership with Helen S. in a retail dress establishment in Paterson, N.J. where Helen lived. I must now relate an interesting event that occurred while I was their accountant. I performed all my monthly accounting duties in the evening at my retail clients since during the day there wasn't any room for me to work while business was going on. On one of my monthly visits, only Bea was present and she informed me that Helen wasn't feeling well.

While I was working, I received a phone call from Helen who was a divorcee, to please visit her at her home after concluding my work. She wished to discuss several matters pertaining to the business. When I arrived at her home, I found her lying in bed wrapped in a flimsy negligee and exposing a lot more flesh than I had anticipated. After several minutes, she began to disrobe very slowly as a stripper would do. Now, Helen was no spring chicken being slightly under or over 50; however, she still possessed a very well-kept and attractive figure. Trying to be very business-like, I inquired what concerns she had pertaining to the store.

Being extremely disappointed at my reaction to her obvious attempt at seduction, she informed me that she was tired and would discuss what was on her mind on my next visit to the store. I then compared myself to Joseph in the Bible and was very proud of my not succumbing to temptation. Of course, that was the last time I was invited to her home.

Another account that I acquired through my father-in-law a year later, was Harby Dress Corp. located on Seventh Avenue in the garment center. In those days it was very common for a salesman and production man, i.e. cutter or patternmaker to form a partnership and become dress mfrs. They very rarely needed more than \$10,000.00 cash to get started, if their credit standing was good. They could then get a bank loan for another 10 or 15 thousand and they were in business. Almost every dress mfr. would assign their accounts receivable to factors, receiving an advance of 75-80% of the invoices and be charged a negotiated commission for this service. This amount would vary between 1/2 to 2 % depending on the credit rating of the assignor and the volume factored.

The two stockholders of Harby were Archie Friedman, a former salesman of Pearl Dress and Paul Simon, who was related to Hilda. Unfortunately, a few years after starting the business, Archie contracted shingles which affected his eye sight and, to some extent, his mental capacity. Consequently, in 1955 the firm dissolved. He asked me to help him and become a partner with him in a newly-formed dress company. I had a great deal of sympathy for him and, in addition, felt a need to repay him for the six years that I was his accountant. Unfortunately, since I was then traveling to Brazil twice a year for extended periods of time, I was not able to monitor the business as much as I would have if I were home all the time. In 18 months, I lost my investment of \$18,000 and we were out of business. I never regretted helping him and would do it again as it was a matter of principle to me.

The year 1949 was a successful year in expanding my practice. Bea Fuchs introduced me to her cousin Mike Marton, a refugee from Hungary, who just formed Quality Wholesale Veal Co., in the Washington Meat Market located on West 12<sup>th</sup> Street. His two partners were Siegfried (Ziggy) Rosenberger, a German refugee and David Marcus, another Hungarian refugee.

An interesting side bar is worth now mentioning. Since veal was always expensive, my clients suggested a few years later that I buy a side of veal at their cost and they would cut it up in pieces which I would transport to my home in my car. We bought a large trash can, filled it with cold water and then soaked the meat to remove the blood. After the soaking, we placed the veal on a large ping-pong table which we had in the basement of our home on 27<sup>th</sup> Street. Hilda would then kosher the meat by pouring salt thereon, an additional requirement for the removal

of blood. Although we were really saving money, the laborious task was much too difficult. After a year or so, we discontinued this practice.

Ziggy died in 1976 and the surviving partners continued till 1989 when Mike left the business and Dave continued as the sole owner. Incidentally, I still prepare the tax returns of Mike and Ziggy's widow, Hilda. Thus, my relationship with this client has lasted for 54 years.

My client Diamond Walter Corp. introduced me to three future clients during 1949. The first was the brother of Paul Walter who was the sole owner of Walter Sign & Display Co. This company created many of the highway signs in the metropolitan area. Their plant was in Woodside, L.I. I remained his accountant till 1960 when he started to have liquidity problems and started extensive borrowing. The lenders, in order to protect their loans, preferred that their accountants replace me.

The second client was Patricia Buckling Co. who buckled lingerie shoulder straps. The firm was located in the East Bronx and was owned by Joseph and Josephine Di Martino, a married couple. Their daughter, Patricia was born a few months after Kenny and Josephine constantly wanted to make a *shidach* (marriage match) with our family. Since they were Italian Catholics and not very devout, intermarriage was no problem as far as they were concerned. In fact, many years later when Patricia was married to a lovely Italian boy, we were invited to the wedding, catered by a kosher caterer in Pelham, N.Y. where the Di Martinos lived.

There were several other Jewish guests since they had many friends and business acquaintances of our faith. The caterer, being told by the hosts that we were Orthodox, came to our table and advised us who the *mashgiach* (kashrus supervisor) was and that he never served non-kosher food at his establishment. Despite his claims, we asked for a cold fish plate.

Being a rabid Dodger fan, I can never forget that I was present at this client when "the shot heard around the world" occurred. Of course, I am referring to the home run hit by Bobby Thomson off Ralph Branca in the ninth inning of a playoff game for the National League pennant in 1951. What made this blow so dramatic was the fact that the Dodgers had a supposedly insurmountable lead during September. My grandson, Joshua who is a staff reporter of the Wall St. Journal, wrote a very extensive and interesting article in that paper pertaining to this event claiming that Leo Durocher, the manager of the N.Y. Giants, resorted to stealing the catcher's signs to the pitcher resulting in his team overtaking the Dodger's very big lead.

The article was so good that it was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. Soon after, one of the largest and prestigious publishing firms suggested that he write a book on this subject and, of course, he accepted.

His employer, the Wall St. Journal, relieved him of his duties for a period of 2 years allowing him to write the book.

During my tenure as the Di Martino's accountant, they purchased 2 apartment buildings so I now had 2 additional accounts. Unfortunately, in 1961 Joe passed away at a young age from cancer and Josephine continued the business till 1976.

The third account that I obtained through Diamond-Walter, was one of their contractors. Almost all dress and lingerie mfrs. did not perform any sewing operations as that would require a great deal of space for the sewing machines and rents were quite high in the garment and lingerie districts. Consequently, the leased premises were utilized primarily for patternmaking, cutting of the fabrics, showrooms and office. In addition, the payroll would have been greatly increased by employing seamstresses and the concomitant problem of employee sickness, lateness and maternity.

Thus, it was more feasible to use contractors who were located outside of Manhattan and mostly in surrounding cities and states. This client was Harold Jacobson whose plant was in Westchester. I was his accountant and friend for 27 years. He and his wife, Laura, and Hilda and I attended each other's happy occasions and I sorely missed him when he committed suicide in 1976.

A year previously, he came to my home without Laura and I suspected that something was wrong. He confided to me that he was very depressed and I immediately suggested that he waste no time in seeing a psychiatrist who would help him with medication and counseling. I, knowing that he had no financial problems and had wonderful, loving children, asked him if he and Laura were getting along. He stated that she was a doll and she was not the cause of his condition. This episode taught me that the mind is terribly complex and why therapists, in many cases, cannot ascertain the reasons for depression and mental illness.

In Sept. 1949, I received orders from the Navy to report for my 2 week training in the Supply Corp. I was ordered to report to the Supervisory Cost Inspector for the Eastern Area in Brooklyn, N.Y. I was sent to help in the conduct of an audit being performed at the Sperry Gyroscope Co. in L.I. City. This supplier had cost-plus contracts with the Navy and the task of the Cost Inspectors were to assure that the costs were not illegally inflated.

In fact, Harry Truman owed his being nominated for the Presidency due to his being chairman of a Senatorial committee monitoring the military contracts based on cost-plus. I was required to wear my uniform while conducting the audit and I really enjoyed the two weeks that I spent at Sperry.

Kenny, reaching the age of six, was ready for his entrance into his academic life. We heard about the Yeshiva Rambam, which was a fairly new Orthodox day school located on Kings Highway near Ocean Parkway. Since it was newly formed, its tuition was quite reasonable. As we were still living on Glendale Court, Kenny had to be transported a fairly long distance to and from school via bus operated by the Yeshiva. On the very first day of his attendance, Hilda and I were frantically awaiting the arrival of our son. The children were discharged at 5 p.m. and when I arrived home from the office at 6.30, Kenny was still not at home. Hilda tried calling the Yeshiva many times to no avail since every employee had already left.

He finally arrived at 8 p.m. and was the only passenger on the bus. As soon as the bus dropped off Kenny, it sped away; the driver fearing the release of our pent-up anger. Naturally, we wanted to know the reason for this terrible inefficiency in transporting the students. The school's apology was that it was the first day of school and the driver was unfamiliar with the addresses of his passengers and since Kenny lived the farthest from the school, he

was the last one discharged. Also, since we lived on a one-street name. The driver kept looking for Glendale Court which was only one block. We lost confidence in the Yeshiva's administration, and placed Kenny in the Yeshiva of Flatbush the next day.

## CHAPTER XXV

Our lease expired on Glendale Court in August 1950 and we were not interested in renewing it. On one Sunday afternoon, all four of us went driving to look for a new home. We decided to drive along Kings Highway where new high-rise apartment buildings were being built. About one mile from our home we noticed 3 large new apt. buildings spanning 3 blocks- 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> Streets. Each 4 story building faced Kings Highway. We were delighted to see a very large and beautiful synagogue in the last stages of construction on the corner of Nostrand Ave. (30<sup>th</sup> St.) and the Highway. Also, we noticed the new home of Yeshiva Rambam on the corner of 31<sup>st</sup> St. and the Highway. Although Kenny was attending Yeshiva of Flatbush, we felt it was good to know that if we moved to those new buildings that we just saw, it would be only 2 or 3 blocks from his new school, if we desired to change schools.

That very afternoon, we decided to sign a lease in 2705 Kings Highway and started a 46 year period of remaining in that immediate area. Our apartment was on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, not necessitating walking up as there was an elevator. The apt. consisted of 2 bedrooms, a living room and kitchen, all facing 27<sup>th</sup> St.

On August 24, two weeks after moving into our new home, I visited my father on President St. after work. He had been ailing for a few weeks complaining of feeling very weak. He had always suffered from high blood pressure, paying a double premium on his life insurance policy. Despite this infirmity, I do not remember my father ever staying home from work due to his health. My mother kept pressuring him from the age of 65 to retire and he always refused but finally consented to do so at the age of 70. His favorite expression was: "All my enemies should have to sit all day and stare at his wife," which belied his true feelings towards my mother.

Although he was not a very big wage earner, he disliked sitting home when he felt he was capable of working. He spent his evenings and Sundays in reading the Yiddish newspapers and listening to cantorial music. At the time of this visit, he was 72 years of age. He had been hospitalized a few weeks previously for a few days, mainly for tests. His doctor was not alarmed at his physical condition and advised bed rest for a week or so.

In the midst of our conversation, my father, very calmly, told me to open a drawer in his room in which were his insurance policy and other papers he wanted me to peruse. You can just imagine my reaction to his request. I blurted out in Yiddish: "Papa, what are you talking about? You have no rhyme or reason for these thoughts. You are not that sick to be concerned about your papers."

About 15 minutes later, I started to hear gurgling sounds in his throat and became extremely frightened because I had never heard a human emitting such sounds. I immediately went into the kitchen to tell my mother that I am going to call a friend of mine Dr. Kroop, whom I met 20 years ago when we lived on Hart St. He also went to Boys High and since his age was between Murray's and mine, he knew us both. He was now the chief cardiologist of a small hospital on Utica Ave. which name escapes me.

When I told him over the phone about the gurgling sounds, he practically flew the few blocks from the hospital to Papa's home. As soon as he examined my father and saw his ankles swollen with edema, he remarked

that he should have been called much earlier and didn't think Papa would survive the ambulance ride to Beth El Hospital, a half mile away.

Mama and I rode in the back of the ambulance with Papa while Dr. Kroop sat in the front with the driver. I was instructed to hold the oxygen mask over my father's face until we arrived at the hospital. While I was doing this, I somehow felt that Papa expired since he stopped moving or showed any signs of life. Unfortunately, I was correct in my assumption because when we arrived at the hospital, Dr. Kroop pronounced him dead on arrival, noting the cause of death due to heart failure caused by a lifetime of hypertension.

On hearing this pronouncement, Mama and I burst into loud, uncontrollable sobs. Mama took his hands and began kissing them at the same time exclaiming: "These are the hands that labored for me all his life." In retrospect, what amazes me to this day that while they were married I never saw my parents kiss. I went home with Mama and then notified the Wishkover Society where my parents had been members almost from the time they came to America. They handled all funeral and burial arrangements for their members. The undertaker was Blau Funeral Parlor on the Lower East Side and the cemetery was Beth David in Elmont, N.Y.

When the person in charge at the Society called me back advising me where and when the funeral would take place, I called my brother who was living in Schenectady to inform him of Papa's death and the details of the funeral service. I then called all our close relatives and friends. Anne, who was living with my parents and was out for the evening was ignorant of all that was happening. When she came home, she created quite a scene; you must realize that none of us knew how sick Papa was, not being told the extent of my father's illness by his Society's doctors.

Upon receiving my call, Murray and Gert immediately left their home and drove to Brooklyn to join us in our mourning. The Jewish religion calls the mourner from the time of death to the time of burial an *onan* who, if a male, is not permitted to put on *tefillin* (phylacteries) on the morning before burial. He is also prohibited from saying the *shachris* (morning) prayers. None of us slept a wink that night and, in fact, didn't even get undressed.

The funeral service was held around 11 a.m. and when I entered the room where my father's coffin was resting on a stand, I burst out in sobs that remained with me throughout the service. I was literally inconsolable. I did not react in this manner at Irene's funeral and never reacted similarly at my mother's or Anne's death which occurred later on. Unlike many others, I have never gained any solace during the seven days of *shiva* (mandatory sitting on a stool and being visited by friends and relatives who wish to console the mourners).

There is no doubt in my mind that these good people mean well when they enter the home of the mourners; however, I disliked being a captive audience for 14 hours a day for an entire week, excluding Saturday. Most of the conversation that emanated from these well-meaning persons turned me off. "How old was the deceased?" "What did he or she die from?" "How long was he or she ill?" "Did the deceased suffer a great deal before death?" Imagine being asked these questions by almost every visitor hour after hour, day after day. Not being a very patient person, it would have been best if I created a tape and played it when these questions arose.

I found, however, that there is one benefit in sitting *shiva* and that is when there are no visitors, and the immediate family discuss the life of the departed with reminiscing incidents filled with love and admiration. This bonds the survivors into a stronger family unit.

Saying *kaddish* (the prayer for the dead) for my father created at times great hardship. During the winter, there were several times that a *minyan* (quorum of 10 males) was not obtained; especially when there were snow storms. The synagogue that I joined was the Kingsway Jewish Center, the new edifice that I referred to previously. Since the construction was not yet completed, our services were held in the old building on the corner of 29<sup>th</sup> St. Since *kaddish* had to be chanted 3 times a day –morning, noon and night-, very often it was difficult for me to find a synagogue near the client that I was visiting that day. Therefore, there were times that I missed performing this obligation. Knowing my father, I always felt that he would say to me on these occasions, “Mendel, don’t let it bother you. I know you tried your best.” For one year, I could not cease crying for my father. In fact, Hilda and Kenny remember to this day how much I missed Papa.

When a close relative dies – parent, sibling, spouse or child – a Jew is obligated to come to the synagogue to recite the *kaddish*. This is not, as most Jews believe, a prayer for the dead but is rather a prayer of praise to God. So, even in our grief, we are to stand up in a *minyan* to declare our continuing faith in God and that we accept His divine plan without complaint.

We recite *kaddish* for 11 months, from the time of the funeral until 1 month before the first *yahrzeit*- the first anniversary of the death. Why 11 months and not the full year? Tradition teaches that in the year following death our loved one’s soul is being judged. Enough good deeds earn eternal reward; too many evil deeds guarantees eternal punishment. So, we learn that each time we recite *kaddish* we are adding to our loved one’s “mitzvah points,” earning additional merit for the one who might be deficient.

Yet no one could be so evil that it would take a full year of earning more merit to achieve *gan edin* (Paradise). Eleven months should be sufficient for even the most needing soul. Thus, we recite *kaddish* for 11 months, confident that our assistance in saying this prayer has been enough to assure that our loved one will enter eternal Eden.

A few weeks after we moved to 2705 K.H., we observed the High Holidays and went to pray at K.J.C. That is when we befriended Anita and Jack Walker. Jack had graduated from dental school and, to the best of my knowledge, never pursued that profession. He went into business with Anita’s father, Icko Wakmann, who was an importer of expensive Swiss watches. Jack, having a beautiful singing voice and being a graduate of Yeshiva University, became the cantor at K.J.C. This position was a side occupation as his time during the week was spent at his business in the diamond center. Anita, a very beautiful and charming young lady emigrated with her family from Portugal. They had one daughter at that time, Marilyn a.k.a. Malkele. I will be relating to them as I write since they are one of our closest friends to this day.

The other couple who became our life-long friends was Birdie and Bob Judd. When I entered the *shul* on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, a vision of loveliness appeared before me. As I was standing for one of the prayers, I couldn't help but notice a stunning, classy brunette in the woman's section wearing a large red hat. I know God has forgiven me for this trespass since He was the Creator of this beauty. Incidentally, I prefer to pray in an Orthodox synagogue because I know my weakness to temptation. Sitting with a woman next to me whose dress or skirt is over her knees or the aroma emanating from her perfume doesn't add to my *kavona* (spirituality).

After the services, I, not being shy, introduced myself to her and she then introduced her husband Bob to me. Bob was a very tall, handsome young man with a great deal of personality. He was a lawyer who practiced his profession for a very short time and then went into business with his brother, Phil. They repaired and sold ticket machines for theatres and other establishments employing these machines. After several years, Bob went to work for Zenith as a salesman. He was an excellent speaker and for many years conducted all the appeals at K.J.C. He was several times elected as Chairman of the Board at Kingsway. They have 2 daughters, Lenore and Pauline. Unfortunately, Birdie died a few years ago and Bob is not in very good health as I am writing. They were only a few years older than Hilda and I. Bob is still our close friend; however, he is in poor health and is living with Lenore, his loving daughter in Maryland.

After the High Holidays, while awaiting the completion of the new K.J.C., I continued to pray on Saturdays and Holidays in the old *shul*. What comes to my mind, as I am writing this, was the attire that the officers wore. Each of them was garbed in dark gray jackets, striped trousers, striped gray tie and a homburg hat. This clothing is what is worn by males at an afternoon wedding. In addition, I was amazed to discover on my first Kol Nidre night that most of the male congregants wore tuxedos. On the following morning, some wore a *kittel* (a long, white robe denoting purity).

The officers were men of wealth and were mainly responsible for the construction of the new building. None of them were Orthodox in practice and, when I was more familiar with them, inquired why they were members and strong supporters of an Orthodox synagogue. Every response was the same: "I grew up in an Orthodox home and would not feel comfortable in a non-traditional *shul*." In fact, some of them would go into their business establishments, play golf or go shopping immediately after attending Sabbath services.

Kingsway became a house of worship in 1928 in a store on Nostrand Avenue without a rabbi. The sexton's duties included being the *baal tefilah* (leading the congregation in prayer) and the *baal kore* (reader of the Torah). Several years later, as the membership grew, a small building on Kings Highway on the corner of 29<sup>th</sup> street was built to house the new synagogue. Towards the end of World War II, Rabbi Samuel Chill was engaged as the first full-time spiritual leader. He was 2 or three years older than I and had attended Yeshiva Torah Vadaath. Hilda and I became very friendly with him and his wife, Hilda. We ate *Shalosh Seudas* (the third meal) on many Saturday afternoons in each of our homes. Also, we attended many Broadway shows, concerts and the opera with them.

Since he was Orthodox, he moved Kingsway more to the right than it had been previously. When I was elected President in 1970, I was the first Sabbath observer ever elected to this office. After my term of office in 1974, which also was a “first” since none of my predecessors was elected for two terms, every one of my successors kept the Sabbath holy. What was surprising was the fact that none of the officers or congregants disapproved of Rabbi Chill’s action. When he retired in 1972 and made *aliya* to Israel, I, being in my second year of the Presidency of K.J.C., was able to grant him a substantial severance pay in addition to his pension. When we visited Hilda in Israel after his death, she thanked me profusely.

I remember quite well the names of the “big guns” who ran Kingsway at the time I became a member. The President was Harry Burros, who owned the Burros Bag Co. located at the foot of the Manhattan Bridge on the Brooklyn side. When I rode to work on the subway and traveled over the bridge, I would feel good to see a tall smoke stack with the words “Burros” painted thereon. He and his lovely wife Ruth were fine people whom I admired.

The Chairman of the Board was Phil Fein, a very short and portly man who was a manufacturer of children’s clothing. At every meeting, he made his presence known, not being a shy person. I still remember his removing his stuffed wallet from his pocket at board meetings, patting it several times with his hand and exclaiming: “Boyes, this is what counts.” His wife, Ida, was the direct opposite of her husband as she was very unassuming.

Mr. Cohen, who was an account vice-president of the National Safety Bank where my father in-law had his accounts, introduced me to his son, Frank who owned a printing business, Brite Printing Co. on East 24<sup>th</sup> St; this was my only new account in 1950 and lasted till 1988.

In December, the General Accounting Office in Washington finally settled my naval accounts while being disbursing officer of the Bollinger. Of all the millions I disbursed over my signature, they discovered a \$12.00 overpayment which they wrote off. Being a very “humble” person, I certainly don’t want to “toot my own horn” but I think that’s a damn good record. In fact, from the date of my discharge till the Korean War, I received many letters from Admirals in the Supply Corps requesting that I return to active duty; unfortunately, I discarded all of the correspondence.

Our office lease on Fourth Ave. expired in April 1951 and we signed a five year lease at 15 Park Row, across from City Hall. The office, which was on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor, contained an entrance vestibule and 4 rooms; one each for Herman, a secretary, our staff and myself. Having a slight case of claustrophobia, I selected a suite whose rooms all faced the front of the building and having a direct view of City Hall Park and City Hall.

Several years later Hilda and I met Mitzi and Jack Avner at Camp Winsocki, where both our boys and their 3 children attended. He was an insurance broker and, since I liked him, I recommended him to many of my clients and his income soared as a result.

We became very close friends, vacationing together and spending many weekends in each other's homes. Jack suggested that I rent another room that became vacant adjacent to our suite so that he could become my tenant; I obliged immediately and he remained in my office for many years.

Our office at 15 Park Row was owned by two brothers; one of whom was more active than the other. After the first two lease renewals-ten years-, the active landlord would negotiate the lease with me and I always felt he was reasonable. After ten years went by and the third lease was ready for renewal, an employee was sent to negotiate with me. Liking the owner and feeling that it was mutual, I stated that I would only deal with him and him alone. Incredible as it may seem, for the next twenty years, all leases were handled between him and me. He told me that I was the only one of all his tenants in all the office buildings he owned that he personally dealt with. We always had a short session in our dealings and he was always reasonable with his terms.

In the spring of 1951, the new Kingsway Jewish Center was ready for occupancy; the old area being converted to a catering hall. The new edifice not only consisted of a large, beautiful sanctuary and a nice sized *beth medrosh* (sanctuary for weekday prayers and Torah study) but also an Olympic size indoor swimming pool, a very large gymnasium, a sauna, a spacious auditorium, several offices and meeting rooms.

The main sanctuary was reached by walking up around 16 steps and the entrance had 6 wide doors leading to a very wide hall. On each side of the hall were 5 steps leading to another door which led into the sanctuary. The interior was built in the same manner as the British Parliament, with a long and wide center containing nothing other than a stand where the Cantor would lead the congregation in prayer. Also, the sexton would chant the portion of the Torah from this stand. Those who were called to the Torah to recite the blessings would reach the stand on either side of it and walk up 2 steps.

The pews on both sides of the sanctuary were elevated, each row one step higher than the other. The first 4 rows on each side were reserved for the men and the next 3 higher rows were for the women. The separation for the 2 sections was a brass bar covered with a velvet fabric.

As the years went by, this separation became higher and higher as modern Orthodoxy drifted to the right. For many years, the congregants had to enter from the top doors, having to walk by the women's section. When there was an influx of new members years later, who were more *medakdik* (stringent), this practice was discontinued and people entered through hall doors and walked in the center to their respective seats.

In the front of the sanctuary stood a large, magnificent *aran kodesh* (holy ark) where many Torah scrolls resided. On the left side, facing the ark, the Rabbi and the Cantor sat and on the right, sat the President and 2 Vice-Presidents. What is hard to believe, is that this million dollar synagogue was constructed by a membership of 220 families and that figure in today's dollars would be beyond belief. Of course, one must realize that this occurred a few years after the war when people became quite wealthy.

Kenny was now 8 years of age and was completing 2 years of schooling at the Yeshiva of Flatbush when we received a phone call from Mr. Braverman, the Principal and executive director of Flatbush. He informed us that

beginning with the next year of registration every parent would be assessed, in addition to the tuition, a fairly large sum for the annual dinner and journal.

Since I was not expanding my practice to any great extent, I was finding it difficult to make ends meet. Rent and tuition were taking its toll financially. I therefore told him that this would necessitate my taking Kenny out of Flatbush and register him in another school. I really expected him to say that he would consider my financial situation and remove this obligation as I was paying full tuition which, I was sure, not all parents were doing at the time.

Always being a very proud person, a trait that I inherited from my mother, I did not ask him to change his mind. God works in wondrous ways.

Several years later when Kenny was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Yeshiva Rambam and was selected to be the valedictorian at the commencement exercises, the same Mr. Braverman, on learning of Kenny's high scholastic achievements, again phoned me. He sounded completely different than in his previous call, this time requesting instead of demanding.

He wanted Kenny to enter the newly-established Flatbush High School and I would not have to pay any tuition. He was looking for students with high elementary school grades to enhance the reputation of his new school and, consequently, have them accepted into prestigious colleges. This strategy would definitely be a great benefit to Mr. Braverman personally. You can just imagine how delighted I was in turning him down.

Because of Mr. Braverman's demand, we registered Kenny back in Yeshiva Rambam. Fortunately, the school relocated to a nice building on Kings Highway at 31<sup>st</sup> Street, 4 blocks from our apartment. Kenny was now able to walk to school, assuring no foul-up in bus transportation that caused his switch to Flatbush two years previously.

When I went to the Yeshiva to make the financial arrangements regarding tuition, I met Rabbi Isadore Lefkowitz, the Principal and Executive Director. He was an attorney who didn't practice law and a rabbi who had no pulpit. His desire in life was to help in the perpetuation of *chinuch* (Hebrew education). He loved being in daily contact with young children and I never heard him raise his voice or displaying anger at an unruly child.

We remained friends for exactly 50 years. He passed away while living in the same condo in Florida where we owned an apartment. In the last 2 years prior to his death he suffered from dementia and I purposely sat next to him at the morning and evening prayer services so that I could turn the *siddur* (prayer book) pages for him. I believe that he was able to pray without the book as I could see him moving his lips and I could recognize some of the words he was saying. He was one of the finest gentlemen that I have ever known. There is a Yiddish saying: "*tzu Gott und zu leit*" ("to God and to man") and he personified that throughout his life.

I cannot recall whether it was on a Saturday or Holiday when I noticed a very handsome and classy couple around my age entering the *shul*. I kept staring at them throughout the service. At the conclusion of the prayers,

Hilda and I introduced ourselves to them or they introduced themselves to us; I don't remember which is correct. They, subsequently, told us that they too noticed us and wanted to meet us.

That was the beginning of a 51 year warm and close friendship that exists to this day. I am referring to Sylvia and Dave Lupkin. They were members of Madison Jewish Center, a Conservative synagogue located one block away from K.J.C. For some reason they were disenchanted with Madison and wanted to experiment with an Orthodox *shul*.

Dave, at that time was a partner in Daving Paper Products together with Irving Strassman, a brother of Sylvia. Her other three brothers, Sol, Sid and Hy were minor partners. The company purchased bales of cardboard and cut and lined them to the specifications of their customers who were in the advertising and display business.

The Lupkins have two sons, Stanley, an attorney who was in the Manhattan District Attorney's office for several years, then became N.Y.C. Commissioner of Investigation for a while. Presently, he has his own successful private practice. Their other son, Joseph, upon graduating from college, entered his father's business and, when Dave retired at a young age, succeeded his father at the helm of Daving. Based on what Dave told me, Joseph expanded the business and made it more profitable than ever. Today, Joseph is also retired at a very young age and his son, Lawrence took over Daving.

Knowing that I was a CPA, both Yeshiva Rambam and K.J.C. asked me to audit their books and prepare annual financial statements. Of course, I didn't refuse and naturally my services were pro-bono. In addition, over the coming years, I prepared the income tax returns of numerous rabbis without charging them a fee.

At Kingsway, I knew there were several other members who were accountants so I decided to form a committee of these gentlemen and I would assign different months to each of them to perform audits, myself included.

## CHAPTER XXVI

I added only one account in 1951 and that was Gencomex Trading Co. owned by Zoli Moskovits, my brother in-law Al's older brother. This company imported canned bonita from Peru. The company was dissolved in 1961 when Zoli moved to Brazil.

The following year, Al formed a new corporation called International Bartering Corp. with Leo Rapaport, his Studio Knit partner, both being major stockholders. His father I. Philip Moskovits and his sister Edith's husband Joel Rosner were minority stockholders.

Leo Rapaport had a cousin Simon Rapaport who was in the industrial diamond business with Sylvan and Armand Goldmuntz who resided and had offices in Antwerp, Belgium. Simon ran the N.Y. office on Fifth Ave. For many years, their company received parcels of industrial diamonds from the De Beers Syndicate in South Africa. Only favorite customers of the Syndicate would receive unopened and un-inspected parcels of these and precious stones. If the recipient rejected a shipment, the company was automatically removed forever from the list.

The General Services Administration (GSA) of the U.S. at that time was purchasing industrial diamonds to be used by American machine tooling establishments. Since diamonds are the most solid metals, these companies employed these stones only. The GSA was stockpiling these diamonds for a possible confrontation with the Soviet Union. This agency was also stockpiling other raw materials necessary for a future war effort.

At this time, the Dept. of Agriculture was feeding half of Europe with wheat, corn and other grains and receiving very little payment from these almost destitute foreign countries. In addition, our government was destroying surplus grain in order to prevent our farmers from going bankrupt as the supply far exceeded domestic consumption.

Whether the idea of barter originated in Al's father's mind since he was a very successful grain merchant in pre-war Hungary dealing almost exclusively with neighboring governments or the idea was generated by the Goldmuntzes, I cannot recall. At any rate, it was a brilliant business move. Al, his father and Rappi made an appointment with the Dept. of Agriculture in Washington to explore this barter concept.

International Bartering Corp. (IBC) would take the surplus grain off the hands of our Govt. and sell it to European grain importers at much reduced prices and in turn would supply the GSA with the diamonds or other materials at no cost to the U.S. other than the surplus grain which they were destroying anyway. Thus, for example, 20 million dollars worth of grain at current market prices would be exchanged for 20 million dollars worth of diamonds at current prices. IBC would sell the grain at prices below market, thus sustaining a loss but would make its profit on the raw materials.

For a period of 14 years till 1966, IBC continued this business trading in feathers, mercury and other materials besides diamonds. When the stockpiles of the U.S. were deemed sufficient, the GSA ceased the barter operations. Al, during these years, spent the entire week in Washington having a suite of rooms at the 1400 Hotel

and would return to his home for the week-end. His primary task was negotiating the barter contracts with the Dept. of Agriculture and the GSA. Many times it would take a period of months before a negotiated contract was signed.

Since I was the accountant for IBC since its inception, I made quite a number of trips to Washington and met with high ranking members of both agencies together with Al. Rappi was in charge of the disposition of the grain and, therefore, would travel extensively to Antwerp to confer with their selling agent, a man named Limberg whom I met several times when he came to N.Y. for conferences.

Besides enjoying my professional contact with IBC because of my exposure to a phase of accounting which was very different than the usual audit and tax problems, my relationship with Al blossomed into a brotherly bond that lasted till his death in 1999. My feeling towards Chippy, Al's wife and Hilda's sister did not need IBC to make me love her. She was 12 when I met Hilda and it was love at first sight for both of us. I was always the dear brother she never had and she will always be my young, loving sister.

Through Al, Hilda and I became very close to his entire family. In fact, throughout the years, our friends thought we were relatives to the Moskovits family. Since they were quite wealthy in Satmar in Transylvania, the Hungarian speaking area of Romania, they were able to immigrate to the U.S. in 1941. After living in Manhattan for 1 year, they purchased a home on President St. in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn.

The family consisted of Philip, the father, Helena, the mother, Zoli, the eldest son, Al (Hashu), Ernest (Lulu), Anne (Pupe) and Bernard (Bubi); the siblings were all unmarried and lived with their parents. The oldest child was Edith who was married to Joel Rosner and had a son Alexander (Zanny) who was born in 1942. They had their own house on Carroll St., one block from their parents.

Joel, being a textile engineer, opened a ladies underwear factory in Queens. Philip, being a commodities trader in the old country and having no experience in textiles, nevertheless became a partner with his substantial investment. Edith went in with Joel every day having taught herself the art of designing and patternmaking. The company was given the name "Moro Mfg. Co." an abbreviation of Moskovits and Rosner.

After several months, the business moved to 27<sup>th</sup> St. and Broadway and soon after to Canal Street. The war was now in full force and the military needed T-shirts for their personnel. Moro was now very successful in obtaining contracts to meet the demand for this item. Al and Rappi, seeing Moro doing well, decided to open a factory making the same product and received contracts as well. Tuban Mills was started on Greene St. off Canal. A few years later, when the war ended, they formed Studio Knit that produced knitted garments.

Being extremely benevolent people, the Moskovitses in 1946 brought over from Europe 102 relatives and found homes for them and employed most of them in their factory. Al, likewise, employed some of them in his plant at Tuban Mills. As the saying goes, "no good deed goes unpunished"; many of these recipients of favors reciprocated by going on strike against Tuban and picketed the Moro in order to organize a union. What amazes me

is the fact that neither Philip nor Al rejected them as relatives nor took an adverse action against them other than not rehiring them.

In 1946, Philip and Joel purchased Beechwood Estate in Irvington-on-the Hudson in Westchester. The property contained 15 acres with a large main house, 3 smaller houses, Olympic swimming pool and 2 tennis courts. There was a large barn with 2 cows as well. The family sold their President St. home and moved to Irvington. They supplied many of their relatives with lodging in their new home besides employing them in the factory.

Three years later, we began to spend our summers in Irvington as though we were members of their family. Kenny was six and Dennis was one. I would drive to and from my office in Manhattan every day but I didn't mind it because I knew that as soon as I arrived in Irvington, I would cool off before dinner in the spacious pool. We also spent several Succoth holidays at Beechwood. On Saturdays, we played touch football with the children; we were able to do so halachically because we were in a private area; thus we were not violating the Sabbath.

As we were playing, I remember Dennis at the age of three sitting next to Gal, Al's German shepherd twirling the dog's tail constantly with his mouth wide open. He still hadn't uttered one word and although Hilda and I weren't concerned, my father-in-law suggested that we see a "professor" to examine Dennis. Being aware of our child's parents' "high IQ", we knew that eventually he not only would begin speaking but would never stop while becoming a well-known lecturer.

The many summers we spent at Irvington will never be forgotten by us and our children as well. Strong friendships were developed between our sons and the Rosner children, Zanny and his sister Franny. After our boys would return from camp, they came to Beechwood and stayed there with us until the commencement of school sessions.

Through our visits to Irvington, we also created a very close friendship with Al's cousins, Velvel and Chavi Spiegel, who lived with the Moskovitses in Beechwood. Later on, when they purchased a nursing home in 1969, I became their accountant until 2002 when they sold it and I retired. We have remained good friends and hope to be so for many years.

Speaking of Al, we socialized very often with him and Chippy. For many years we celebrated New Year's Eve with them and with our friends. Since Al's father was very religious, he did not permit his children to attend any festivities that pertained to a "Christian" holiday. Al, therefore, would go to his sister's house on Carroll Street to get dressed for that evening. Every year, we went to Madison Square Garden to watch the N.Y. Rangers hockey team play the Boston Bruins. After the game, we all marched downtown to Times Square to view the large ball rise at the stroke of midnight ushering in the New Year.

Then all five or six couples would go to one of our homes to partake of cold cuts and have a great time. When Al and Chippy bought a house on North Bay Rd. in Miami Beach several years later, we continued the practice of being together on New Year's Eve which I will write about later on.

About a year after I returned from the Navy, the four of us went to the Capital Theatre on Broadway on a Saturday night to attend a movie. Since it was in the winter, the street was covered with much snow. As we left the theatre lobby and walked onto the street, a wise guy about our age thought it would be a good idea to hit Hilda with a snowball. He was accompanied by his girl friend and two other couples. Hilda was wearing a brand new beaver fur coat that I brought home for her as a surprise gift.

Mac, always having guts and not too much sense, immediately confronted the culprit ordering him to apologize to Hilda for his act which I did not interpret as a joke. When he declined, I grabbed him by the neck and started punching him, instructing Al to get a policeman. As soon as his friends heard this, they started to run since one of them was carrying a gun.

What amazed me about this fracas was Al's behavior. He did not come to my aid while all this was going on. He had constantly told me how strong he was and how many kids he beat up in Romania when they picked on his siblings. For the entire trip going home in the car, he didn't stop apologizing to me for his inaction and couldn't understand what happened to him. Of the three of us, he was the most hurt.

In 1952, we registered Kenny for the first time in a sleep-away summer camp, Camp Eton. Many years later, we discovered that Kenny's future wife, Jeannie, was also a camper there at the same time. In addition, Jeannie's brother Danny was in his bunk and Jeannie's mother, Claire, was the camp mother.

A year later, when Dennis was five and Kenny was past ten, we enrolled them in Maple Lake summer camp. Our friends, the Lupkins also sent their sons, Stanley and Joseph to this camp at the same time and we all enjoyed our two Sunday visits immensely.

What enters my mind now is my father-in-laws reaction to our sending Dennis who was not yet five to a sleep-away camp. On one of our visits we drove up to the camp with Hilda's parents and when we were ready to leave, Dennis started to cry as he wished to leave with us. Papa Friedfeld then berated us in no uncertain terms telling us how cruel we were to ship off such a young child away from home. We, naturally, were not swayed and poor Dennis remained in exile.

On June 25, 1950, North Korea launched a surprise, tank-led invasion across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel into South Korea. At the end of World War II, the Korean peninsula was split at this point by the Soviet Union and the U.S. as the Allies drove Japan out of Korea. With the consent of its Soviet patron, North Korea invaded seeking to impose communist rule throughout the peninsula. The U.S. with the approval of the United Nations, several months later, entered the war. China, another new communist power, entered the war in October, sending waves of soldiers into North Korea when UN forces threatened to overrun the Yalu River on the Chinese border.

On one Saturday morning in 1953, I received a telegram signed by Harry S. Truman, Pres. of the United States recalling me to active duty. He also informed me that if I would not or could not obey this command, I would be automatically discharged from the Naval Reserve and relinquish my commission and rank which was now Lt. Cmdr. Had I not been an observant Jew and had Hilda acquiesced, I would have returned to the Navy because,

despite going through the travails of World War II, I liked being in the Navy. I, of course, declined my commander-in-chief's invitation and told him so; on Jan. 19, 1954, I was honorably discharged.

In 1953, when Kenny was 10, we decided to visit Hilda's sister Esther in Baton Rouge, LA; we left Dennis with my in-laws as he was a poor traveler. As I mentioned previously, she married Joe Saltz immediately after the war; Joe was born and raised in that city. As I was still in the Navy, I was not able to attend their wedding or the wedding of Chippy and Al.

We traveled in our light blue De Soto, named Betsy, with Kenny performing the task of navigator throughout the trip. For many years, I always purchased a De Soto and always gave it the same name. Before each and every trip, I would obtain from the AAA a trip-tick, maps of the USA and every state that we would pass and travel books noting restaurants and motels on our voyage. Kenny would direct me from this paraphernalia.

We spent about 10 days with Esther, Joe and their two daughters, Nancy, aged seven and Diane, aged three. I can still remember the delicious cajun cuisine that Etta Mae, their housekeeper and cook, would serve us. We visited together with our hosts the LSU campus, the State capital, a sugar cane processing plant and the Mississippi levees.

Joe, although he received a degree in history, never pursued a career in his major. Instead, he entered his father's business which was a retail army and navy store. We met his lovely parents and his two brothers, Willie and Izzy and his sister, Ida, and their spouses. Joe and his family were not Orthodox or even Conservative Jews, being members of a Reformed Temple.

Esther, being Orthodox her entire life, found this situation troubling; however, she remained an observant Jew throughout her life. Her home maintained *kasbrus* and celebrated the Sabbath and Jewish holidays in every *halachic* detail. She taught the children in the Reformed school many of the Orthodox tenets, with the full approval of the Rabbi. In fact, when she died on July 4, 1956, the Temple erected a large plaque in her memory at the entrance to the sanctuary.

After several days of our visit, I made a remark to Hilda that unfortunately was prophetic. Since there were many oil processing plants in Baton Rouge, the air was filled with multi-colored smoke spewing from the smoke stacks. I told Hilda that this polluted environment had to be a cause of lung cancer, basing this on my Uncle Dovid's contracting lung cancer because he lived across the street from the Pfizer chemical plant.

In 1952, we started to travel by car to the Moskovits' winter home at Royal Palm Ave. in Miami Beach. Kenny was 9 and Dennis was 3 ½ at the time and they always looked forward the entire year for our annual excursion to the South. At this time, the I-95 highway was not yet built so I went via route 17 all the way to Florida; driving through many cities. I always exceeded the speed limit of 50 miles per hour on these trips so that I could make the trip in 3 days. In all the years that we made this trip, I received only one speeding ticket.

We usually started driving each morning around 6 a.m. and stopped around 7 p.m. Once when we were driving through Georgia around 7 am and I was doing about 75 miles per hour, an unmarked car overtook us and

stopped us. A man in civilian clothes got out of the car and identified himself as being the local sheriff. He looked into our car and when he saw our young children in the back, he was astonished that I would be so foolish as to drive so fast on a terrible road. Instead of giving me a ticket and making me appear before a local judge, he asked me for \$50.00 and cautioned me to not endanger my passengers by going so fast. Whether he pocketed the money or turned it over to the authorities I couldn't say. Of course, I never drove over sixty going south again.

As soon as we entered the city of Miami Beach, we always stopped at the Saxony Hotel which had an ice cream parlor called the "Noshery". We all would order a large hot-fudge sundae which we looked forward to on the entire trip. Then we would arrive at the Moskovits home to spend a delightful 2 weeks with Al, Chippy, Zanny, his sister Frannie, Jamie, Al's sister Anne's son, and Al's other siblings. Since Rappi and his wife Susie and their daughter Margie lived next door, we spent lots of time with them as well.

We would take all the children to the Monkey Jungle, the Parrott Jungle, the Serpentarium, where the various species of snakes would be milked for their venom, and other places that attracted children.

After several years, Al built his home on North Bay Road and then we began to spend our winters with them for many years until 1998 when he sold his house. For many years, we celebrated New Years Eve with Al and Chippy at their home with many of their friends and Rappi and Susie. I can never forget those evenings full of warmth, food and hilarity.

Although Al always denied he was a Satmar Chassid, he opened his home to the Satmar Rebbi, his lovely Rebbitzin and the Rebbi's entourage of men and women who catered to his every need. Since his home consisted of many bedrooms, he was able to accommodate many guests.

For the first two years of the Rebbi's stay, he performed his *mikva* (ritual bath) obligations in Biscayne Bay on which the house was located. After that period, Al built a *mikva* on his premises. He also purchased an additional freezer and placed it outside in his yard. The Rebbi's Chassidim would bring their own food from Williamsburg as they evidently did not trust the *kasbrus* (kosher adherence) of Chippy and Al. For many years until the Rebbi passed away, their home in the winter was a crowded hotel as many Chassidim would visit with their families in order to receive blessings from their exalted Rebbi.

Throughout these years, believe it or not, Chippy kept reporting the filching of food from the outside freezer and silverware. These supposedly ultra religious people had some in their midst who did not consider stealing a violation of one of the Commandments. The Rebbitzen, when informed of these despicable acts, constantly berated these "guests" with the hope that it would cease. Unfortunately, nobody knew the names of the culprits.

In 1953, Al wanting to help me expand my accounting practice, introduced me to Aron Maged, Salamon Wachsmann and Samuel Nirenstein who together with Al and Rappi purchased a nursing home on 74th Street between Central Park West and Columbus Ave. This home was named Aron Manor using the initials of Al, Rappi, Maged and Nirenstein and was one of six nursing homes on the block; all being 4 story brownstone buildings.

When I first entered this home to examine the books of the seller prior to the purchase, I was shocked at the appearance of the patients and the strong odor of urine. I had never been exposed to old and sick people in the past so I had not anticipated the sight that appeared before me.

Fortunately, when the new owners took over the reins of this establishment, many changes were instituted to alleviate the horrible conditions of the past. Never again was there a putrid aroma of urine as electric air deodorizers were installed throughout the home. Also, patient care was elevated to a high degree.

## CHAPTER XXVII

Aron Manor was the first of my nine nursing homes that were my clients. Prior to my acquiring these health care institutions, my clientele was primarily in the ladies ware industry. Because of the high risk of survival in the fashion industry due to the rapid and volatile change of styles, one good season could ensure a manufacturer several years of fiscal endurance. A poor season could very well lead to bankruptcy. In fact, the average survival in the dress business was five years.

As I related previously, most mfrs. started on a shoe string and were financed by factors, who received accounts receivable invoices as collateral. Consequently, the accountants in this industry would receive monthly phone calls from the factors and banks requesting general ledger trial balances which would be given over the phone. These trial balances informed the lenders as to the fiscal status of the borrower. The former were primarily interested in the liquidity of the firm. All current assets and current liabilities i.e. cash, accounts receivable, accounts payable, notes and loans payable were submitted via phone; also, net sales were also divulged.

In addition, certified financial statements were prepared annually and monthly financial break-even statements also were furnished the clients. These reports stated what the inventories should be in order to break-even for the month. Taking physical inventories together with management's personnel was an important factor in certified statements. Soliciting confirmation of cash in banks, accounts receivable, accounts payable, notes and loans payable by mail was an additional requirement for these statements. Fortunately, by the time I obtained my first nursing home client, I only had one in the garment industry.

Being an accountant in the health care field required preparation of different reports. I would prepare monthly financial statements relating the profit or loss for the month; this was easy since no inventories were involved. However, annual certified reports were submitted to the various states dept. of health. Before remuneration based on costs were instituted, these statements were necessary to divulge the fiscal feasibility of the home.

When I became the accountant for Aron Manor, which serviced 120 patients, remuneration by N.Y. State to nursing homes was based on 3 categories depending on the patient care necessary for each patient. The monthly amounts were \$160, \$170, and \$180. Approximately ten years later, a Columbia professor in the public health dept. of the College was able to influence the N.Y.S. Dept. of Health that nursing home patients on Medicaid or Medicare should receive patient care comparable to private patients. Medicare covered patients over 65 years of age and, some patients under 65 with disabilities. Medicaid covered indigent patients who had to submit proof of their financial state.

This strong proponent of increasing the degree of patient care assumed that, if the homes would spend more money, the patients would benefit. Consequently, the old method of remuneration was scrapped and annual

Medicare and Medicaid cost reports were submitted to a Federal agency (Medicare) and to the NYS Dept. of Health in Albany (Medicaid).

I remember rising at a Metropolitan Nursing Home Association meeting held in one of the Manhattan hotels when this new remuneration method was proposed and making a very concerned prediction if this new method was accepted by the governmental agencies. I stated that Harry Truman became President of the U.S. due to his chairing a Senate committee reviewing cost-plus defense contracts. Greed and temptation are very difficult to suppress and would lead to many honest nursing home operators becoming criminals as many of the defenses contractors, who received jail sentences.

Unfortunately, my prediction was correct as many operators would pad their costs with expenditures for their homes and other personal needs. What galled me was the fact that the homes were all doing well financially and didn't have to resort to criminal acts to survive. After 10 years of cost-plus, it finally came to light what some of the homes were engaged in, resulting in the convening of the Hynes Commission headed by Charles Hynes who is presently District Attorney of Kings County.

It was a very difficult time for nursing home accountants at this time as many operators were able to persuade them to cheat lest they lose the account. In 1974, I had 7 nursing home clients and only one of these operators wanted me to file a false report to no avail. A few years later after the scandal was over, I told him that I kept him out of jail.

One of the bookkeepers at this client advised me that this operator, in a phone conversation with another nursing home owner, who later was convicted as a result of his criminal nursing home acts, remarked that his accountant, Mr. Prager, was a bum because I wouldn't allow him to steal.

In order to employ every bit of space for patient rooms in order to increase the revenue, Aron Manor, as some of my other nursing home clients, allowed a very little area for the office which was approximately 150 sq. ft. In this crowded space were three desks, filing cabinets and cabinets for office supplies. When I and a man from my office arrived to perform the monthly audit, one of us had to work in the lobby where patients were congregated. Being claustrophobic, I sure didn't enjoy working there.

Archie Friedman from Harby Dress Co. introduced me in 1954 to his brother-in-law Carl Michaels who owned a firm who manufactured custom made therapeutic shoes. Carl always wanted me to do the monthly audit on a Thursday as he convened a dinner conference in the restaurant in his building around 6 p.m. This procedure went on for 19 years until Carl brought in his son-in-law into the business who wanted his friend to succeed me as the accountant.

Hilda's Aunt Buddy, who was divorced, had a boy friend Bill Warfman who was in the carpet business. That same year, Bill and his partner, Irving Zucker, engaged me as their accountant. The name of the company was Carpet House and was located on Madison Ave. and 53<sup>rd</sup> St. I acquired several small accounts in related businesses through the efforts of Bill. They went out of business in 1968.

Our lease at 2705 Kings Highway expired in 1954 so several months prior to that event we began to look for a house in the immediate neighborhood as we enjoyed our new friends, K.J. Center and Yeshiva Rambam. I don't recall whether we purchased our new home through an agent or newspaper ad. We inspected a house at 1725 East 27<sup>th</sup> St. between Quentin Rd. and Avenue R. It was a two story one-family unattached house with a basement; it was built in 1924 and sold for \$4,500. The house was 'in excellent shape. Other than painting the interior and minor electrical renovations, we had no other expenditures.

Throughout the 43 years that we resided in this house we had no plumbing repairs to speak of since the house was built with brass plumbing, a far cry from the homes that were constructed after the war. The entire plot was 190 ft. x 25 ft.; the house was 100 ft. x 25 ft. You walked up 3 stairs to the entrance and a fairly large patio.

The entrance led to a tiny vestibule leading to a 24 x 18 living room. From the latter, you entered through an arch to a 22 x 18 dining room and then to a 30 x 18 kitchen and dinette area. A stair case on the far side of the dining room led to the second floor where there were 3 bedrooms and a long, narrow hall. The master bed room faced the front of the house, Kenny's room faced the rear and Dennis's room faced the driveway on the side of the house. We had a garage but a large car could not fit into it; we used it primarily for storage and for the bamboo poles which I used to place on my *succah* (a temporary abode commanded by the Torah).

As soon as Hilda and I saw this house, we decided to buy it. We purchased it at the asking price of \$16,500 from a lovely elderly couple whose name was Jarret. He was an importer of Dutch chocolates and on his travels to Holland was able to bring home with him beautiful rose bushes which were planted in the small garden in the rear of the house. In fact, we inherited 5 rose bushes each of a different color; yellow, red, pink, orange and a very dark red. Believe it or not, these bushes were still blooming in 1997 when we sold the house.

We placed a 15 year mortgage of \$9,000 on the house which I was able to handle quite comfortably. The basement contained 3 rooms; laundry room, a very large room which I converted for an office and a furnace room consisting of an oil burner for heat, hot water heater and 2 large fuel oil tanks. Several years later, we converted our heating to gas and were able to dispense with the huge tanks. All the walls were of cinder block so, a few years after the purchase, we covered all the basement walls with wood paneling.

After living in the new home for about a year, we made a *chanukas habais* (a house warming) in the basement and invited about 75 relatives and friends. My father-in-law made a beautiful speech and publicly gave Hilda and me a generous gift of \$2,000 for which we were most grateful. We raised our two sons in this house and have nothing but good memories of our stay in this house.

In this same year, 1954, Dennis started his academic career, starting in the first grade at Yeshiva Rambam. Also, although we were satisfied with our sons' summer camp the previous year at Maple Lake, we decided to give Shelly Apfelbaum a break by enrolling both our boys at his Camp Winsoki near Rensselaerville in the Catskills.

Shelley was executive director of Kingsway and I found him to be extremely efficient in that capacity; therefore, I assumed that he conducted his camp activities with the same energy and competence. My assumption

proved to be correct as we continued to send our boys to his camp for many years. Kenny went there through the usual program; camper, waiter and counselor finishing his camping career as life guard; Dennis was a camper. When he arrived at the age of being a counselor, he opted to go to Camp Massad in the Poconos in PA.

On the two Sundays the parents would visit their children, Hilda and I chose to spend weekends at the camp instead of just on the Sundays. The camp had a very comfortable guest house and we made good friends with other parents on these weekends. Among others, we met the Avners of whom I wrote previously. On Saturday nights, several of the parents, including myself, competed against the counselors in basketball games under the lights. Kenny was an exceptionally good athlete so I enjoyed playing against him.

We also enjoyed the company of Seymour and Hermia Reinhard whom we knew from Yeshiva Rambam. Their boy twins, Andy and David, were also campers at Winsoki for many years. Seymour was one of the players on our parents' team. Andy, eventually went to Columbia and dormed with Kenny throughout their stay at the college. They both then attended Harvard, Kenny in medical school and Andy in law school. To this day, they are good friends; Kennie and Jeannie, whenever they visit Israel, stay a few days at Andy's and his wife's apartment in Jerusalem. David and his wife Elaine live in Miami Beach where David is a physician.

When Dennis was a counselor at Massad one summer, we received a phone call around 1 a.m. one night informing us that our son was in a bad auto accident not very far from the camp; the call was from a hospital in Scranton, Pa. You can just imagine our fear of not knowing the condition of our son.

We immediately left in our car with much trepidation, again not knowing what is awaiting us. Arriving at the hospital about 4 a.m., we asked the nurse on duty for the room number where Dennis was lying; she replied that she would escort us to visit him. Instead of being in a room, he was lying on a gurney in the hall. The gurney next to him was occupied by a lovely young lady who was his passenger. His face was covered with bandages as he suffered a broken nose; the girl also suffered facial injuries.

Fortunately, despite his condition, he was able to relate to us in detail all the facts of the accident. The car he was driving was an old car that Hilda had given him when she purchased a new one. Perhaps the brakes were bad and that may have caused the accident. Dennis and his companion were counselors at Massad and on their day off decided to go visit the areas around the camp.

They were returning to the camp in the late afternoon and, at a very sharp turn on a narrow road, the car hit a concrete wall. We were not interested as to whether Dennis or the car was at fault; we simply were concerned with the health of Dennis and the girl. He told us that the car was totaled-completely destroyed-. He also told us that he picked up a young couple who were hitch-hiking. Fortunately, they were let off a few minutes prior to the accident. Had they still been in the car, they would have been killed since the rear seats of the car suffered the most damage and the entire roof was shorn off and landed on those seats.

After a day or two, Dennis and his passenger were discharged from the hospital and returned to the camp. Sometime later, we viewed pictures of the demolished car and couldn't believe that our son and the girl survived

with relatively minor injuries. A few months later, the girl's father sued me, as the owner of the car, despite the fact that Dennis was doing his daughter a favor by giving her a lift on her day off. He evidently felt that since I was insured, any award granted to him would not come out of my pocket. Of course he was wrong since for the next three years my insurance premiums were increased substantially. If the shoe was on the other foot, I do not believe that I would have sued him.

In 1955, the partners of Aron Manor Nursing Home, except for Samuel Nirenstein, decided to expand their interest in the health care industry by bidding on the purchase of the Brooklyn Thoracic Hospital. The building was about 75 years old and was located on the corner of St. John's Place and Kingston Ave. in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn.

This hospital had previously housed patients infected with tuberculosis. With the discovery of new drugs and equipment, the number of those suffering from this disease decreased greatly; consequently, the hospital was no longer needed. The edifice was put up for sale to the highest bidder. The two highest bidders were my clients and Rabbi Bergman, who already owned several nursing homes in the metropolitan area. After a brief period of negotiation, Rabbi Bergman consented to withdraw his bid.

After some renovation, the building was converted to a nursing home, called the Garden Nursing Home which housed 300 patients on four floors, practically all being paid for by Medicaid. The staff, other than the nurses, consisted of many relatives of Aron Maged, Leo Rapaport and Al Moskovits. Hilda, not very enamored with housework, jumped at the opportunity to be the asst. administrator under Mr. Maged, who was the administrator.

Since Dennis was now 7 years of age, his mother felt it was time to go to work. She hired a wonderful Negro woman named Ethel who had 3 sons; Dennis adored her and the feeling was mutual. In fact, until his teenage years, she was his confidante through his troublesome period at school about which I will relate later on.

During the 20 years that I was the accountant and Hilda was the administrator, we became very close to the patients who loved us. One of the women patients in her late seventies addressed me as "papa" and Hilda as "mama". Every month, when I came to do the audit, I would visit her in her room and speak to her. She would write letters to me as a child would write to her father and give them to Hilda to bring to me.

We had season tickets to the Philharmonic, N.Y.C. Ballet and the Metropolitan Opera, all at Lincoln Center. Even though we lived in Flatbush, we went out of our way, after attending these events, to make surprise inspections at the nursing home at mid-night.

We were concerned about the patients lying in their urine and feces as though we were owners of the facility. On arriving at the Home, Hilda and I would go with the nurse's aides with flashlights and inspect all 300 patients on the 4 floors to be assured that they were sleeping comfortably in a dry condition; she inspecting the women patients and I inspecting the male patients.

On Xmas day, Kenny and Dennis would go with us to the Home to speak to the patients and bring the Holiday spirit to their forlorn lives. The boys would take movies and still photographs and then show them the next

year. I can still hear them exclaim when viewing the movies, "Paul is no longer with us; what a pity;" "Look how nice Mary looked last year, too bad she died."

Every Xmas Eve, the four of us would visit Ethel and her sons at her apartment in Bedford-Stuyvesant a section of Brooklyn inhabited primarily with a Negro population. Since she was living without an adult male in her house, she and her children were elated to see us and enjoy the gifts we brought them. In addition, the four of them had very little contact with white folk and they loved us for it. Apropos of this, Hilda and I took Ethel several times to an all Negro night club on Fulton St. where I danced with her and we all had a great time.

We kept in touch with Ethel for many years after she ceased working for us. Whenever she took ill, she would phone us and we immediately visit her at her home and once in the hospital. She probably has passed away since we no longer hear from her and there is no answer at her home when we called.

Perhaps, the Almighty has blessed our family for the deeds expressed above, especially for our actions at the nursing home where we were only the accountant and an employee.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

During this period, our social life primarily revolved around the Lupkins and the Walkers. Both of our friends lived a few blocks from our home. Very often on Saturday nights, we met at each of our homes and spent a most enjoyable evening; the men singing cantorial songs and the women listening and applauding. After the “concert”, we partook of a “melava malka” (a meal celebrating the leaving of the Queen Sabbath). The hostess would feed us with bagels and lox, tuna and egg salads, cake and coffee.

We still to the present day are very close friends communicating with each other by phone once or twice a week. It is hard to comprehend that after 53 years we never had a falling out and respected each other’s opinions; be it political or religious. We took joint trips to Israel, Europe and other places over the years. Even though years later, the Lupkins moved to Great Neck to be near their children, we travel several times a year to have lunch with them. Of course, we all attend each other’s *simchas* as we are at least as close as blood relatives.

When we purchased a condominium in Miami Beach in 1975, I immediately contacted my friend Jack Walker to advise him of my purchase so that he too could take advantage of a good buy and, more importantly, have a close friend near us in our winter home. Without a moment’s hesitation, Jack told me to place a deposit on the apartment immediately below us and I complied with his request. The proximity of our two families in the winter cemented our friendship even more.

In addition to the above, we enjoyed the company of the Judds. Birdie and Bob would invite us for the breaking of the Yom Kippur fast for many years until they moved to Silver Spring, Md. to be close to their daughter Lenore and son-in-law Chuck. Also, we visited each other quite often and took occasional trips together. We loved going to the opera with Fay and Dave Hammerman. Dave was the president of Detecto Scales and hired Kenny as a shipping clerk for one summer while in college.

When the Korean War broke out in 1950, the Moskovits family after the experience of fleeing from Europe in 1940 became justifiably alarmed and decided to take up residence in Brazil in 1952. Having been in the textile business in the U.S., they formed Nailotex S.A. in Sao Paulo. Brazil not being at that time as industrially advanced as the U.S., it was necessary for a textile company to go the “vertical setup” route.

Nailotex would purchase nylon thread from the U.S., and produce woven textiles on its weaving looms called *tecelagem* in Portuguese. On their knitting machines, knit goods were produced called *malbaria*. Both the woven and knit goods were dyed and finished in its dye house. The *tecelagem* were sold to mfrs. of woven items. The *malbaria* were used by Nailotex for the manufacture of lingerie, children’s clothing, bathing suits and brassieres

Although Nailotex engaged an accounting firm to prepare its taxes and financial statements, Joel Rosner needed someone who was proficient in cost accounting in order to price the spring and fall lines before going into production. He, therefore in January of 1955, asked me if I would be interested in coming to Brazil twice a year to

accomplish his needs. I didn't need too much persuasion to accept his offer. The thought of visiting a country that I had never been to sealed the deal. Also, the compensation was very attractive.

Thus, on Jan. 8, 1955 I made my first trip to Brazil and my last trip was in 1973 when Nailotex was sold. I can still vividly recall that first trip. The commercial air lines at that time were still propeller driven. Since all my travel expenses were reimbursed to me by Nailotex, I booked a first class reservation with Braniff Airways. Since the trip took 24 hours, two sleeping berths were available on the plane for an additional \$100.00 for each. I didn't reserve a berth desiring instead to pocket the money. Never traveling first class, I was thrown into a new world of affluence and comfort. The quality and quantity of the liquor and wines were indescribable. Unfortunately, my adherence to the kosher laws did not allow me to partake of the delicious and expensive fare that was tendered to the first class passengers. However, there was enough for me to eat, especially the varied desserts.

The itinerary of my first trip was as follows: I boarded the plane at Idlewild Airport- now known as Kennedy- on a Sunday afternoon and the first stop was Washington, DC. After a short lay-over, we proceeded to Miami: again a short stay and left for Panama where we landed after midnight. We remained there for about an hour and flew to Lima, Peru where we arrived in the morning. Since we had a lay-over for about 2 hours, I shopped in the airport for a gift for Hilda. Peru was famous for silver and gold jewelry so I purchased a gold set of bracelets to give to my woman.

Incidentally, on each of my many trips to Brazil I always came home with a gift of jewelry for my wife. Hilda still has all these gifts except for 2 rings containing semi-precious stones which were mined in Brazil. These rings were stolen years later on one of our vacations at the Homowack Hotel in the Catskills.

Leaving Peru, the plane headed for Rio de Janeiro and after an hour or so I arrived at my final destination, Sao Paulo. Of course, after going through customs, Joel was waiting for me to take me to the Excelsior Hotel on Avenida Iparanga. After staying there for my first 3 or 4 trips, I decided to stay at the Jaragua Hotel which was more to my liking and where I always stayed on my subsequent visits. The entire trip took 24 hours.

When jet planes arrived, Braniff went out of business, and I traveled on my future travels with either Pan American Airways or the Brazilian airline, Varig Airlines. On one of my trips with Pan American, I was seated across the aisle from Gov. Nelson Rockefeller and his new bride, Happy, who were going on their honey-moon to a ranch in Brazil. They both spoke to me quite a bit and couldn't have been more gracious.

I always took along a motion picture camera and snapped views of all picturesque scenes that came before my eyes while in the plane. Flying over snow-capped peaks of the Andes was awe inspiring. You felt that you were able to touch the mountains since you were that close. Also, flying over Lake Titicaca, which is on the Peru-Bolivia border and is the highest lake in the world, created an unforgettable impression on me. Then coming into Rio and viewing the Corcovado-statue of Christ- and Sugar Loaf Mt. in the harbor was a magnificent scene.

When I arrived at the Nailotex plant, I discovered an old building in need of repairs. I did realize that in their haste to flee to Brazil, the Moskovits family did not have the leisure of time in selecting a newer edifice. After a

period of 2 or 3 years, a large piece of land was purchased and construction started on a much larger factory with modern features and after a year or so, the company relocated to its new home.

After inspecting the various components of the plant and interviewing the heads of departments and several of the more important employees, I was able to familiarize myself with all the functions performed by each and every department. This phase of my introduction lasted for about 2 or 3 days after which I began the work for which I was engaged.

My first task was to inspect the weaving and knitting machines to ascertain the time spent to produce each item of piece goods; also the type and quantity of yarn needed. Then I visited the dye house to determine the time spent in dyeing and finishing these goods and the cost of raw materials. The allotted time of production established the direct cost of labor of each item and together with the material cost produced the direct cost of each item of piece goods.

The next step in my cost accounting procedure was the most difficult. Since the sewing plant had over 40 or 50 items in their proposed line, it was a gigantic task in determining the anticipated selling price of each style. Again, each item had to be evaluated as to sewing time and the quantity of yards of piece goods and trimmings to arrive at the direct cost of each and every style in the line. I actually stood at the sewing machine and timed the operations. Joel, being a textile engineer in Europe was an invaluable help; without him, I could have stayed home.

What I required next was the indirect cost of every item produced. Analyzing all the indirect expenses; i.e. factory, selling and administrative costs enabled me to establish the indirect cost of each item depending on time of production. After my figures were complete, Joel and I would sit at his home, usually on a Sunday and discuss every item of piece goods and every style to determine if it was feasible for them to go into production and also set the selling price if they were included in the line. This procedure was done twice a year, in February and in August.

My first trip to Brazil was on Aug. 1, 1955. At that time, one had to obtain a temporary visa to enter that country. I would go to Rockefeller Center where the Brazilian Consul was located and receive my visa. This procedure lasted for one more trip in Feb. 1956 and then I no longer needed a visa.

In February, Christians throughout the world celebrated the holiday of Lent, a period of penitential preparation for Easter. Western churches once provided for a 40-day fast (excluding Sundays), in imitation of Jesus' fasting in the wilderness; one meal a day was allowed in the evening, and meat, fish, eggs, and butter were forbidden. These rules have gradually been relaxed, and only Ash Wednesday-the first day of Lent in Western Christianity, when the penitents traditionally have their foreheads marked with ashes and Good Friday are now kept as Lenten fast days. Rules of fasting are stricter in Eastern Churches.

The carnival pageant is held in some Roman Catholic regions. The most famous and probably the most exuberant carnival is that of Rio de Janeiro, which is celebrated with masked balls, costumes, and parades. The first day of the carnival season varies with local traditions, but carnival ends on Shrove Tuesday, the day before the start of Lent. In Rio, carnival lasted for 3 days when the entire city, as well as others in Brazil, shut down and celebrated.

It is a one-day event in France called Mardi Gras “Fat Tuesday”, but in the U.S. it lasts several days in New Orleans, where it is also marked by parades, street celebrations, and extravagant costumes.

You can just imagine my reaction to encountering on my first trip to Brazil the exciting and unforgettable event of carnival. Although I was living and working in Sao Paulo, I made sure not to miss an experience which was far more enjoyable than I had anticipated. The air trip from Sao Paulo to Rio was a little less than an hour. I was counseled by some members of the Moskovits family as to where to stay in Rio; they suggested the Hotel Gloria which faced the Bay, the Corcovado and Sugar Loaf. Whenever Hilda joined me, we always stayed at the Gloria when we came to Rio.

The city of San Paulo with a population of close to 17 million is located 30 miles from its Atlantic port of Santos. Founded by Portuguese Jesuits in 1554, it became a base for exploration in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and a city in 1711. In 1822 it was the scene of the declaration of Brazilian independence by Emperor Pedro I. It developed rapidly from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is the foremost industrial center in Latin America, producing steel, motor vehicles, machine tools, and a wide range of consumer goods, including textiles and appliances. It is also Brazil’s largest city, an important cultural and publishing center, and one of the most populous cities in the western hemisphere.

Rio de Janeiro whose population is over 5 million is a port located on the Atlantic in southeastern Brazil. The site was discovered by the Portuguese in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and became important in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as an outlet for mineral exports from gold and diamond mines. Located on one of the largest harbors in the world and known for its scenic views, it was the capital of Brazil from 1822 to 1960, when the national capital was moved to Brasilia in the interior which had practically no population.

Rio is the country’s second-largest manufacturing center after Sao Paulo. Major industries include metallurgy and food processing. Noted for its wide streets, public buildings, beaches, and public parks and gardens, it is a leading tourist and resort center, especially the Copacabana beach which is a district of Rio. The beach occupies a narrow strip of land between the mountains and the sea. It is famous for its magnificent 2.5 mile curved beach along the entrance to Guanabara Bay. Hotels, nightclubs and restaurants line the waterfront.

Although many of the Brazilian cities celebrate carnival with dancing in the streets and Balls at hotels, Rio has the largest, longest in duration and loudest; Sao Paulo does not engage in any festivities. As a religious Jew, I could not comprehend how a so-called event with religious connotations could display the amount of sexual promiscuity and moral decadence that I witnessed. In fact, when I returned home, I told Hilda that I had been to Sodom and Gemorrah. In my 37 years of life I had never seen so much debauchery. The women, mostly Negroes, danced in the streets almost naked; an unusually great number of transvestites accompanied them.

The Balls held at the Gloria Hotel and other hotels were populated by men and women, mostly white, engaged in excessive drinking of liquor and sexual fondling. Men would spray the women with a gas that they called “ether” which was supposed to act as an aphrodisiac.



## CHAPTER XXIX

Hilda who had accompanied me on 3 trips out of 22 that I made to Brazil and I made sure to bring her only during carnival and I enjoyed the “escola do sambas” ( the school of sambas) more than the other attractions during these festivities. Almost all the participants were Negroes who were blessed with the gift of rhythm. Also, one must realize that the Negro population of Brazil was the highest in Latin America. Approximately 8 or 9 schools would compete in a contest. The criteria were the original music compositions, the choreography and the costumes. This event would be held on one of the 2 nights on the widest avenue in Rio. Wooden stands were set up on both sides of the streets and would hold several thousand on-lookers. I fell in love with Latin music, especially that of Brazil; in fact, on each trip I would purchase phonograph records of this music- tapes and disks were not yet in vogue.

On one of our trips together, while watching the samba event, a rather humorous experience –at the time it was almost tragic- occurred. I always prefer an aisle seat at the theatre or at a sporting event; therefore I made sure to arrive early and secure an aisle seat in the stands. When all seats were occupied, people were compelled to sit or stand in the aisles of the stands. As luck would have it, a young Brazilian couple in their twenties who were either married or just friends stood at my left in the aisle. Seeing her holding a large and heavy purse, I asked her if I could hold the purse to relieve her discomfort. She immediately smiled at me and gave me her bag with many thanks.

Midway through the dance, either one of them or both had to leave temporarily. When she gave me the purse, I stupidly placed it on the ground between my feet not realizing that the rear of the floors of the stands were wide open. Several minutes after they left, I discovered that the bag was no longer at my feet and fell to the ground which was at least 50 feet below. Fear and horror enveloped me and Hilda and I kept saying in Yiddish so nobody could understand what I was saying “Er vet mir deharginen” – he will kill me.

I, therefore, decided that I will offer to reimburse them for the bag and all its contents. Money was far less important than my health and life. As we were contemplating our fate, the couple returned and we hesitatingly related our dilemma and made an offer to repay them for my gross error. Surprisingly, they smiled and allayed our fears when the young man stated that he would climb down the rear of the stands and retrieve the bag. It was quite a feat which I could never emulate. This experience only fortified my belief in the old axiom: “No good deed goes unpunished”.

In this same year, 1955, Hilda decided to spread her wings and return to a career. When we were “going steady”, she emphatically stated to me that if and when we would marry, she would want a large family and I of course agreed with her. After our marriage, she sang a different tune repeatedly informing me that her ideal life would be a career, no children and living in Manhattan. In fact, I would jokingly retort that I had grounds for an annulment, she deluding me and not advising me of her true intentions prior to marriage.

At any rate, Dennis now reaching the age of seven and old enough to be cared for by a maid gave my wife the opportunity to fulfill her ambition. Also, it is possible that my starting twice a year trips to Brazil was another

factor in her looking for employment. The Garden Nursing Home was just purchased and one of the owners was my brother-in-law Al who wanted one of his relatives in the office to protect his investment. I cannot recall whether he proposed hiring her or she approached him; but, be as it may, she was hired as an assistant administrator to Mr. Maged, the administrator. Her administrative duties included admission of patients, liaison with their relatives, making daily rounds of all 300 patients and their rooms with the nurse's aides, phoning daily the Dept. of Health requesting patients, and some others which I can't recall.

She also had bookkeeping duties, i.e. preparation of patient bills –private and Medicaid- and posting to an accounts receivable ledger. Joe Saltz, my other brother-in-law who was Esther's husband was also employed and handled accounts payable and payroll.

In order for Hilda to be able to go to work, we hired a wonderful, compassionate Negro maid named Ethel. She really was the surrogate mother to Dennis for many years. Since he was a problem child in school and a doll at home, he conveyed his most private feelings to her.

A typical working day at the Nailotex plant was as follows:

I would arise at 7:30, shower and dress, put on my *tefillin* and pray and then call room service for my continental breakfast which always consisted of papaya, rolls with butter and coffee. At 8:30, Stefan, Mr. Moskovits's Hungarian chauffeur who spoke no English, would arrive at the Jaragua Hotel to drive me to the plant which was about 30 minutes away.

I then would visit the offices of Mr. Moskovits and Joel Rosner to say hello and proceed to the office of Edith Rosner and chat with her for at least a half hour which we both enjoyed immensely. Edith designed the various lingerie lines – called collections in Brazil- and was the production manager of the sewing operations. Joel, being a textile engineer, supervised the weaving and knitting operations and the dye house as well. Mr. Moskovits, not being too familiar with textiles and not being as young as his daughter and her husband did not put in a full day's work and devoted himself primarily with finance duties. Similarly to the U.S. where textile companies would factor their receivable invoices with factors or banks, Nailotex would assign their invoices –called *duplicates*- to several banks. Mr. Moskovits would handle this financial phase.

After leaving Edith, I then visited the weaving and knitting areas, the dye house and the sewing plant to obtain all the statistics necessary to ascertain the cost of each and every item produced. At 11 am girls would come around with small cups of black coffee –called *café zinho*- this precluded having a coffee break. At 12:30, the entire plant stopped operations for the lunch break. A large cafeteria holding approximately 200 hundred persons was the site where all the employees who had brought their lunch from home would congregate. Before the new plant was constructed, Edith, Joel-called Hesse- and I would drive to their home for lunch. Later on, because the new factory was further from their home, we would have our lunch, which they brought from home, in one of their offices.

An hour later we all returned to our labors. At 3 p.m. the coffee girls would return again and we all would not stop our activities while drinking the hot beverage. At 6 p.m. operations ceased and the three of us would drive

to the Rosner home for dinner to be met by their son Alexander-called Zanny- and their daughter Frances-called Franny. Several years later another son was born to them, Bobby.

After dinner, I would return to the hotel and if I was not tired I would go to one or two of the several “night clubs” called *boites* which were usually small rooms that could hold anywhere from 10 to 50 persons. What attracted me to these places was my liking for Latin music. Each of these *boites* would have a small combo consisting of a guitar, bass fiddle and a drum; never other string or wind instruments. The music was primarily Brazilian, Paraguayan and to a lesser extent that of other Latin countries. I could sit for hours sipping scotch and enjoying immensely the music.

Each of these “clubs” would have a few young girls available for dancing and sex, if you desired. You could sit and dance with a girl or girls the entire night without paying them and just buy them drinks. If a customer felt the need for having sex with one of them, taxis were ever-present outside the *boite* to transport the couple, usually to the home of the girl who lived alone. Most of the girls were originally from the poorer towns in Brazil and the money they made would sustain them and also allow them to send money to their families who lived in the Northern provinces and the interior of Brazil.

Whenever Hilda went with me on my trips, we would frequent these places and sit for hours enjoying the music. Also, although the Rosners had lived in Brazil for several years, they had no knowledge of these places and I introduced them to this music and we would go on many Saturday nights to enjoy a pleasant evening. Also, the four of us several times traveled to a most beautiful beach called Guaruja for a week-end and spent a most delightful time together as we enjoyed each other’s company quite a bit. Guaruja was on the coast of the Atlantic past the city of Santos which was a 3 hour drive north of Sao Paulo. Since Hilda always accompanied me only in February because of carnival, the weather was that of the summer, Brazil being south of the equator.

On one of our week-end trips with Edith and Hessu, as we were lolling on the beach, both of them proposed that we move with our children to Brazil as I could enhance Nailotex’s business by being at the plant permanently instead of coming twice a year for 3 weeks each trip. Also I would be able to increase my earnings considerably by making the move. Without a moment’s hesitation, I responded that I was quite happy in Brooklyn and with my profession. Instead, I suggested that they send their 14 year old son, Zanny, to live with us and to attend Yeshiva University High School where Kenny was a student.

I kept telling them that Brazil, being Sodom and Gemorah, was no place to rear children, especially those from Orthodox Jewish homes. In the few trips that I made I was witness to the moral deterioration of young boys and girls, even from observant homes. I can never forget that before my first trip, a member of Kingsway Jewish Center, knowing that I was to visit Brazil, asked me to please look up her brother who lived in Sao Paulo.

Several days after my arrival, I phoned the brother and he graciously invited me to come for dinner at his home. Of course, I accepted and went by taxi to his home where I met his family. After dinner, he suggested that we take a walk and get to know each other. While walking, he asked me if I or other men in the US had mistresses.

Knowing he was a religious Orthodox Jew, I was completely taken aback by his question. I told him that, although many married men in the US did have mistresses or affairs, this was not common among religious Jews. Also, that I and my friends were devoted to our wives and would never think of doing what seemed to be prevalent in Brazil.

Also, once while visiting a boite, I recognized a congregant of the shul that I attended every shabbos soliciting one of the girls and leaving with her. He was dressed as a chassid with a black suit and hat. I also was told by some of the male Orthodox employees of Nailotex that the wives all knew of these transgressions and were not perturbed at all. Thus, my suggestion of saving Zanny was not without foundation.

What did surprise me was that Edith and Hessu did not need much persuasion to accept our offer. At the end of his school year, Zanny came to live with us and shared Kenny's room which had 2 beds. We enrolled him at YUHS which was located a few miles from our home at Bedford and Church Avenues. In the 4 years that he lived with us he was treated no differently than our own sons; with love and guidance. I remember sitting him and Kenny down in our living room and speaking to them in very open and frank terms regarding sex. He told me that his father had never broached that subject with him. He felt very relieved after our talk and a bond developed between us which has lasted to this day.

From the day he entered our house he found in me a confidante who listened attentively to his thoughts and sometimes his problems. At no time would I divulge to his parents or to anyone else what he confided in me.

After he graduated from YUHS, Hessu enrolled him in Philadelphia Textile Institute to pursue studies to acquire a degree in textile engineering without ascertaining whether Zanny desired that route. As expected, he dropped out of school after 2 or 3 years and returned to Brazil to work for Nailotex. Despite his aversion to the academic phase of the textile business, he has always been related to that trade as a means of making a living for his family and always enjoyed his choice of occupation.

While Edith was in her terminal stage of cancer, he decided to expedite his marriage to Eva Sojcher from Los Angeles so that his mother could attend the first wedding of a child. They have two wonderful children, Jennifer and Joel; the former's career being in criminal forensics and Joel enjoying a successful profession in law. We became very fond of Eva's mother, Yoli, who has been our very close and dear friend to this day.

Years later, when he was living in Miami Beach, his present home, he was elected to the presidency of the Miami Beach Academy, an Orthodox day school. He asked me to attend his first officiating at a board of directors meeting. I was completely surprised and a bit embarrassed when his opening remark was as follows: "Many of you know Max Prager who is sitting with us today but none of you are aware that I consider him as a father." I am sure that if either one of his parents were alive at the time, he would not have made that statement.

Unfortunately, Edith had passed away from cancer several years prior to this event and Hessu drove his car into Biscayne Bay and died instantly about 3 or 4 years after Edith's demise. He had a problem of blackouts previously and the cause of his accident was probably attributed to this ailment. Three years ago, in June 2001, Zanny was elected president of Beth Israel Congregation in Miami Beach and on February 15, 2004 was honored at

the annual dinner of this institution. The ad inserted in the journal by Hilda and me read: "To our third "son" Alex Rosner." We both have been as proud of him as we are of Kenneth and Dennis.

About a year or two after my coming to Brazil, as I was working at Nailotex, I found it necessary to question Edith about some phase of the cost of lingerie production. As she was not in her office, I went to the showroom and sure enough she was showing the collection to the lingerie merchandise manager of Sears Roebuck. The woman was quite attractive and appeared to be in early forties, a bit older than I. Edith introduced me to Anita de Rosa and after a little chit-chat, I left and returned to my office.

It seems that Edith had a motive in introducing me to her; whether it was for my sake in making my social life better while being in Brazil or, perhaps, increasing the sales to Sears. One must realize that in the States, married and single salesmen in the garment industry were encouraged to entertain out-of-town buyers by taking them to dinner, shows and in some instances, sexual relations.

A few days after meeting Sra. de Rosa, Edith clued me in to Anita's past life. She had married and divorced three men, each of whom was a diplomat in Spain, Portugal and Brazil, respectively. Edith, although not knowing Anita's birthplace or her religion, suspected that she was a Hungarian Jewess; Mrs. de Rosa never divulged her true lineage. Edith suggested my making a date with her which I did and she was well aware of my marital status.

For the next 8 or 9 years, comprising 16 or 18 trips, I entertained her taking her to dinner, the cinema, shows and concerts, During one carnival season, we met in Rio and went in the evening to Sacha's, the most prestigious night club in Brazil. As we were sitting and enjoying our drinks, we both noticed Lana Turner, Van Heflin and other Hollywood stars dancing. Anita, not being very bashful, suggested that I ask Miss Turner for a dance. Believe it or not, I did just that and Lana could not have been more gracious by accepting.

In all that time, she never invited me to her apartment, except for one Sunday afternoon when she called me at the hotel and informed me that she wasn't feeling well and desired my company. When I arrived at her apartment building, I saw an exquisite and beautiful edifice that contained apartments that only the very wealthy could afford to purchase.

Her apartment resembled a Hollywood set of a home of the extreme rich. I imagine that each divorce left her quite wealthy. While being with her for the first time in that close environment, I anticipated that she would attempt to seduce me in either being dressed provocatively or being undressed to some degree. When I saw her lying in bed in a sick state, I knew that she honestly wanted a friend to be with her and not even thinking of sex. She liked me as a friend and enjoyed a platonic relationship; perhaps, it was due to the fact that she knew that I was happily married and not looking for a sexual partner. When I state: "I never had sex with that woman" a la Clinton, I really mean it.

One day, she advised me that she was coming to the US on business and told me that she was going to stay at the Biltmore Hotel. When she arrived, she called me and we made a date for dinner for the three of us, Hilda included. We had a most enjoyable evening together, Hilda being very impressed with her looks, brains and very

vibrant personality. In fact, Hilda liked her so much that she graciously invited Anita to dinner at our home, to meet our sons. She, of course, accepted and we again enjoyed each other's company. My desire was to end our platonic relationship fearing that, perhaps, it would lead to events that I would regret. She once told me that I should move with my family to Brazil and if I did so she and I together could make a fortune.

After she met my family and my not accepting her suggestion that I relocate, she also decided to put an end to our dating and although I would see her at Nailotex, we remained friendly but never dated again. Several Years later, Lulu Moskovits mailed me an article from "La Manchete", the "Saturday Evening Post" of Brazil, which related the murder of Anita by her lawyer who wanted to steal her apartment.

It seems that the two of them were on a car trip on business between Sao Paulo and Santos and that she was slain and her body disposed of somewhere between the two cities. He was convicted for some offense; but not for murder since they never discovered her body. He served 18 months and was released.

Finally, in 1955, my beloved Dodgers whom I rooted for in Ebbetts Field since the age of 8 won its first World Series. This team had participated in 2 previous attempts at winning this prestigious honor in 1916 and 1920. In the former year, the Boston Red Sox defeated the Dodgers 4 games to 1. Babe Ruth pitched the second game going 14 innings winning the game 2-1; he batted 5 times without getting a hit. The Brooklyn pitcher, Smith, pitched the entire game with an earned run average of 1.35. Today, if a pitcher goes 8 innings in a game it is considered an exemplary performance. The more famous names on the Dodger roster were; Zach Wheat of, Jake Daubert 1b, Casey Stengel of, Chief Meyers c, Fred Merkle 1b, Rube Marquard p, Nap Rucker p. and Wilburt Robinson mgr. Their second loss in 1920 was to the Cleveland Indians 5 games to 2. Two additional names appeared in this Series, Burleigh Grimes p, and Otto Miller c.

After losses to the Yankees in 1941, 1947, 1949, 1952, and 1953, my team finally reached nirvana beating their city rivals 4 games to 3. The Dodger starting lineup included Gil Hodges 1b, Junior Gilliam 2b, Jackie Robinson 3b, Peeewe Reese ss, Carl Furillo rf, Duke Snider cf, Sandy Amoros lf, Roy Campanella c, and Walt Alston mgr. The pitchers were Carl Erskine, Don Newcombe, Johnny Podres, Clem Labine, Roger Craig, Billy Loes and several less known members of the bull pen. Johnny Podres won 2 games with an earned run average of 1.00.

## CHAPTER XXX

On January 14, 1956, Hilda and I were privileged to celebrate our first born's Bar Mitzva. The weekly portion of the Torah was *Vaayrah* which describes the first five plagues visited upon the Egyptians. After the Torah portion is read, a congregant is called up to the Torah to chant the *Haftorah*- a portion of the Prophets. Although at my Bar Mitzva it was not the custom for the celebrant to chant the Torah portion and I did not do so, the young man reaching adulthood did usually read aloud the *Haftorah* which I did.

Later on, many Bar Mitzva boys who were capable did read both the Torah portion and the *Haftorah* and Kenny did so admirably. His pronunciation of each word and his cantillation was flawless. Hilda and I were not at all surprised since he was a top student at Yeshiva Rambam and at his graduation on June 20 he delivered the valedictory address and received recognition of excellence in several subjects. In the evening, we had a fairly large reception in the catering hall of the Kingsway Jewish Center.

After his graduation, we enrolled him at the Yeshiva University High School at Bedford and Church Avenues. A week prior to the school semester, I received a phone call from the executive director of the Yeshiva requesting that I come to the school on the following Sunday morning; I having no idea why he wanted to see me. When I arrived, I saw many parents sitting outside the director's office and they, being more experienced than I, informed me that the reason for our being called was to make financial arrangements regarding tuition. When my turn arrived, I was ushered into the office and, sure enough, he asked me how much I could afford or wished to pay for my son's education.

I had never experienced this request when I enrolled my two sons at Yeshiva Rambam. I then asked him what the regular tuition was and he responded that the figure was \$500 per year which I immediately accepted. I still remember the startled look on his face and he, being an honest man, told me that I was one of very few parents who would pay that amount. He also told me that he knew the financial status of many of the parents who could well afford the standard tuition and much more but would plead poverty and pay much less.

On July 3, 1956, Hilda had the misfortune to experience the first death in her immediate family. Her sister, Esther, who had been living in Baton Rouge, La. for many years with her husband, Joe Saltz, a native of that city, and with her two young daughters, Nancy and Diane, succumbed to that dreadful disease, cancer of the bronchus. She had been coughing for quite some time and whether she was misdiagnosed or neglected to seek medical advice sooner, I really don't know. Perhaps, when one's time is up, there is very little that you can do.

A few years prior to her death when we visited Baton Rouge, I remember clearly stating to Hilda that, considering all the chemical and oil splitting plants located there, it was a miracle that the inhabitants did not contract lung cancer. At that time, environmental control was unknown and, viewing the many smokestacks belching multi-colored smoke, rang a bell in my mind since I, as a young child, watched my uncle Dovid, who lived on the same street as Pfizer Chemical, die of lung cancer.

After Esther was informed of her ailment, she came up to N.Y. to corroborate the findings and, unfortunately, it was positive. She stayed with Chippy in Florida in the winter and in Irvington-on-the Hudson in the summer. During the last six months of her life, while in her terminal state of the illness, she and her children lived with us while Joe stayed in Baton Rouge, working for his father in an Army & Navy supplies store.

Since Kenny's room had 2 beds, she could have slept in that room; however since she would have to walk up a flight of stairs to reach the bedroom, we decided to buy a large, comfortable folding bed and place it in the living room. This is where she stayed for the entire time while "convalescing" in our home; I am using that term loosely because instead of convalescing she kept deteriorating physically with increased pain.

When New Year's Eve arrived, there was no question in our mind that we would leave her and attend a party elsewhere. Since we knew the love and devotion our friends had for us and Esther, as well, we didn't hesitate to invite them to our house for a "happy and enjoyable" evening. Our six dearest friends, Sylvia and Dave Lupkin, Anita and Jack Walker, and Bertie and Bob Judd did not hesitate for one moment in accepting our invitation, knowing full well that the festive mood would necessarily be impeded by staring at a once beautiful woman changing rapidly into a pain-plagued human being.

Despite her severe pain, Esther kept smiling and joining us, while still lying in her bed, in having a wonderful time. I took motion pictures of the night's activities showing all six of us dancing and singing. In fact, during the entire time that Esther was with us, Anita and Sylvia would visit our home almost daily to see her; Dave also came frequently to perform a very great mitzvah of visiting the sick.

I still cannot forgive myself for a very stupid act that I committed a few days prior to her demise. Esther had been going downhill quite rapidly and gangrene was setting into her legs with its accompanying severe pain. On one Saturday afternoon, her condition necessitated our calling her oncologist who, when advised by us that her legs had taken on a weird color, immediately informed us to call for an ambulance to take her to Mt. Sinai Hospital in Manhattan where he would see her.

When the ambulance arrived and she was carried by stretcher, I should have gone with her to the hospital, the Sabbath notwithstanding. However, perhaps due to the shock or trauma connected with her imminent death, I lost all capacity for thinking clearly and allowed her to be taken alone to the hospital. Unfortunately, that was the last time that I saw my sister-in-law alive as two days later she was taken out of her misery. To this day, I cannot forget this folly perpetrated by me. I only wish and hope that she forgave me.

Since she passed away a day prior to the July 4 holiday, and the normal burial would have taken place on the holiday, we discovered that a union holiday prevented the grave-diggers from working; consequently, the body was put on ice and the burial was performed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July.

My brother-in-law Al several days later, while we were in Irvington, informed me that he and Chippy wanted to take Nancy and Diane to live with and be raised by them. The girls and our two boys were then in camp. I told him that no father would give up his children after the mother's death and that Joe would probably hire a

nanny to help rear them. Al responded: "Just wait and see." About 2 weeks later on a Saturday afternoon in Irvington, Al asked me to accompany him and Joe to an area on the estate and be witness to his asking Joe for the children. Believe it or not, after Al made his suggestion, I had never seen anybody so relieved as was Joe. No mention was made of the fact that Chip and Al had not been blessed with children; but I would guess that may have been one motive for the offer.

In the same year, 1956, Sam Silverman, who was the lawyer for the Moskovits family and for several of my nursing home clients, suggested that I join the Town Club where he was a member. Besides being a possible source of enhancing my practice, he felt that I would enjoy the various activities that were provided by the club. Knowing that I liked imbibing in alcoholic beverages, he informed me that there was a group of members who participated in a unit called "The Wednesday-Nighters". Besides the regular dues, joining this group required an additional surcharge to cover the liquor, canapés and service. The membership consisted primarily of Jews, having a handful of non-Jews and among its members was Nat Holman, a legend in collegiate basketball. Among the celebrities who were members were Attorney-General Lefkowitz and many Supreme Court Judges.

I liked his suggestion and became a member of the club and the other group. I paid an initiation fee which was for a building fund and the annual dues. During the first year of my membership, the club was located in the East 40's, renting space in a small building. After one year, a building was purchased on East 86<sup>th</sup> Street, about 150 feet off Fifth Avenue and Central Park.

The edifice had been the town house of a socialite named Woodward who was shot and killed by his wife, ostensibly by accident. She was never arrested nor convicted because of her claim that she thought he was a burglar and shot him in the dark. He was a very wealthy sportsman owning a large stable of race horses and an accomplished polo player.

The building was beautiful consisting of 4 stories and a large basement which contained the swimming pool, sauna, solarium, several massage rooms and other health club amenities. The "Wednesday-Nighters" met on this floor adjacent to the pool; all dressed in robes drinking and eating and enjoying each other's company. A typical Wednesday night would have about thirty members present, although the group consisted of at least 100 members.

The first floor housed the entrance, reception office where you signed in, gave your wallet and valuables to be placed in safe deposit box, locker room where you undressed and placed your clothing in lockers and a meeting room for any guests that were invited.

On the second floor was a very large and magnificent room where the bar and party room was situated and a well-stocked library. The spacious dining room and lounge were on the third floor and the card rooms were on the fourth floor. Hilda joined me many evenings at the club where we dined together with the other members and their spouses. When I went to play poker, she would retire to the library and indulge in conversation with the other women. I remained a member for 19 years and resigned in June 1975 when we purchased a condo in Tower 41 in Miami Beach. In retrospect, I regret that I made this move of resigning since I enjoyed those years immensely.

In 1957, I began a 33 year business relationship with Anne Lehman, Al's sister, and her husband, Freddy. They engaged me as their accountant at Bristle Trading Corp. a company that imported hair bristles from China. I replaced a nice young man who was the brother of Zero Mostel, the comedian. This firm lasted for 1 year and the Lehmans went into the philatelic business representing several African and Asian governments i.e Ghana, Togo, Maldiv Islands and others.

Due to their contacts with the Ministries of Communication of some African nations as a result of their philatelic representations, the Lehmans entertained the idea in 1976 of supplying these third world countries with telecommunications that were sorely lacking in those areas. Freddy would spend a good part of the year in Africa selling the idea to the governments.

In essence, contracts would be signed with the Ministry in charge of communications and the Lehmans would then sign contracts with usually European suppliers of this equipment. Their compensation was in the form of commissions. Each of the Lehmans employed their best talents in creating a very successful enterprise; Freddy as retaining excellent contacts with the foreign officials and Anne possessing a very astute mind in writing and interpreting contracts. Of course, legal professionals were engaged in drafting the contracts but Anne actually instructed the lawyers in this task.

When Dennis was 9 years of age in 1957, he became extremely bored with his academic career at Yeshiva Rambam and created an atmosphere in his classroom which was not very conducive to learning. He would crack jokes and make his fellow students laugh and his Rebbi or secular teacher exasperated.

In fact he was so well admired by his classmates that he was able to form the "Hendrixian Society"; Hendrix was the name given by Dennis to a very large green stuffed frog given to him as a gift. Being very resourceful and practical, Dennis printed membership cards of this society having as its logo a picture of Hendrix. Almost every member of his class joined and paid him 25 cents annual dues. Many years later, when my niece, Diane, met her date at my home, the young man took his membership card out of his wallet and displayed it proudly to us.

Despite his popularity with his classmates, the teachers were understandably annoyed at my son's behavior and would send him to the principal's office almost daily. The women in the office would await anxiously for his arrival as he made them laugh. I have heard Dennis remark on his radio program that the women established "The Dennis Prager Chair" in his honor. Rabbi Lefkowitz, of whom I have written previously, would call me at the office quite frequently to give me the bad news about my son's behavior. Perhaps, because I was the vice-president and auditor of Rambam, he never suggested my taking Dennis out of his school.

When parent-teacher evenings occurred each semester, we did not look forward to these events as the reports were always depressing. Also, my poor son went into a fearful state a few days before the meeting. When he reached the 7<sup>th</sup> grade at the age of 12, Hilda and I felt that, perhaps, a change of venue would rectify the situation. Since Dennis would always be greeted by a new teacher with the words "Oh, you are Elimelach's brother. I am sure

that you will equal his accomplishments.” They surely did not take Education 101. The worst thing a teacher can do is to compare his pupil with his sibling.

I certainly do not absolve myself for the gross error in placing Dennis in the same school as Kenny. I should have been wise enough to realize that since Kenny was an exceptional student and athlete, he should have gone to a different yeshiva. To compound my stupidity, I enrolled him in Winssocki where Kenny was the lead actor in the annual plays and the best athlete.

Because of the above, we decided to send him to Yeshiva Yaacov Yoseph on the Lower East Side. Every morning, including Sundays, I would drive him to the subway station on Kings Highway and McDonald Ave. Lo and behold, after a few weeks at his new school, phone calls would be made to my office by Rabbi Schwartz advising me of his behavior. I really was in a dilemma as to what action to take. When Dennis informed me several months later that students had been beaten by young hoodlums in that area, I decided to reenroll him in Rambam at the end of the year.

As Yogi Berra would say “Deja Vu, All Over Again,” Rabbi Lefkowitz and I resumed our phone conversations. Prior to his graduation from Rambam, the subject of high school arose and I wanted to enroll him in the Mir Yeshiva which was in the neighborhood. This yeshiva was definitely more to the right than Rambam. When Kenny heard of this proposal, he wisely informed me that my choice would assuredly make matters worse and we would lose our son.

We took Kenny’s advice and enrolled him in Yeshiva of Flatbush. During his freshman year, I received phone calls from the principal, Rabbi Lieberman repeating what the previous two principals told me.

Hilda and I were at wits end and completely lost as to what options we had in raising our son. I have heard Dennis remark many times on his radio program, when speaking of this episode in his life, that a teacher at Rambam advised me as to the course of action that I eventually took. I dislike correcting my son, but his statement is erroneous.

The truth is as follows: since I always have a brief conversation with my spiritual Father before falling asleep, one night full of anguish and pain, I implored him to guide me in the correct parental path I should take with Dennis. Believe it or not, I awoke the following morning with a modus operandi. A day or two later, I sat Dennis down in my home office and the two of us were alone. I remember, as though it happened yesterday, the exact words that poured from my mouth.

I told him that, as his father, I loved him and will always love him. However, respect has to be earned and I could not respect his actions. I then took a risk in informing him that from that moment on, the word “school” would be taboo in our home. I would never ask him if he had homework, what his grades were, and, in fact, did not have to attend school.

From that moment on, he made a 360 degree turn in his academic life. What he needed was a hands-off approach from his parents that automatically eliminated the severe tension that had been building up throughout his

school years. His grades improved substantially, he was elected president of his senior class and was editor of the year-book.

Not being a psychologist, I cannot state definitely why Dennis behaved in the manner that he did. However, my guess is that since he feared not living up to his brother's achievements, he preferred attributing any low grades that he may receive in the future to his poor behavior rather than being accused of stupidity.

In 1958, I received another client called Saxony Paper Co. which was in a store in 15 Park Row where my office was located. I would buy my stationary supplies from Saxony and one day the proprietors asked me if I would become their accountant; of course, I accepted as I didn't reject any sources of income. I remained with them until 1984 when the company dissolved.

That same year, Hilda and I got the urge to visit Havana with Chippy and engage in a bit of gambling at one of its casinos. We thought it would be enjoyable to spend New Year's Eve in Cuba. We chose the Nacional Hotel and checked in 2 days prior to the New Year. We spent several hours in the casino on New Year's Eve and when we returned to our rooms around 2 a.m., we discovered that our beds were not made up and not cleaned. I, therefore, went down to the lobby to complain after receiving no answer on the phone. To my dismay, I did not see any employees in the entire hotel.

There were a few guests milling around the lobby as perplexed as we were and in a few moments we ascertained the reason for the mystery; Fidel Castro and his deputy Che Guavera successfully revolted against Batista's government. On the following morning, we went to the airport to return to Miami. Fortunately, we boarded the last plane out of Cuba.

My friends, Dave and Fay Hammerman who had also been vacationing in Cuba could not leave for close to a week.

In October 1959, Kenny was selected as one of the representatives of the Yeshiva High School students in New York City to be a delegate to the Albany Youth Conference convened by Governor Rockefeller. He was selected by Dr. Alvin Schiff, the head of the Jewish Education Committee of New York. A few months later, he was chosen as the only yeshiva student in the U.S. to represent all the nation's yeshivas at the White House Conference on Children and Youth. I would describe these events as true "yiddishe nachas"

Kenny graduated from Yeshiva University High School of Brooklyn in June 1960 receiving the following honors: Excellence in English, Excellence in General Science, and Excellence in French. Also, he received awards for service as G.O. President and Editor of "Kolenu", the Hebrew newspaper. In one of the articles he wrote, which was supposed to be humorous, he mentioned his Rebbi, Rabbi Yogel, in a manner which was not appreciated by the Rabbi and to demonstrate his pique, he refused to call upon Kenny in his class and ignored him completely.

I do not recall whether Kenny apologized for his action in demeaning his Rebbi, but I felt that since I was paying tuition for my son's education, the punishment was not in order. I asked for an appointment with Rabbi

Zuroff, the Hebrew principal, to express my displeasure at having Kenny sitting in his class as a “persona non-grata”. As I expected, Rabbi Zuroff, not being a very forceful person, listened to me and did nothing.

At the commencement exercises, I noticed Rabbi Yogel congratulating Kenny with a broad smile; thus, displaying his complete forgiveness which made my son and his parents very happy.

## **CHAPTER XXXI**

Dennis became a Bar Mitzva in August 1961 while he was a camper at Winssocki. Hilda and I, after getting Dennis’s permission, decided to celebrate at camp. Believe it or not, this was the first of four events which were held to commemorate our son’s becoming a “man”. Fortunately, my mother and Hilda’s parents were still alive so that they were able to attend the ceremony at camp. Among the other invitees were Murray and Gert, my sister Ann, Chippy and Al and Pearl and Bert.

Unfortunately for Dennis, the portions of the Torah to be read that Shabbat – Matoth and Masse – were the longest in words of the entire Pentateuch and making it obligatory to read both because that year was a leap year in the Hebrew calendar. Despite this difficult task, Dennis’s rendition was excellent in both the pronunciation of the words and the cantillation; his reading of the Haftorah, similarly, was perfect.

All the meals that weekend were accompanied by joyous singing. Dennis and his guests enjoyed a beautiful and memorable Bar Mitzva party.

Since we were members of two synagogues and Dennis was our last son to be honored in this mitzvah, we felt we could not get enough of celebrating. Consequently, upon his return from camp and after the High Holy Days in October, Dennis again obliged us by consenting to read from the Torah and chant the Haftorahs in Kingsway Jewish Center and Cong. Oheb Zedek. We invited the entire congregations to a large kiddish since all our friends were not invited to the camp festivities.

In November, we held the Bar Mitzva Reception on a Saturday evening at the Fifth Avenue Synagogue in Manhattan inviting our families and close friends. As I mentioned previously, we would not have another occasion to celebrate a Bar Mitzva of a son, so we went all out this time.

My cousin, Tanta Rivka’s son who was a CPA, informed me that 2 of his clients were going to public in 1961 and if I was interested in preparing the “red herring”. This was the term used to describe the prospectus to be filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission. At this particular time and for several years previously, many corporations with a small capitalization took advantage of the public’s frantic desire to “get in on the ground floor” and make a “killing”.

These companies usually had a few stockholders who were the officers and would issue a large number of shares at an attractive low price so that the public would jump in. In very few cases, the investors would reap a bonanza; however, in most cases, they lost their entire investment.

As I stated previously, I never turned down new clients because of lack of expertise in their areas of business. I was not intimidated by the importance of preparing a prospectus and the work involved. To add to my inexperience, both companies were going public at the same time and audits were for the same month, September 30. I told my cousin that he could depend on me and thanked him for the additional revenue to be gained by me.

The first corporation that I tackled was Stewart Industries who manufactured stainless steel kitchen and hospital equipment. The initial public offering –IPO– was 80m shares @ 4.00 per share; after a 10% underwriting discount and after legal, accounting and other expenses, the proceeds to the company from the sale of shares amounted to less than \$260,000. Today, that figure appears ludicrous compared to present IPOs.

However, considering inflation of the past 43 years, that amount becomes less ridiculous. I was doing well financially having a fairly good practice; my annual earnings before expenses and taxes was \$32,000. Today a junior accountant just coming out of school earns more. My fee for this work was the magnificent amount of \$2500. You can just imagine what a present day accounting firm would charge for this engagement.

I remained their independent accountant preparing annual financial statements for five years. I do not recall whether the company had to furnish the SEC with independently audited financial statements for 5 years or that they went out of business.

The other corporation was Miltronics Manufacturing Corp. who produced military electronic cases and containers; 90 % of its products were sold to purchasers in the electronics, aircraft, missile and communications fields and most of these products had an end use for equipment produced under Government contract. The Company ranked eighth in the country among approximately twenty manufacturers of metal containers. Another item produced was electronic score-boards sold to many stadium owners.

The IPO was 100m shares @ 2.00 per share; after the underwriting discount and other expenses, the proceeds to the Company was \$170,000. The last annual financial statement I prepared for this Corporation was in 1970.

The following year in 1962, I again became a hotel manager. After my “illustrious” debut in hotel management in Spring Valley years ago, I was definitely not interested pursuing this vocation. My clients, Al, Rappi, Maged and Wachsmann purchased a vacant building in Long Beach, N.Y. that had previously housed a hotel. The edifice, inside and outside was in shambles. Because of this poor condition, the purchase price was very reasonable; however, the renovations and improvements exceeded 1 million dollars.

Being very charitable individuals, the 4 major stockholders offered a few of their relatives an opportunity to become minor stockholders. I, thus, became overnight an hotelier as I purchased a 10% interest in the new venture. To my complete amazement, all 4 of my partners decided that I was to be the manager while the building was being renovated and refurbished. Also, I was to remain in that capacity for Passover, the entire summer, the High Holy Days and the 8 day Succoth Holidays. I immediately rejected their very lucrative offer for three reasons.

1. I was very happy working at my profession and was not looking to augment my income outside of accounting.

2. I remembered my past experience in this line of work and wasn't looking forward to the many problems inherent in hotel management.
3. Last but not least, I had to live with Hilda at the hotel; a single room not comparable to a fairly large house in Brooklyn.

After a great deal of cajoling, they persuaded me to become the manager. We called the hotel the Promenade Hotel which was situated on National Blvd. and the Boardwalk and was a five story building housing 180 guest rooms. We decided to open on Passover and due to radio and newspaper advertising, we booked a full house for the holidays. The crème-de-la-crème of Orthodox Jewry was among our guests. If I were to name just a few, you would immediately recognize the names.

I must say that the architect and interior decorators did a magnificent job in producing a beautiful edifice, internally and externally. However, the plumbing contractor that was employed was, evidently, a dud. On the first day of check-in which was the eve of Passover, I remember standing at the registration desk in the lobby and being soaked with water from the ceiling above. Whenever the guest or guests on the floor above would use either the sink or toilet, we would be soaked below. Finally, we decided to employ umbrellas to hold over the heads of the people checking-in. This was my second introduction in hotel management.

My second problem was in the dining room that evening. It seems that the chopped liver appetizer was placed on the tables much too soon in that hot weather resulting in a very sour plate that was rejected by all. This was my first experience at a Seder as a married man being away from my home or the homes of our parents. Sitting in a large room with several hundred persons chanting the Haggada simultaneously does not create much *kavana* (spiritual warmth) in me. I definitely can understand people going to hotels for the Passover Holidays if they secure a private room for the Sidurim. That evening was the first and last time I celebrated Passover at a hotel.

Fortunately, the rest of the Holiday was uneventful in that no further problems arose. For this holiday and for the summer we engaged the leading cantors of the country; each shabbos, a different cantor led the guests in prayer. During the Succoth Holidays, we again engaged a cantor.

The Mizrachi Organization of America held a 3 day convention at our hotel with the guest speaker being Rabbi Dov BerSoloveitchick. Therefore, I enjoyed some very good moments in addition to aggravation at other times while I was managing.

Whether it was due to aggravation or running around the hotel all day, I lost at least 15 pounds during my managerial tenure. When one of the stockholders, Salamon Wachsman, offered to purchase the hotel from the remaining stockholders 2 years later and his offer was accepted, I *benched gomel* (a prayer thanking God for being rescued from a dangerous situation).

The hotel was converted to a half-way house for mental patients who were not so ill that they required being institutionalized. This saved the State a great deal of money as the cost in an institution far exceeded the sum spent

in these homes. Mr. Wachsman retained me as his accountant until 1985 when he sold the building to a group interested in converting to condos.

In 1963, my friend Dave Knaster, whom I knew from Kingsway Jewish Center and Yeshiva Rambam, purchased a firm that manufactured envelopes. He asked me if I was interested in being his accountant for this company. As I stated several times previously, I very rarely rejected an offer. There were a few isolated cases when I didn't receive the right vibes when meeting a prospective client and invented a reason for not accepting. Thus I became the accountant of the Sterling Envelope Corp. for 9 years when he sold the company in 1972.

A year later in 1964, I received my third nursing home client, the Oceanview Nursing Home in Far Rockaway. One of the operators was Dave Wolf, a brother of one of my classmates in Yeshiva Torah Vadaath, Tobias Wolf; his partner was Joe Weissblum. I cannot recall why they chose me as I didn't know either one of them prior to my being their accountant. By coincidence, the administrator of the Home was Mrs. Stern, the wife of another classmate at YTV, Saul Stern. I remained their accountant for 6 years when they sold the Home in 1970.

In January 1964, Kenny graduated Columbia College after 3 ½ years and was elected to the Phi Beta Kappa Society. Having six months before attending post-graduate school, he opted to spend that time in traveling abroad. His first stop was the Sorbonne in Paris where he studied for several months. Then, he visited Israel and stayed there until he was ready to enter medical school.

While in Israel on one Friday night, while praying at the Great Synagogue in Jerusalem, he met Rabbi Levi, a distinguished gentleman who resided in Mea Shearim and whose ancestors had been living in Israel for 8 generations. Although living in a section of Jerusalem inhabited mainly by anti-Zionist chassidim, he was a loyal Zionist as was his entire family. He asked Kenny if he had a home to visit to celebrate the Sabbath. When Kenny answered in the negative, he invited my son to his home where he met Rabbi Levi's granddaughter Shifra.

Whenever Hilda and I visited Israel, we made sure to pay our respects to the Levi family; even after several years and the grandparents were no longer alive. A year or two after Kenny met Shifra, she married Yaakov Dior, a charming, handsome, educated and wonderful young man. From the first time we met Shifra, we both fell in love with her. She had all the attributes a suitor would desire; pretty, smart, wonderful personality and all goodness. They have a beautiful home in Rannana and on each trip to Israel, we visit them as do Jeannie and Kenny.

Before going on his trip abroad, Kenny applied to several medical schools, including Columbia and Harvard. While he was away, he was accepted by all other than Harvard from whom he received no word. When I contacted him in Israel telling him about the acceptances, he told me that I should inform Columbia that he accepted their offer. I don't remember whether I fulfilled his desire or waited to hear from Harvard.

At any rate, several weeks later, he received his acceptance from Harvard and in the letter he was informed that he has 14 days to accept or reject the opportunity to be a student in that very prestigious school. I immediately contacted Kenny who told me that he prefers Columbia and that I should notify Harvard that he is grateful to them but he is going to Columbia.

I didn't comply with his wishes and made a call to the dean of admissions at Harvard and told him that Kenny was abroad and that I couldn't contact him and therefore requested that he reserve a place for Kenny until he comes home in a few weeks. Believe it or not, the dean was very gracious and understanding and said there would be no problem and as soon as he returns he should get in touch with him. When my son returned, he thanked me for not obeying his request and was extremely happy to go to Harvard.

Around this time, I began to notice strange and bizarre actions by my mother. For instance, on one occasion when she spent a weekend at my house and we went to Kingsway for the Sabbath services, when the Rabbi was sermonizing Mama decided to stand up and pray. In addition, she wore shoes with both soles semi detached from the shoes and flapping noisily. My sister Anne, seeing at home what Mama was going to wear, admonished her for this behavior. My mother, as usual, berated Anne for her interfering in Mama's choice of attire.

Another instance of her strange behavior occurred that same weekend. I was sitting in the living room conversing with two clients and Mama suddenly came into the room. She told my clients that she would like to visit her son in Schenectady but, unfortunately, didn't have the fare to do so. Instead of being embarrassed, I realized that they could detect my mother's illness.

Also, my sister-in-law Gert informed Hilda and me about several instances that she observed that definitely demonstrated acts of severe dementia. A dilemma now arose as to the proper action to be taken by us in the care of Mama. Our first option was engaging a woman to take care of Mama as Anne was working every day and couldn't take care of her. As we expected, after several days the woman we hired left telling us that my mother was a very difficult patient.

The second option was to have Mama live with us; again this was out of the question since Hilda also was working. After a family discussion with Murry and Anne, we decided to place her in the Garden Nursing Home where Hilda was employed and I was the accountant. Since the Home was a few blocks from my mother's residence, Anne would be able to visit her every evening.

In addition, Mama's sister Rivka who also was suffering from dementia was already a patient at the home. Every time I visited Rivka, she would address me as Meyer, her son. Also, Rivka's husband, Elia who had a slowly progressive cancer was also a patient in the Home. Hilda looked in on Mama several times during the day and therefore made my mother's stay more pleasant. Murry came into New York from Schenectady quite frequently on buying trips for his store; thus he also saw her very often. I must say that during the entire year that she was a patient she never complained to her children or to the nurses who were caring for her. In fact, I noticed a great diminution in her dementia. Whenever I visited her, she would ask me to get her a few bottles of beer from the liquor store across the street.

One night around 3 am in May 1964, I received a phone call from the Home that Mama was near death. I immediately drove to the Home and when I went to her room I saw my mother in a state more serene than I had ever seen her in the past. She gazed upon my face with a faint smile and took my hand in hers. Not a word came

from her lips and she seemed to be awaiting her fate with no fear since she was a very devout Jewess and accepted her Maker's decision with love. She expired as I was holding her hands. Fortunately, she never had pain and did not suffer during the last days of her life. The cause of death was heart failure; the same cause of Papa's death. I was now a true orphan not having either parent. Regardless of the excellent care Mama received at the Home, I always had a guilt complex about not taking her to live in my home.

After Papa's death, my mother reserved a grave next to that of my father and erected a double tomb stone. Although Mama was very religious, she allowed her love for her husband to transcend the Orthodox taboo of lying next to a man. Despite her great love for Papa, at our annual visits to the graves at Beth David Cemetery, she would first touch and speak to the grave of her daughter Irene which was next to her reserved grave. It was a poignant demonstration that the loss of a child inflicts a greater suffering than that of a spouse.

Our first trip to Europe and Israel occurred in May 1965. Whether this was due to celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary or not, I can't recall. Our first stop was in London where we spent a very enjoyable and enlightening time. We liked London so much that we revisited this city 4 more times on our future trips. After a stay of one week, we departed for Israel. We had reservations at the Dan Hotel in Tel Aviv and were not too surprised that either our travel agent or the hotel screwed up. Upon arrival, we were told that we arrived 1 day too soon and there were no rooms available. However, they informed us that they could obtain a room in the Jewish Olympics compound which was several miles outside of Tel Aviv.

We did not know that these sporting events were being held at this time and, consequently, all rooms in Israel were solidly booked. When we arrived at a building which was erected specifically to house the Jewish athletes, we were given a fairly large and simply furnished room lacking air conditioning. Since the heat was oppressive, we were forced to sleep with the windows wide open. Of course, there were no screens and we spent the entire night sleepless, killing all the insects that wanted to share our room. After this introduction to Israel, we moved the following day to the Dan Hotel.

A day or two later was the holiday of Log B'omer and was told that if we cared to experience an unforgettable event we should visit Mt. Maron where the grave of Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai was situated. This Rabbi was held in reverence by Sephardim throughout the world. When we arrived at this site, we could not believe what we saw. Hundreds of men, women and children were congregated with sheep to be slaughtered on this occasion. There is a tradition among all chassidim, Sephardi and Ashkenazi, to cut the hair of their 3 year old sons on this holiday; the Israeli Sephardim do this on Mt. Maron. The singing and dancing accompanying this celebration will forever be etched in our minds.

On September 14, we celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary at a party tendered to us at the home of our dear friends, Anita and Jack Walker. Among the many guests were our two sons, our close friends, the Lupkins and the Judds. We will always remember Dennis's toast to us on behalf of Kenny and his "siblings" in Brazil. That created a

great deal of laughter among all those present and, of course, neither Hilda or I were embarrassed by his remarks knowing full well that Mac was not unfaithful to his loving wife.

Hilda presented me with a sterling silver “esrog” box inscribed “To My Darling Husband on Our 25<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary”. I gave her a pair of sterling silver three arm candelabra inscribed “To My Lovely Dear Hilda on Our 25<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary”. Kenny and Dennis jointly gave us a beautiful sterling silver shaped box with a floral décor inscribed in Hebrew “To Our Dear Parents on their Wedding Anniversary”. Pearl and Bert gave us a Dutch silver “Reindeer & Sleigh”.

The occasion prompted me to express my long harbored feelings that I had for my beloved partner in life; I wrote the following letter.

Dearest Hilda,

This is the first time in my life that I am writing to you while not being separated in distance. In fact, as I write these words, I am gazing at your beautiful face as you are dozing on the couch.

As we say at the Passover Seder, *ma nomar, ma nidaber* (what shall I say? what shall I speak?) My heart is really too filled with emotion to articulate clearly my feelings on this milestone in our lives; the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our wedding.

To tell you that I love you would sound too much like a cliché and, of course, would be insufficient to express to you how I really feel towards you. A little incident 27 years ago taught me how strong my love is for you and since that day that love has become stronger with each passing day. So, just to tell you “I love you” is hardly any news to you.

To tell you “I respect you” should also not be something revealing to you. In the 29 years that we know each other, I have always asked you for advice and guidance. Many has been the occasion when I was troubled and groping for the proper and wise solution.

Your incredible wisdom, common sense and mature understanding always rescued me from the dilemmas that befell me. How many times have I praised you and even envied you for having the right saying or the right thought at the right time. Your capacity for human understanding and for your transmitting your warm personality to others has made you beloved by young and old, by the healthy and infirm. So, just to tell you “I respect you” is also nothing new to you.

To tell you “I am proud of you”; that you have heard hundreds of times from my lips. Your beauty, carriage, dress and just plain CLASS has made me the envy of many a man. When you enter a room, all eyes stare at you; when you stroll in the street, all eyes follow you. You are always clean, neat, impeccably dressed and, of course, crowned always with a great big smile. Yes, Hil, I am truly proud of you and know that I will continue to be until we are called to Paradise. So, just to tell you “I am proud of you” again does not startle you because you have heard it before.

To tell you “I am grateful to you” for the wonderful sons that you bore in your womb for me; again this would be repetitious since I have never ceased telling you that after the Almighty, I credit you for their marvelous upbringing. I can never forget the difficult years you spent in rearing Kenny with a father thousands of miles away. His childhood illnesses and problems you bore alone.

I was stern with the boys at times; however, you tempered my severity with the warm love of a mother. Thus, you were an ideal partner in the rearing of our sons and, incidentally, you are quite aware of how grateful they are to you for the manner in which they were raised. So, just to tell you “I am grateful to you” doesn’t really surprise you one iota.

What I will say to you now is that “I need you” more than you can ever imagine. I need you now and for the next seventy years. Without you, I am just a floundering man. The many times I have been separated from you have shown me vividly what your presence is to me. So please, Hil, stay close to me for many years so that I can enjoy your warmth, lively disposition, hearty laugh, gorgeous face, exciting body, wise counsel and, above all, your precious companionship. I repeat *ma nomar ma nadaber*. What shall I say? What shall I speak? Nothing more than I NEED YOU. All my love!

Mac

## CHAPTER XXXII

In June 1966, Dennis graduated Yeshiva of Flatbush and being the President of the senior class, he presented a gift to the school on behalf of his class at the commencement exercises. In May of 1965 and 1966, he was admitted to “Archon”, the honor society at the Yeshiva. Also, he received good grades in his Regents exams and was able to obtain a Regents Scholarship. Evidently, the advice I received from the Almighty paid off in dividends.

In his senior year, he applied to several colleges, including Columbia and one or two other Ivy League schools. His principal, whom I will not name, refused to forward his applications to any of the prestigious colleges. I was quite aware of the reason for this action since Yeshiva of Flatbush had an exemplary record of having its graduates accepted to these ivory towers. By refusing its students who did not have a high scholastic standing to apply to these colleges, it was able to retain this high record and used this as a vehicle to encourage elementary school graduates with high grades to enroll in Flatbush.

When Dennis informed me of the principal’s action, I saw red. I called the principal for an appointment to lodge my complaint. Incredibly, he refused to see me. I did tell him that if he continued to refuse to send my son’s application to whichever school Dennis wanted, I would be sure to disseminate his refusal to all newspapers in the city and his beloved Yeshiva would suffer the consequences..

I don’t remember whether he hung up on me; but I do recall that he did not reply. A few days later, Dennis told me that all his applications were forwarded. I knew quite well that because of his grades, other than the Regents grades he would not be successful in being accepted to any of the Ivy League colleges. However, no school official has the right to deny a student an opportunity to apply to any college he desires. Since, he was not accepted by these schools, he went to Brooklyn College.

On June 26, 1966, Zanny, of whom I wrote previously, married Eva Sojcher, a beautiful and very lovely young lady who lived in Los Angeles and who was attending Stern College in New York. What I am now going to relate, perhaps, gives credence to the Jewish belief that one’s future spouse is ordained – we call this a *zivik* and what has become more expressed as a *basherte*.

Zanny was given the name of a young lady from Los Angeles named Eva who was attending Stern College whom he should date. When he called the school and asked to speak to Eva from L.A., not knowing her surname, he was connected to the other “Eva”. Evidently, the wrong “Eva” was exactly what he desired as his wife and she too saw much in him that she was looking for; consequently, after a short courtship, they became man and wife.

Unfortunately, Zanny’s mother, Edith, of whom I also wrote previously, contracted lung cancer while in Brazil and, instead of continuing her therapy in New York, decided to return to Nailotex to prepare her lingerie line for the coming season. One will never know whether her decision was the reason for her demise or that she would leave her family regardless. At any rate, because of her severe illness and imminent death, the wedding date was

pushed up so that she would enjoy her eldest child's wedding. It was a wise decision since Edith went to the hereafter in July, a month after the wedding.

Although Hilda and I had met Eva's parents, Yoli and Jake, at the engagement previously, we got to know them much better at the wedding. Whenever we visited Dennis in the following years in L.A., we would visit these two charming individuals at their home and at their Judaica shop on Fairfax Avenue. We became very close to Yoli over the years and our friendship has blossomed to this day. Because Jake, who had been suffering from Parkinsons, met his death a few years after the wedding, we, unfortunately, did not have the opportunity to enjoy his company for a much longer period.

Yoli is considered family, therefore, when we lived on 27<sup>th</sup> Street in Brooklyn and she lived on 13<sup>th</sup> Street and Avenue M, she would walk close to a mile to our home every Saturday to spend the afternoon and evening with us. After joining us in whatever activity we would engage in, I would drive her home at night.

In November of the same year, Hilda underwent gynecologic surgery at NYU University Hospital in mid-Manhattan. Since Hilda was the administrator of a nursing home, she was permitted to bring her round-the-clock nurses from the home. God must have had a hand in this wise decision as future events unfolded. What was supposed to be a 7-10 day stay at the hospital, resulted in her being there for 3 weeks. It seems that her position during the surgery aggravated her slipped disk which necessitated the longer stay.

About a week after her surgery, Jessie Davis, a R.N. from the nursing home informed me that Hilda, who was suffering from a hyper thyroid condition for many years, was being treated by the internist with drugs usually administered to hypo thyroid patients and possibly resulting in her death. When she went into a coma for 6 hours, I immediately called her gynecologist and informed him of this very serious situation. His answer was that he had a full waiting room of patients in his Park Ave. office and could not see her until later in the evening.

My response was that he must allow me to bring in my own internist, Dr. Kabakow, who did not have visiting privileges at University Hospital. I stated that unless he granted my request immediately, I would call the Daily News to have a reporter present the following morning when I would take Hilda out of the hospital and transfer her to Beth Israel Hospital in which Dr. Kabakow was affiliated.

The threat worked because, within one hour, Dr. Jenkins, her gynecologist showed up and apologized for the extremely serious error that was perpetrated by his chosen internist and advised me that I could bring in any doctor that I chose. Miss Davis informed me, a day later, that the hospital nurses on the floor asked her "Who is this Mr. Prager that he has the power to bring in his own nurses and his own internist?" What this incident demonstrates is that people are very reluctant to question their physician's decisions.

Kenny, who was home from Harvard for the Thanksgiving holiday, Dennis and I reserved 2 rooms at a hotel near the hospital and we celebrated the Sabbath in her room, bringing kosher meals and singing *zmiros* (Sabbath songs)

On Thanksgiving in the afternoon, we received a call in the hospital room from Kenny wishing to see us as he had something very important to convey to us. Hilda's immediate reaction was that he was going to announce to us his engagement to Jeannie Gronich.

On my birthday, July 18, in the year 1965, Kenny while attending Harvard met his future wife for the first time. Perhaps, it was a coincidence that Kenny met his *zivik* on the date of my birth; who knows. Jeannie was a student at Radcliff College in Cambridge at the time.

Jeannie's friend, Margie was going with Mark Peppercorn, a friend of Kenny who suggested that Kenny call Jeannie for a date, which he did. They, evidently, hit it off since a month later he brought her to Camp Massad in the Poconos where Dennis was a counselor. Hilda and I met her for the first time and we liked what we saw.

We invited her to spend the following Shabbos at our home. She still relates to us and others that she couldn't quite get over the fact that at our Sabbath table there was so much talking and singing, both in a high decibel. Evidently, this did not dissuade her from continuing to see our son.

Jeannie told me recently a fact that I didn't know. It seems that Kenny inherited a Prager syndrome which prevented our males from leading a girl into a false illusion that we are serious in the relationship when we are not ready to make a commitment. Thus, Kenny made it clear to Jeannie that, although he liked her, he was still a medical student and marriage was not yet in the cards.

Consequently, they stopped seeing each other for a few months and Jeannie resumed dating other young men. However, Kenny, being Mac's son, repeated his father's dilemma when I was courting his mother. I told Hilda that I didn't wish to see her as I related previously and after a period of only one weekend I realized how much I loved her and resumed our relationship. Similarly, Kenny, who was hesitant in committing himself, discovered that he was in love with Jeannie and called her for a date. From that moment on, neither one dated others.

When Kenny came up to Hilda's room and announced his engagement, we told him to bring up Jeannie who was waiting downstairs. We hugged and kissed both. Kenny said that they would like to get married in June 1968 when Kenny graduates from medical school. Hilda stated that they shouldn't wait and get married the following June and both agreed.

On the week end of June 10, 1967, Hilda and I were honored by Yeshiva Rambam at the Pioneer Country Club in the Catskills. Since on the previous Monday hostilities erupted between Israel and several Arab nations, I was not in the mood to be honored by any organization. When I mentioned my thoughts to the dinner committee, I was overruled and told that there would be no cancellation. The committee was correct since the number of participants and the amount of money raised set a record in the annals of the Yeshiva. The following is my address to the guests:

My dear friends,

Up until 10 days ago, I had no intention of addressing you this evening other than to express my gratitude to all of you for your wonderful response. However, the events that unfolded on the world scene

and especially on the Jewish horizon, made it necessary to speak before you. As recently as last Monday, when hostilities erupted between the tiny State of Israel and her Arab enemies, while in a mood of despondency I mentioned to Hilda, that I would have much preferred that this week-end's festivities be cancelled. Whether it is a result of our heritage or perhaps a unique sameness of gene composition, whenever a single Jew is being threatened it is traumatically and vicariously felt by his fellow Jews. However due to the incredible courage, indomitable spirit and brilliant military efficiency, all our moods today have changed; and while I am extolling the well deserved praises of our glorious Israeli brethren, I must say that even the atheist, the agnostic, or even the believer who is skeptical in regard to miracles, have begun at least to question perhaps the hand of God can be seen in this unprecedented and magnificent victory.

It would have been certainly cause enough for joy had this been just a military achievement, but in my mind this is only one resulting factor that has emerged from this great Israeli accomplishment. However, to the Jews of the world something even more important has been added. The word Jew has taken on a new dimension from one end of the world to the other. The age old accusation that the Jewish people were cowardly, meek, timid and incapable of self defense has been for time immemorial completely refuted. Not since the days of King Solomon has the Jew of the world been able to hold his head as high as he can today.

The tribute that is being accorded to my wife and me this week-end pales in significance when compared to the valorous, courageous acts that have been and are being performed by our glorious sons and daughters of Israel. This tribute, although accepted by Hilda and me with deep humility and gratitude, seems almost undeserved when placed alongside the spirit that is evinced by the civilian population of this besieged nation. The tremendous optimism and courage that many of these people displayed in the face of fire and threats have been a source of great admiration by our gentile neighbors throughout the entire world; and I might add, in some cases, even grudgingly so.

Also, tribute should be paid this week-end to Yeshiva Rambam and all the yeshivas of the entire United States for producing boys and girls as I saw on Monday picketing the U.N. in an orderly, proper fashion with songs on their lips. What fascinated me when I saw them was the fact that not one boy was without a yarmulka on his head. The oft-repeated accusation by our own American Jews that children of the Torah are either devoid of courage or anxious to avoid combat is completely repudiated when photographs in the N.Y. Times and other newspapers displayed young boys wearing yarmulkes leaving Kennedy airport for Israel to aid their beleaguered brethren.

I asked myself, where are the young American Jews who frequent the street corners of Kings Highway? Where are the young Jewish children from the haunts of Greenwich Village? We have seen them in the past support and demonstrate vociferously for the cause of civil rights. They are in the forefront of all liberal causes and understandably so. I have seen them protest for sex freedom in the colleges and universities, perhaps, not understandably so. But any rate, I have not seen them in the numbers or in the

loud protestations that were evident in the past. Perhaps, the learning of Torah does instill in our young men and women a spark of Judaism that can never be extinguished.

Of course, although these tributes to man should be great, our homage to the Almighty must be of even greater proportion. He has demonstrated to the nations of the world that the God of Israel is not dead. Contrary to the statements that have been made recently by the theologians of all the other religions, He has demonstrated once again the uniqueness of his children, and that whoever and whatever nation desires their extermination will be themselves destroyed. May He continue to guard this small nation and all Jewry against the oppressors and our enemies who continuously find our presence on the face of the earth to be a bone in their collective throats. May this day be a prelude to a permanent peace in the Middle East, so that the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob may be able to lead that entire area to fruitful prosperity and towards the elimination of disease for the glorification of God.

In conclusion, Hilda and I wish to express to all you gathered here this evening our heartfelt thanks for your unprecedented support to Yeshiva Rambam and for the honor you have bestowed upon us by your presence here this week-end. We would like to express our gratitude to Isaac Moinester, Ben Zweiter, Joe Greenberg and to their committees for their successful accomplishments both in producing a record-breaking journal and for this wonderful week-end that is being enjoyed by us all. Also, our thanks go to Isadore Lefkowitz, Rabbi Harczstak, Ethel Baff and Rose Stabin for their diligent and laborious efforts in their administrative accomplishments. May the Almighty bless you all and may we all continue to retain the immense pride that fills our hearts today as children of Israel.

The following is the invocation given by Rabbi Appel, the principal of secular studies.

Once again we are gathered at the Pioneer  
To honor an officer we love so dear.  
A Rambamite whose professional chores  
Have ensured our ledger's conformance with the laws.  
His accounting firm is at our beck and call  
He's constantly ready to give us all.  
Personal labor and services without a fee  
When needed for Rambam, he's available for free.  
But it is not only his lucid, periodic audits  
Which inspire us to lavish our annual plaudits,  
Rambam's books show another double entry  
His two sons were enrolled and graduated, you see.

I can remember this month eleven years ago,  
When Kenneth, an officer of our student G.O.,  
Inspired our audience on the eve of graduation  
With a soul-stirring, moving valedictory oration.  
It was a great night for parents and teachers alike  
As Kenneth took his position in front of the “mike”.  
This “simcha” was followed some six years later  
By the graduation of Dennis – another great debater.  
The Yeshiva was proud of each Prager offspring  
Who knew how to make each class debate ring.  
They’re both fine examples of intelligence applied  
And to both their parents may they always bring pride.  
Many parents forget Rambam, as a rule,  
When their children are graduated from our school.  
But the officers of the Yeshiva proudly report  
That the Pragers have continued their ardent support.  
And so tonight to honor Hilda and Max,  
Many a couple paid their \$200 tax.  
They rose to the occasion and brought in their ads  
A tribute to the Pragers from Rambam mothers and dads.  
Heavenly Father, these are very turbulent times.  
Perhaps they should not be spoken in rhymes.  
But the friends of Torah who are assembled here  
Are mindful of Israel and what’s transpiring there.  
If by this banquet we trespass in any way,  
If during this week-end we seem too gay,  
In Thy infinite wisdom, will you please understand  
That we have not forgotten our Holy Land.  
To our guest of honor and his lovely wife,  
We invoke Thy blessings for long years of life.  
May You see fit to have peace restored,  
For a true “Shalom”, we beseech Thee, Oh L-rd.

In the same year, 1967, my accounting firm was engaged by another nursing home. The Farragut Nursing Home was owned by Esther Ostreicher, a niece of my other client, Aaron Maged. This was now our fourth health care facility. The home was located on Farragut Avenue in Brooklyn. We retained this client till 1976 when the home was sold.

On January 21, 1968, Papa Friedfeld, who had suffered 4 previous heart attacks, succumbed to heart failure at the age of 85. He and my mother-in-law had been living with Chippy and Al in Florida for several years. Al and I performed the *tabara* (washing of the deceased as required by the tenets of Judaism) with the help of a member of the *chevra kadisha* (a group of men and women who sit with the departed until burial and who also perform the *tabara* and dress the body in a plain white gown).

The body was flown to Brooklyn for the funeral and the burial was in Beth David Cemetery in Elmont, L.I.; the same burial grounds where Irene and my parents were buried.

Kenny graduated from Harvard Medical School in June 1968. Of course, Hilda and I flew up to Boston to attend the ceremonies which were held on a Saturday morning; we now had a doctor in the family in addition to an accountant. What was missing was a lawyer to put credence to the age-old statement that “a Jewish family had to have all three professions to complete a perfect family”. He applied to Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital in Manhattan for his internship and was accepted.

Jeannie and Kenny rented an apartment on Haven Avenue, one block from the hospital. After being separated from our son for 4 years, we were delighted to be able to visit Kenny and our daughter-in-law. We were invited to celebrate the Sabbath with them several times and we were in seventh heaven.

While Dennis was in his sophomore year at Brooklyn College, Marvin Kratter, a real estate developer who built apartment houses at the site of the old Ebbets Field, former home of the Brooklyn Dodgers, created an annual scholarship for ONE student of the sophomore class at Brooklyn College called the Gideonse Foreign Study Scholarship. Harry D. Gideonse was the chancellor of the New School for Social Research and was the past president of Brooklyn College and Kratter wanted to honor him.

In addition to having good grades, and being held in high esteem of some of the teachers, students had to be interviewed by a panel of professors. Dennis, always having charisma and eloquence, was chosen to receive the \$2,000 scholarship which covered sea transportation to and from any college in the world, tuition, and room and board.

Since Dennis was interested in political science and the University of Leeds in England had a high reputation in that field of study, he chose this school. Little did he know that the climate in Leeds was horrible, especially for those suffering from asthma. The sun appeared periodically and rain and fog was the order of the day, almost every day. In addition, he was not very enamored with the school as well. But, Dennis being extremely adaptable, made the best of it and never complained.

One day in December, I received a phone call in my office from Dennis. He advised me, that since he had a fairly good knowledge of the Russian language, Israel had contacted him and wanted him to bring in to Russia certain items and to bring out some items on his departure from the Soviet Union. He was to be accompanied by an Orthodox Jewish girl who lived in England and she was to be his “cousin” throughout the trip.

When he asked for my opinion, I told him that it was a coincidence that the portion of the Torah to be read that week related the story of Moses slaying an Egyptian who was beating a Jewish slave. Moses, being a prince in the house of Pharaoh, was willing to relinquish a safe, wealthy, comfortable life and go into exile in order to protect his fellow Jews. I said: “You, Dennis, now have the choice to do likewise. You may never have this opportunity again.”

## CHAPTER XXXIII

During the Vietnam War, Kenny opted to join the Public Health Service and although he applied to be stationed in Alaska, he was sent to a Sioux Indian reservation in Eagle Butte, S.D. He arrived in June 1969 and was given a lovely house on the reservation about 150 yards from the hospital.

The other physicians on the reservation, all serving in PHS, were George Potter with his wife Susan and their young child, Leslie; Jimmy with Margo Strasberg, both doctors serving the second year of their stint in Eagle Butte. The other physicians beginning the first year of their 2 year stay were Bob with Sara Dickman who was pregnant and Kenny and Jeannie.

On August 2, 1969, our first grandchild was born. Since there were no obstetricians on the reservation, Dr. Bowe at Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital recommended Dr. Theissen in a Rapid City hospital to perform the delivery. Kenny drove his pregnant wife 180 miles to the hospital, fearing all the way that Jeannie would give birth in the car.

When Jeannie asked to go to a rest room in Mud Butte, 80 miles from their destination, Kenny was sure that the moment had arrived and that he would have to deliver his child. Fortunately, his fears were allayed when Jeannie returned to the car and stated that she just had to relieve herself.

When we were notified that Jeannie had given birth, we and Claire immediately flew to Rapid City via Minneapolis to help Jeannie with our granddaughter, Karen. When we arrived at the hospital to take the mother and child home and I held our new gift of God, I cannot describe my emotion and tremendous joy that enveloped me.

Six months after Karen was born, our children asked us if Hilda and I would care to accompany them on a skiing trip to Colorado; of course, we accepted immediately. We flew to Denver where we met them and we all proceeded to Winter Park where we stayed at a ski lodge. Hilda and I attempted to ski and after 2 attempts, we realized our gross ineptitude in that sport. Jeannie also tried her hand at it and gave up after several trials. Kenny, however, took to it as a professional and kept going up on the lift to be able to ski down the hills.

Believe it or not, we took Karen with us and our presence gave our children the opportunity to be able to do things on their own while we baby-sat. We had a grand time and Karen behaved magnificently.

One day, Hilda and I decided to try to drive a snowmobile into the mountains. Unfortunately, while quite a distance from the lodge, the snowmobile broke down in the midst of a snow storm. Instead of feeling in distress, we broke out in great laughter and exclaimed: "We should have remained in Brooklyn; this is not for us." Fortunately, several minutes later we were rescued by an employee of the lodge who constantly kept driving around to give aid to those in trouble.

Next day, the four of us again decided to explore the environs and each couple rented a snowmobile. Jeannie decided to take pictures of us and the magnificent scenery. As she got off her mobile, she disappeared completely. After a while, we called her and didn't receive any response. This time we were scared and started to

look for her. After a while we saw her in a 10 foot hole in the snow into which she had fallen. Being no more than 5 feet tall, she wisely pulled her 2 legs together to diminish her fall so that Kenny, being 6 feet 4 inches tall and possessed with long arms was able to pull her out; again, we started to laugh.

We all had a great time and spent the Shabbat in Denver at a hotel. When the time came to leave, I can still remember how I sobbed saying good-bye to my first grand-child.

In 1969, I was able to obtain 3 more clients. The first was Lily Pond Nursing Home whose engagement started in March. The home was located in Staten Island and owned by Jacob Rozenberg and his wife Miriam who was a niece of Aron Maged. Besides our relationship of client and accountant, we became fast friends and we participated with them in each other's *simchas* (happy occasions).

Jacob died after a short bout with cancer in June 1993. Miriam continued running the home with the aid of her two daughters. After 30 years, I began to be fatigued traveling to Staten Island from Englewood and having difficulty in parking my car several blocks from the Home; I decided to resign as their accountant.

In April 1969, I was engaged by the University Nursing Home located in the north Bronx on University Avenue. The Home was leased to William (Velvel) and Eva (Chavi) Spiegel. Hilda and I met them in 1947 after the war when they immigrated from the concentration camps and were taken into the home of the Moskovits family on President Street in Brooklyn.

Velvel was the nephew of Philip Moskovits, Al's father and Chavi was also a relative of the Moskovits family. We got to know them more intimately when they moved together with the Moskovits's to Irvington-on-the-Hudson. I related previously the many enjoyable visits our family made to Irvington. Of all of Al's relatives, except for Zanny, we are the closest to Velvel and Chavi to this day.

In 1987, I decided to give up my office on Park Row and work out of my home. Since my clients rarely came to my office, I saw no need to travel daily to lower Manhattan from Brooklyn. In addition to saving 2 hours a day in travel, fighting traffic in the morning and evening, paying \$15 for parking, I was able to save quite a bit of money not having to incur office expenses i.e. rent, utilities and a secretary.

I still had my associate, Leon Goldberg, work with me. As he lived on Ocean Parkway, a few miles from my home, I was able to pick him up at his home daily to visit our clients. This was necessary because Leon could not drive a car due to an eye affliction. Now attaining the age of 69, I made the decision to cease taking on new clients and allowing my practice to diminish gradually.

I relate the above because University was my last client where auditing was necessary. When University sold their Home in 2002 after being their accountant for 33 years, I retired at the age of 84

However, I still retain a small tax practice servicing several widows of ex-clients and my family.

The third client I obtained in 1969 was a manufacturer of ladies garments in Miami. The firm's name was Double Talk and the partners were Al and Joel Rosner, Zanny's father. This was my first of many clients that I was able to obtain in Florida. After 2 years, Double Talk went out of business.

In December 1969, a terrible tragedy occurred when Joel Rosner, while driving on the causeway over Biscayne Bay separating Miami from Miami Beach, drove his car into the bay and died instantly. Although no one knew why this happened, I speculate that Joel, who had occasionally suffered black-out episodes in Brazil which I witnessed, possibly could have blacked-out while driving.

A year later, Danny Retter, an attorney and the son-in-law of Rappi, gave me five small senior hotels in Miami Beach as clients. He was one of the partners and the lawyer for all of them. He renovated them and then gradually sold them; so I serviced them for several years.

Another Florida client that I obtained that year was Reva Knitting Mills owned by Zanny. Polyester fabric was in vogue and many textile firms purchased knitting machines for the production of this material. Women's dress wear and men's clothing utilized this fabric to a great extent as it was washable and didn't have to be pressed.

Reva lasted till 1975 and Zanny, knowing the textile business very well, formed Intertex Trading Corp. that exported textile machinery, parts and thread to companies in South and Central America. His ability to speak Portuguese fluently, having lived in Brazil, was a big help in speaking Spanish. He made frequent trips to these customers and his business has flourished to this day.

Another client I secured in 1970 was Hillcrest Nursing Home in Lakewood, N.J. which was owned by Aron Maged and his niece and nephew, Fanny and Geza Kasziner. I was the accountant till 1979 when the home was sold. What I observed at this home was enlightening to me. Lakewood, being the home of Beth Medrosh Givhoa, an Orthodox yeshiva, had a large number of young married men who sat all day and learned Torah, while their wives were working in various jobs. All of Hillcrest's feminine employees were wives of these *kolel* students.

Dennis graduated from Brooklyn College in June 1970, majoring in Anthropology and History. In July he was selected as a delegate to the World Youth Assembly which was opened by the chairman of the UN's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. This gathering brought together many international youth groups from 130 nations. For ten days the young people were able to air their views and work up some original proposals that the Un General Assembly was pledged to consider.

In an article written by the assistant director of the UN Office of the Bnai Brith International Council, he stated: "But, the star of the West was the representative of Bnai Brith Hillel, Dennis Prager, 21, of Brooklyn. Challenging the Soviets, Prager led a spontaneous walk-out of the Peace Commission when the Moscow-Cairo group, couched by members of their regular UN delegations, refused to allow Vietnamese and Chinese participants to speak.

Prager suddenly rose, 6'4" tall, and above the din of the desk-pounding cried out that all who wanted to protest the violation of democratic principles should follow him out of the room. About 30 did so. Although their actions did not necessarily reflect political sympathy with those who were excluded, under Prager's leadership, they effectively demonstrated their commitment to the democratic way.

The next morning Prager appeared at the Education Commission and delivered a speech on the cultural deprivations suffered by Soviet Jewry. Back in the Peace Commission, he participated in an exchange which earned for him the reputation as the only man to embarrass the Russians.

At noon a day later, Prager called a press conference at which he presented a declaration signed by 40 delegations protesting “the cynical attempts to manipulate the conference by representatives of the Soviet-East European bloc and representatives of the undemocratic left.” During the final plenary debate, Prager withstood the threats and jeers of the Moscow-Cairo mob and demanded a vote on the validity of their one-sided Peace Commission report. When that was denied, the Jewish students worked to insert an amendment in the Soviet inspired final message to the UN General Assembly. Their single success came when the plenum, by a vote of 271-115 agreed to condemn the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and demand the restoration of democracy to that country.”

My son, Dennis, at the age of 21, already was a staunch fighter against totalitarianism, communism and the injustice perpetrated against his co-religionists in the Soviet Union. He began a strong campaign for Soviet Jewry by speaking constantly against “the evil empire.” I cannot express in words the tremendous pride that I have for my son to this day. Perhaps his strong desire for justice emanates from his home or perhaps it stems from his unflinching faith in his religion which teaches in the Torah the words *txedek txede tirdof* (run after justice). Or perhaps it's from both; who knows?

Writing of the pride we have in our younger son, I can now state how Hilda and I were blessed to have two sons who exemplify all that is good in this world. Their respect for us and all mankind is engrained in their soul. Their strong religiosity is their code in fulfilling good deeds *bein odom l'mokom- bein odom l'chavaro* (between man and God-between man and his fellow man.) In the coming pages of these memoirs, I will write more fully regarding Kenny's many accomplishments.

In June 1970, the two physicians that arrived in Eagle Butte to replace the others who had completed their 2 year stay were Bruce Schneider who came with his wife Susan and their son Benjy and Michael who came with his wife Ruth. The entire medical staff at the hospital now consisted of four Jews and the dentist was also of the same faith. I am sure that the Indians at the reservation were of the opinion that most Jews were doctors.

Our third trip to South Dakota was in September 1970 when we spent the Labor Day holiday with our children. We enjoyed our stay immensely because of the Labor Day parade and the Indian songs and dances at a pow-wow.

I would now like to describe the difficulty in traveling from Brooklyn to Eagle Butte. We flew from La Guardia Airport in Queens via United Air Lines to Minneapolis and then switched to North West Air Lines to land in Pierre, South Dakota. Then we rented a car traveling 90 miles over horrible roads to the reservation.

For about 5 or 6 years prior to 1970, I was asked by the powers that be at Kingsway to accept the presidency and I kept refusing them. Finally, I remember sitting at the Shabbos table and asking my wife and 2 sons

to vote on the proposal of becoming the president of Kingsway Jewish Center. This demonstrates the democratic procedures followed in the Prager household.

I asked my family in reverse order of age their opinion. Dennis opined that I would make a good president and that I owed it to the community. Kenny elaborated more along the same line and stated that I always spoke about communal duties and therefore I could not refuse to serve; then, came Hilda's turn to speak. If I remember correctly, she was quite ambivalent and gave reasons to accept and reject the offer. Since the vote was 2 in favor and 1 abstention, I decided to become president.

I was elected president without any opposition in June 1970. The installation of officers took place in the synagogue on a Shabbos morning and we were invested by Rabbi Chill. The following is my acceptance speech given that morning:

My dear friends,

The question that is being posed today by most people is, why would anyone want to be president of the U.S. or Mayor of a city like New York or even president of a religious institution? The headaches and heartaches that are concomitant with these positions would normally frighten any individual from accepting leadership. However, if one has a desire to help his fellowman; to live not by bread alone; and especially if the flame of Judaism pervades his being, he cannot with clear conscience reject the challenge.

I, for one, am a great proponent of constructive criticism and feel that progress can only be achieved as a result of critically analyzing the daily problems that beset humanity as a whole, and Judaism specifically. Rhetoric alone has never proved to be either meaningful or fruitful. If action results from criticism however, the profuse verbiage that permeates our everyday living is productive.

To criticize and not to act is virtually criminal, and in matters dealing with Judaism it is actually sacrilegious. As the Rabbis wisely stated: "It is not the thought which is of essence, but action" Thus, in his span of life, one must decide whether he goes with the verbal tide or accepts a challenge to attempt to make our lives more spiritually meaningful.

The tragedies that befall fine, upstanding families in our society must make us stop for a moment and ask ourselves the question: "What has gone wrong with our Jewish children and what can we do to correct the situation?" We must divert the paths of our children who are headed for a ruinous life, not only for themselves, but for society and our people.

I am sure you are all aware, that statistically speaking, children who have been reared in traditionally religious homes and who have attended yeshivas, generally speaking, have been able to withstand the temptations that constantly lurk in the shadows to entrap them.

Establishing yeshivas, maintaining synagogues with strong religious content and, last but not least, instilling in the home a meaningful religious experience between the parents and the children are all ingredients of producing good Americans and devoted Jews.

What I am saying, perhaps may appear to be echoing sentiments expressed many, many times by our religious and communal leaders; but, the mere repetition of these words does not detract one iota from their validity and their significance.

The Jewish people who are the legatees of a proud and noble heritage and have been bestowed by the Almighty with the most precious gift mankind has ever received; namely, the Torah, have dissipated this legacy. Just as a son who has inherited great wealth from his father and has squandered it without benefiting either himself or mankind, so too the Jewish people, unfortunately, have been squandering the spiritual fortune that they received at Mt. Sinai.

Stimulating sermons and symphonic songs in the liturgy do not in themselves make a synagogue distinguished. The yardstick to be employed in measuring the accomplishments of a synagogue should be its competence in reaching and communicating with its youth. The Synagogue that is content to cater to its adult congregants, but neglects to take into account the needs and desires of its youth is committing an unpardonable sin.

I believe that we cannot place too much emphasis on our youth activities and all our efforts should be directed towards keeping our children from straying from the synagogue. To bring them back to Judaism is much more difficult once they have left and our task is to make them want to stay.

To this end the new administration pledges itself; but the success to be achieved will be measured by the amount of cooperation you people wish to give the leadership. Without your energetic labors, the best laid plans will be doomed to failure.

Kingsway Jewish Center, within the last few years, has been fortunate in attracting young married couples who can be the embryo of a synagogue second to none. I personally have had the good fortune to meet with these young people and they have impressed me with their strong sense of yiddishkeit and with their desire to work for Judaism. I hope to continue to meet with them in the very near future so that they can transmit to me their ideas and suggestions which will always find an open ear.

As you are all aware, Kingsway is presently embarking on a new project; namely, the construction of a building which will be used exclusively by our Kingsway Yeshiva Academy. We have, thank God, increased our enrollment to such an extent that our present facilities which house the Yeshiva, the Talmud Torah and the nursery are inadequate.

I, therefore, appeal to you to give the new administration strong financial help so that we can open the new edifice for registration in February of the coming year. This is not an appeal for Kingsway, but a request to help Jewry specifically. Even more so, your contributions will be an investment in the future of our Jewish youth, and who knows, perhaps the money you give today will directly help your own child or your own grandchild stay on the path of righteousness and not become a casualty of the age.

I want to publicly state at this time that every committee of Kingsway is wide open and anyone expressing a desire to help by being placed on these committees would be more than welcomed by me. I would suggest that they contact me as soon as possible since the committees will be formed in the very near future.

I wish to express my gratitude to all of you for the trust and confidence that you have placed in me to lead Kingsway for the coming year. Whether I will be successful or not, only time will tell; but you can rest assured that a diligent and sincere effort will be made by me to instill Kingsway Jewish Center with dynamism without which no institution can maintain its prominence.

As I read this acceptance speech 34 years later, I am amazed how relevant these words are today especially pertaining to the large amount of secular Jewish youth who are more interested in pro-choice, the environment and affirmative action than in the survival of the Jewish people and the survival of the Jewish State of Israel.

Jeannie and Kenny in December 1970 asked us to baby-sit for Karen as they wanted to go to Minneapolis to visit Anna Marie a classmate of Jeannie in Radcliff; so we made our fourth trip to Eagle Butte. We were well compensated for our schlepping to South Dakota again as the five days that we were there were closest to Nirvana that one could imagine.

Our precious granddaughter behaved beautifully giving us enjoyment that cannot be described. In the morning we brought her into our bed and amid kisses and hugs we hesitated to leave the bed. It is amazing that at no time in the lives of our two sons did we ever bring them into our bed. I have always said that the love for children becomes progressively greater with each successive generation.

I now can recall that most of my clients and friends constantly showed me pictures of their grandchildren and never displayed photos of their children. Now that we have Noah, our great-grandson, the joy of having him in our family transcends all the emotions that we had previously relative to our progeny.

While our children were away and we had Karen to ourselves, she did not miss her parents and took to us as a fish to water. As I would sit in an easy chair and read, I would have my scotch highball resting on the floor near me. Karen would sidle over to the glass, stick her finger into the liquor, lick her finger and come back for more. In addition to the liquor, she loved the ice.

We brought her a large rubber animal toy which she loved. She kept hitting the toy and it would rebound and hit her which made her laugh hysterically. To this day, she and I have an unusually close relationship imbued with love and mutual respect.

Jeannie was now pregnant with her second child and expected to deliver sometime in April 1971. Hilda and I, accompanied by Claire decided to enjoy the Passover holiday with our children. Believe it or not, we took along Schubert, our cat. For some reason, we couldn't connect with a flight out of Minneapolis so we stayed overnight at a Holiday Inn in that city. Schubert, the moment he arrived at the motel, hid under our bed and didn't come out until we left.

On the second Seder night after we concluded the chanting of the Haggadah, Jeannie remarked to Kenny that she was ready to deliver. I can still remember the utter calm that she displayed at a time when most women in labor would justifiably evince pain and certainly anxiety. But, I should have not been surprised because my “daughter” was and is always gutsy. Kenny immediately took her to the hospital close by to their house and delivered his son Joshua; the date being April 11, 1971. Several hours later, we visited Jeannie and were shown our second grandchild.

When Hilda saw the birth notices that read: “Joshua was born on Easter Sunday,” she flipped and told our children not to send these notices to our friends nor members of our family since most of them were Orthodox Jews.

Eight days later the age-old ceremony of the *bris* (circumcision) arrived. As we say in football, the term “triple threat” could be applied to Kenny. He produced together with Jeannie his son, brought him into this world via delivery and performed the circumcision. The tradition in Judaism is that the father is obligated to execute this act. However, the majority of Jewish fathers are not capable of performing this *mitzvah* (good deed); therefore a *mobel* is engaged who is a professional who has been taught this medical procedure.

Kenny, always perspiring like his father, was handed large towels by his fellow physicians while circumcising his son. Although he had performed this procedure many times in the past, evidently, when one does this on his own son, the anxiety and perhaps fear of hurting his flesh and blood causes profuse sweating. At any rate, regardless of Kenny’s discomfort, everything went according to Hoyle and Joshua is grateful to his father for a job well done.

In February of this year, Dennis represented the U.S. at the World Conference of Soviet Jewry in Brussels. After graduating from Brooklyn College he enrolled in the Russian and Middle East Institute at Columbia University to pursue a Masters degree. He studied under Dr. Zbigniew Brezinski who later served as head of the National Security Council in Pres. Carter’s administration. In March, he was appointed a Fellow in the School of International affairs for the 1971-1972 academic year in recognition of his outstanding academic achievement. It carried a fellowship of \$1,000 to be used towards tuition.

Kenny completed his 2 year stint on the Eagle Butte Reservation in June 1971 and returned with Jeannie and his two children to commence his residency at Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital. They preferred the suburbs of New York and rented a house on Madison Avenue in Englewood, N.J. Since the George Washington Bridge was about 1 mile from his new abode and the hospital was right off the bridge, it was an ideal location for Kenny. Coincidentally, Hilda and I live about 100 yards from this house at the present time.

In this year, one of my clients Edmundo Rosenberg, a brother-in-law of Rappi, who owned a large ladies’ garment factory in Lima, Peru and whose realty holdings in Miami I was auditing, introduced me to his acquaintances who owned large textile plants in Lima.

They decided to immigrate to Miami and go into the polyester knitting business which was then the rage. They purchased approximately 70 knitting machines and set up a dye plant as well. The knitting operation was

called Arosa Knitting Corp.; the dye plant was named Miami Dying and Finishing Corp. and the sales company of the finished textile products had the name, Victoria Fabrics Corp.

The principals of these companies were all Arabs. The president of all the firms was Miguel Atala who was originally from Ramallah, Palestine, now on the west bank of the Jordan River. He came with his wife, Isabel and his son Tali and a daughter, whose name escapes me. He left a son Miguelito in Lima to run the family business. They were all Moslems.

The treasurer of all the firms was Nicholas Saba who lived in Beit Jala, a Christian city in Palestine. He came with his wife Victoria and 2 children and with his brother Wadi, who was the secretary of the companies. Wadi came with his wife Helena and 2 children. They were all Christians.

All 3 families bought magnificent homes in Coral Gables which was a city close to Miami and was inhabited by a large Latino population.

Arabs are known for their being congenial hosts and my clients lived up to that reputation in every respect. Hilda and I were very often invited to their homes for dessert as they knew we would not eat a meal there because we kept kosher. Also, we went out socially with them; of course, we would reciprocate by inviting them to our home.

Every month when I came to audit the books of the companies, I would enter Mr. Atala's office to say hello and have a brief conversation with him. On one of my first visits to his office, he told me that when he was leaving Peru for Florida, he was told to be sure to engage a doctor, lawyer and accountant; all of the Jewish faith.

Although he was not an anti-Semite since he had many Jewish friends and could not have been nicer to Hilda and myself, he would engage me almost monthly in a discussion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He, being a Moslem Arab, was a rabid defender of Arafat and a great critic of the Israeli "occupation" of his homeland.

At one of our conversations, I asked him if he knew what the Jewish population was in the U.S. I was not surprised or shocked when he stated that the answer to that question was "35-40 million." When I replied that it was closer to 6 million, I still remember his retort: "They are all in New York."

Despite our political, ethnic and religious differences, we got along very well in our business and social lives. The Sabas and I never discussed the Middle East; possibly because they were Christians. Due to the collapse of the fashion fad of polyester knits, in Sept. 1977 they ceased business operations and returned to Peru.

I would make my monthly trips to these plants in Opa-Locka, about 8-10 miles from Miami accompanied by either Herman Litt, my ex-partner who moved to Miami Beach from Brooklyn several years previously or Leon Goldberg, my associate. Sometimes, Leon and I stayed at the Doral Hotel on the Beach or a small motel near the airport.

Florida was one of the few states that required a permit for accountants to perform audits in that state. If a firm or individual did not have a permit or a Florida license, they were subject to a fine or more severe disciplinary

punishment. I assume the reason for this regulation was to protect professionals working in the state. Many snow-birds migrated during the winter months southward and wanted their accountants to service them in Florida.

When I discovered the above in the winter 1974 and noticed a large building being constructed on the corner of Pine Tree Drive and Arthur Godfrey Rd. (41<sup>st</sup> Street), I decided to explore the possibility of establishing legal residence in Florida so that I could apply for a reciprocal CPA license and not having to obtain permits for each and every audit engagement.

As 4101 Pine Tree Drive (Tower 41) was still in a construction phase, the developers had a large trailer on the corner in which the rental personnel were available to sign leases. Since I was one of the first prospective lessees, I had the choice of 450 apartments. I selected an apartment on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor facing the pool area and a view of the ocean, several blocks away.

The reason I chose the 6<sup>th</sup> floor was due to the fact that there was no Sabbath elevator so I didn't want to walk up more than 6 flights. I didn't want a lower floor so that I could have a fairly decent view of the ocean. I signed a one year lease as that was the longest they were giving to the renters; the rent was \$480 per month. I was permitted to live rent-free during the winter till June 1975 when the developers decided to go the route of selling condos; giving the lessees the option of buying or renting.

Never being a proponent of renting versus buying, I, naturally, opted to buy. If I had used the apartment solely as an office when I made my professional visits to Florida, I would have been able to deduct the rent as a business deduction on my income tax return. However, as Hilda resided in the apartment for a period of 3 months and sometimes we resided there during the summer months, I couldn't take this deduction.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

At this juncture, I'm going to digress a bit from my chronological order of writing my memoirs. It is now the High Holiday season – September 2004 – and I must relate my great joy and happiness in listening to Kenny being the cantor in the auxiliary *minyán* of our synagogue, Cong. Ahavath Torah in Englewood, N.J.

For the past few years, he led the *schachris* service on the first day of Rosh Hashana, the *Kol Nidrei* service and the *mussaf* service on Yom Kippur. To listen to your child sing in a beautiful voice and chant many melodious songs accompanied by me and most of the congregation instilled in me and Hilda a tremendous sense of pride that cannot be described.

Also, being invited by Jeannie and Kenny to their home for all the Jewish holidays for many years and being joined by our grandchildren and their spouses evokes in both of us a great feeling of gratitude to the Almighty. There is no material achievement that can surpass the joy of sitting at the holiday table with those whom you adore and love.

The delicious and plentiful food prepared by our darling “daughter” Jeannie, the constant group singing of liturgical songs at the table and the sincere respect and love given to us by our children and grandchildren produces an *oneg yomtov* (joy of the holiday) to be admired. God has been good to us throughout our lives and may He continue to do so for many years.

To be together with Karen, her husband Mark and their precious child, Noah; Joshua and his wife, Lauren; Benjy and his wife, Dahlia and Tamar and her partner, Arielle is the quintessence of happiness.

Although our other son Dennis lives 3000 miles from us, he phones us several times during the week inquiring as to our health and what's going on in our lives. His wife, Fran, never neglects to e-mail us with info regarding their lives and what is going on with Anya and Aaron, their children. David, Dennis's son by a previous marriage has given us joy since he was born.

In November 1991, “New York” magazine began an annual series entitled “The Best Doctors in New York.” Kenny was selected as one of New York City's Best Pulmonologists. He received this honor in 1991, 1998 and 1999. He has been Clinical Professor of Medicine at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons for the last 30 years. Also, he has been the Director of Clinical Ethics and Chairman of the Medical Ethics Committee of Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital for 10 years or more.

Kenny held clandestine medical clinics in the Soviet Union. During a visit in 1986 and later set up the first U.S.-Soviet medical student exchange program between Columbia P&S and the First Moscow Medical Academy.

As soon as he arrived in Russia, word got around that there was a physician from the U.S. His Soviet acquaintances immediately organized makeshift clinics in various apartment houses so that he could examine patients and dispense medical advice. Even though he expected Soviet medicine to be below American standards, he was appalled by what he saw.

One of his first patients was an 80-year-old man in severe pain because he was unable to urinate. His bladder was distended and needed to be catheterized immediately. The urologist who had been summoned to his home complied with Kenny's request for a rubber glove to examine the patient's prostate gland. After examining him, my son was startled when the physician requested that Kenny wash the glove so that it could be reused. She then relieved the patient of his distress by passing her only, reusable catheter into his bladder after lubricating it with butter. She sterilized the catheter by boiling it in a pot of water in the patient's kitchen.

There was a virtual absence of such disposal items as syringes, needles, catheters and intravenous tubing in hospitals and clinics. Reused items increase rates of infection, while intravenous needles and scalpels that have become dull as a result of wear and tear increase pain and discomfort.

Another patient he met was a 28-year-old man with a well-documented heart attack two years earlier who was still experiencing chest pain when he exerted himself. His entire evaluation by Soviet physicians consisted of an ECG stress test, and his only medication was nitroglycerin to be taken as needed for chest pain. A coronary angiogram, which might have disclosed a surgically correctable reason for his premature heart attack and persisting angina, was never suggested. Also, he was not treated with any of the potent cardiac medications that might lessen his pain, and possibly increase his longevity. A select few in the Soviet Union have access to angiograms and life saving drugs. So much for the workers' paradise.

Kenny is heavily involved in teaching pulmonology and medical ethics to medical students and nurses. He received the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center House Staff Award for Excellence in Clinical-Senior Faculty Teaching in 1999-2000. In 2003, he was elected to the Marquis's Who's Who in America and to the Guide to America's Top Physicians, Consumers Research Council of America. That same year he received the Physician of the Year Award, Department of Nursing, Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center.

In 1984, he was honored with the Rafael Award for Medicine by the Sanz Medical center in Netanya, Israel. For many years he was the personal physician to the Klausenberger Rebbe both in Union, N.J. and in Netanya, Israel. The Rabbi, a holocaust survivor who lost a wife and children in the ovens of Hitler, reconstructed his life forming a new family and, most importantly, creating a religious community in Kiryat Sanz in Israel.

He was selected as "One of the Best Internists/Pulmonologists" in the Castle Connolly Guide: How to Find the Best Doctors, New York Metro Area, 1994, 1997, 1999, 2001-2003.

His writings on medicine and medical ethics have appeared on the OP-ED pages of The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal as well as in medical journals and textbooks. He lectures extensively on medical ethics. He is on the admissions committee and is a regular guest lecturer at the Ben Gurion University MD program in International Health and Medicine in collaboration with Columbia University Health Sciences.

Last year -2003- he delivered the commencement address at this school. He is also on the Board of Directors of the American Council on Science and Health.

Among his many written articles, one that he wrote in the Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA), and is the mostly read to this day is entitled “For Everything A Blessing.” This article was reprinted in many Jewish and non-Jewish publications and produced a large number of “letters to the editor.” The number of e-mails and letters that Kenny received from his medical colleagues, again Jews and gentiles, was a pleasant surprise to the author. I will now insert the entire article.

When I was an elementary school student in yeshiva – a Jewish parochial school with both religious and secular studies – my classmates and I used to find amusing a sign that was posted just outside the bathroom. It was an ancient Jewish blessing, commonly referred to as the *asher yatzar* benediction, that was supposed to be recited after one relieved oneself. For grade school children, there could be nothing more strange or ridiculous than to link to acts of micturition and defecation with holy words that mentioned God’s name. Blessings were reserved for prayers, for holy days, or for thanking God for food or for some act of deliverance, but surely not for a bodily function that evoked smirks and giggles.

It took me several decades to realize the wisdom that lay behind this blessing that was composed by Abayei, a fourth-century Babylonian rabbi.

Abayei’s blessing is contained in the Talmud, an encyclopedic work of Jewish law and lore that was written over the first five centuries of the common era. The Jewish religion is chock-full of these blessings, or *brachot*, as they are called in Hebrew. In fact, an entire tractate of Talmud, 128 pages in length, is devoted to *brachot*.

On page 120 (*Brachot* 60b) of the ancient text it is written:

Abayei said; “When one comes out of a privy he should say: Blessed is He who has formed man in wisdom and created in him many orifices and many cavities. It is obvious and known before your Throne of glory that if one of them were to be ruptured or one of them blocked, it would be impossible to survive and stand before You. Blessed are You that heals all flesh and does wonders.”

An observant Jew is supposed to recite this blessing in Hebrew after each visit to the bathroom. We young yeshiva students were reminded of our obligation to recite this prayer by the signs that contained its text that were posted just outside the restroom doors.

It is one thing, however, to post these signs and it is quite another to realistically expect preadolescents to have the maturity to realize the wisdom of and need for reciting a 1600-year-old blessing related to bodily functions.

It was not until my second year of medical school that I first began to understand the appropriateness of this short prayer. Pathophysiology brought home to me the terrible consequences of even minor aberrations in the structure and function of the human body. At the very least, I began to no longer take for granted the normalcy of my trips to the bathroom. Instead, I started to realize how many things had to operate just right for these minor interruptions of my daily routine to run smoothly.

I thought of Abayei and his blessing. I recalled my days at yeshiva and remembered how silly that sign outside the bathroom had seemed. But after seeing patients whose lives revolved around their dialysis machines, and others with colostomies and urinary catheters, I realized how wise the rabbi had been. And then it happened: I began to recite Abayei's *bracha*. At first I had to go back to my *siddur*, the Jewish prayer book, to get the text right. With repetition – and there many opportunities for a novice to get to know this blessing well – I could recite it fluently and with sincerity and understanding.

Over the years, reciting the *asher yatzer* has become for me an opportunity to offer thanks not just for the proper functioning of my excretory organs, but for my overall good health. The text, after all, refers to catastrophic consequences of the rupture or obstruction of any bodily structure, not only those of the urinary or gastrointestinal tract. Could Abayei, for example, have foreseen that “blockage” of the “cavity,” or lumen, of the coronary artery, would lead to the commonest cause of death in industrialized countries some 16 centuries later?

I have often wondered if other people also yearn for some way to express gratitude for their good health. Physicians especially, who are exposed daily to the ravages that illness can wreak, must sometimes feel the need to express thanks for being well and thus well-being. Perhaps a generic, non-denominational *asher yatzer* could be composed for those who want to verbalize their gratitude for being blessed with good health.

There was one unforgettable patient whose story reinforced the truth and beauty of the *asher yatzer* for me forever. Josh was a 20-year-old student who sustained an unstable fracture of his third and fourth cervical vertebrae in a motor vehicle crash. He nearly died from his injury and required emergency intubation and ventilatory support. He was initially totally quadriplegic but for weak flexion of his right biceps.

A long and difficult period of stabilization and rehabilitation followed. There were promising signs of neurological recovery over the first few months that came suddenly and unexpectedly: movement of a finger here, flexion of a toe there, return of sensation here, adduction of a muscle group there.

With incredible courage, hard work, and an excellent physical therapist, Josh improved day by day. In time, and after what seemed like a miracle, he was able to walk slowly with a leg brace and a cane. But Josh continued to require intermittent catheterization. I know only too well the problems and perils this young man would face for the rest of his life because of a neurogenic bladder. The urologists were very pessimistic about his chances for not requiring catheterization. They had not seen this occur after a spinal cord injury of this severity.

Then the impossible happened. I was there the day Josh no longer required a urinary catheter. I thought of Abayei's *asher yatzer* prayer. Pointing out that I could not imagine a more meaningful scenario for its recitation, I suggested to Josh, who was also a yeshiva graduate, that he say the prayer. He agreed. As he recited the ancient *bracha*, tears welled in my eyes.

Josh is my son.

As I write these words, I too, have tears in my eyes because I remember the unfortunate episode very clearly. When all the renowned doctors informed my grandson, Josh, that he would never walk again, you can just imagine my grief at hearing that terrible prediction. Unfortunately, our medical schools are only interested in teaching science and not having a course in faith. In my 86 years of life, I have been witness to many instances of the physicians giving no hope to the patient and not realizing that, perhaps, sometimes God has something to say. Fortunately, I have seen a good many patients recover and survive despite the gloomy predictions of their doctor.

I sincerely believe that our Creator had something to do with Josh's ability to walk again. Perhaps, this "miracle" was due to *schuss avos* – intervention by our ancestors who were pious and performers of good deeds. When I was present with Josh and heard the neurologist give him the shattering verdict, I knew immediately that this particular physician was either an atheist or agnostic and, probably, never attended services at a church or synagogue. When all hope fades, faith is what sustains us.

Dennis, as well has given us a great deal of joy and pride in his many accomplishments. Listening to him on the radio for three hours 5 days a week when he broadcasts nationally over close to 70 cities, reading his weekly articles on "World Net Daily" and "Town Hall", listening to his many tapes of his lectures given throughout the world, viewing him on the most popular TV news shows and, last but not least, emceeding the 7 hour annual Chabad telethon gives his parents *nachas* (joy and pride).

In 1972, Dennis taught Jewish history and religion at Brooklyn College for one year and in that same year in October he formed the Tze Ulmad Institute with his best friend, Joseph Telushkin. They decided to write an introduction to Judaism and publishing the book themselves under the name of Tze Ulmad- which means in Hebrew, (go forth and learn.)

The book was published in 1975 with the title "The Eight Questions People Ask About Judaism." It was so successful that Simon & Schuster asked them to add a question and it was published by them in 1976 with a new title "The Nine Questions People Ask About Judaism." It was dedicated to their parents, "who provided environments conducive to asking questions and seeking answers." Today it is the best selling introductory text to Judaism, used by rabbis from Reform to Orthodox. Also, it has been translated into twelve languages and is read throughout the world.

The second book authored by the two friends was "Why the Jews-The Reason for Antisemitism" which was published again by Simon & Schuster in 1983. It was dedicated to Raul Wallenberg, the Swede who saved thousands of Jewish lives from being exterminated by Hitler. Dennis's third book was "Think a Second Time" which was published by Regan Books (Harper Collins) in 1995. The book consists of 43 essays that Dennis had previously written in his quarterly journal "Ultimate Issues" which he started in 1985.

In 1998, he wrote his fourth book, "Happiness is a Serious Problem" published again by Regan Books. Dennis had been lecturing on the subject of happiness for several years and this particular subject captivated him.

These lectures were more than sprinkled with humor; in fact, they were a deluge of comedy. The dedication was to his second wife, Fran, of whom you will read later on in my memoirs.

Proficient in four languages, Dennis has lectured in Russian in Russia and in Hebrew in Israel. As for English, "Toastmasters" voted him one of America's five best speakers. He has been teaching the Hebrew Bible verse by verse at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles for many years. He has engaged in interfaith dialogue with Catholics at the Vatican, Muslims in the Persian Gulf, and Protestants at Christian Seminaries throughout the United States.

He was appointed by President Reagan to the U.S. delegation to the Vienna Review Conference on the Helsinki Accords. He has made and starred in "For Goodness Sake", a half-hour video directed by David Zucker shown on public television and purchased by thousands of major corporations. Two other films were produced and starred in by Dennis; "Character, Who Needs It" and "Diversity Through Character."

Dennis always loved music and, fortunately, when he was not the ideal student around the age of 11 or 12, we decided to give him another outlet other than school. We purchased a piano and he, for some reason, opted for the accordion in addition. I do not remember the chronological order of purchase; whether the piano came before the accordion. At any rate, we engaged teachers in both instruments and he became quite good playing both.

He, today, periodically conducts symphony orchestras and through his writings and broadcasts has introduced thousands of people to classical music. I remember him, as a teen-ager, going to classical music concerts with the entire score in his possession to be able to follow the music from the conductor's standpoint.

Several years ago, while still being a Democrat, he was asked to enter the Congressional primary against the incumbent. I, not caring for the sleaze of many politicians, tried to talk my son out of running. When he asked me to give him \$1,000 for the application fee and to prepare a financial statement, I did so reluctantly. After a month or two, he had a change of heart and the fee went down the drain.

Both our sons have a great love for traditional Judaism which imbues in Hilda and me a strong sense of achievement with the help of the Almighty. Fortunately, they both have created in their children that same feeling. Thus, when I included the word "gratitude" in the title of my memoirs, you can now understand the reason therefore. We pray that our Heavenly Father grant us good health and longevity to continue to enjoy our wonderful children and grandchildren.

Jeannie and Fran are our daughters and not only spouses of our sons. The love and respect they have for us and we for them could not be more sincere if they were our biologic children. Thank you God for all that you have bestowed upon us.

At this point I would like to digress and relate what happened to me in the last 5 months - it is now November 24, 2004.

In April of 1996, I went to my primary doctor, Jonathan LaPook at the 60<sup>th</sup> Street branch of Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital for my annual physical. Since I complained about some abnormality in my gastro-intestinal

area, he immediately had me take a CT scan. After a few days, he called to tell me that the radiologist discovered an aortic aneurysm in my abdomen. Since it only measured 3.4 x 3.8, it was not severe and I would have to have an ultra sound examination annually to monitor the size. When it reached over 5 cm I would need surgery to prevent a rupture of the aorta which in 75% of the occurrences leads to death. Among celebrities who died from this malady were Albert Einstein, Lucille Ball and George C. Scott.

Most cases are caused by hypertension which I have suffered with all my life; evidently inherited since my father and both sisters had this condition. My father died at the age of 72 from heart failure caused by a lifetime of hypertension. My sister Irene died at the age of 32 having a bad heart and hypertension and my sister, Anne, died at 55 from heart failure as well.

75% of aneurysms occur in the abdominal aorta. This blood vessel becomes less elastic with age and the vessel wall thins in spots. Pressure on these spots causes ballooning, which increase over time. The most serious threat posed by an aneurysm is rupture. Depending on the severity of bleeding, shock and death follow quickly.

The success rate for surgery for a ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysm is only 50%. More than 200,000 abdominal aortic aneurysms are diagnosed annually. If detected in advance (with a CT scan or a sonogram) the condition is treatable in 95% of the cases.

My annual ultra sound procedure in 1997 showed no change; in 1998 and 1999 it increased to 4.0 x 3.7, in 2000, 2002 and 2003 it increased to 4.3 x 4.4, and in June 2004 it increased to 5.3 x 5.0 which I jokingly told my doctor it was time to sell. My primary doctor, Frank Livelli, told me it was time to have surgery performed to remove the risk of sudden death.

I spoke to Kenny, my son the doctor, who consulted our good friend, Dr. Jonathan Sussman who is a vascular radiologist at Columbia-Presbyterian and is a member of a team that performs surgery to bypass aneurysms. Although I would have preferred to have the surgery at Columbia, where Kenny and Jonathan are on the staff, Jonathan recommended Dr. Michael Marin at Mt. Sinai Hospital for a very good reason.

While treating an elderly patient for this problem at Montefiore Hospital, where Dr. Marin was an attending surgeon in 1992, he realized that this patient was too ill for conventional surgery and he began looking for alternatives. After a few months of searching, Dr. Marin found an Argentine surgeon named Juan Parodi, who had invented a new, minimally invasive technique, which Dr. Marin brought to Montefiore.

A stent-graft -a sort of artificial artery made of polyester fitted over a stent - is inserted into the abdominal aorta via two small incisions in the patient's groin. The graft is positioned at the site of the aneurysm, where it pops into place and serves as a sort of artery within an artery – the aneurysm is bypassed, and blood flows through the graft instead. Surgery that used to involve a two-week hospital stay and several months' recovery time now has patients out of the hospital the next day, and recovery takes less than two weeks.

On July 6, I went to see Dr. Marin, who was now at Mt. Sinai, for consultation and he advised me that if an angiogram would show the exact location of the aneurysm to be below the renal arteries in the kidney area, I would

be a candidate for a stent-graft. That very same day he scheduled me to have a CT scan and X-Rays and two days later he sent me to Dr. Squire on Park Avenue for an EKG. On July 20, I went for a stress test; these procedures were to determine the condition of my health and to assure my ability to undergo surgery. On July 28, an angiogram was performed and, fortunately, I could have an endovascular aortic aneurysm repair and not have to endure an open-chest procedure.

Luck played an important part in my life for several reasons. Since having an aneurysm is insidious with absolutely no symptoms whatsoever, had I not had a CT scan in 1996 for a GI problem, I would never know that I was a “ticking time bomb.” Secondly, I was fortunate in having the location below the kidney so that I could have a stent-graft instead of regular surgery.

On October 13, I went for surgery. Because I had an epidural anesthesia, I was awake during the entire procedure and was even able to speak to Dr. Marin and his associates throughout the procedure. At least six or seven times, I was asked to hold my breath while they were taking X-Rays. The operation lasted for 2 ½ hours and the sewing and clamping staples on the incisions lasted for another ½ hour. The two incisions on each side of my groin were around 2 inches in width.

I was then wheeled into the recovery room where I spent 6 hours. The entire lower part of my body remained numb for the entire time that I was there. Not ever experiencing this inability to move my legs nor feeling anything when I touched my abdomen, it certainly became a grave concern to me. I couldn’t believe that it would take 6 hours to regain normal feelings; however, the nurse, Jeannie, kept reassuring me that I would be fine.

About three hours after the surgery, I was delighted to see my family enter the recovery room; Hilda, my daughter Jeannie, grandson Joshua, grandson Benjy and his darling wife, Dahlia. Later on, Kenny arrived and all couldn’t believe that I had surgery only three hours previously since I looked so well, thanks to the Almighty.

After my stay in the recovery room, I was taken to a down-graded ICU which contained 4 beds and a nurses’ station with 2 nurses in attendance. I remained there over night and the following morning, after an examination, was released to go home. I was told by the doctors that I could begin to take the three medications that I had been taking previously to control my hypertension; they were nadolol (a beta blocker), lisiniprol (an ace inhibitor) and dyazide (a diuretic). Unfortunately, these three drugs lowered my blood pressure so severely that I became very dizzy.

This condition lasted for 2 weeks and, fortunately, when Kenny told Jonathan Sussman at shul what my problem was, Jonathan told him that, as a result of my operation, blood was flowing more freely to the kidneys that automatically reduced my blood pressure. Kenny, after shul, visited me and took my pressure and was shocked to find that my pressure had gone down to 68/23. He immediately advised me to take only nadolol and, sure enough, my pressure returned to normal.

When Ryan Surmay, RPA (registered physician's assistant), Dr. Marin’s associate, called me to ascertain how I was recuperating, I informed him about my past problem and told him that he should have informed me what

Jonathan told Kenny and that I should have not taken all 3 drugs. He agreed and said “You are wise beyond your years.” I also told him that he, in the future, should advise patients undergoing vascular bypasses to contact their primary physicians immediately to prevent problems that I encountered; he readily agreed. I must commend Ryan for being unusually solicitous about my health and cooperative from my first visit to Dr. Marin to my last conversation with him. In fact, all the nurses who attended me at Mt. Sinai were exceptionally kind and helpful during my stay at the hospital.

I am very grateful to God that I now feel great and no longer have to be fearful about a condition that could have been fatal.

## CHAPTER XXXV

On June 2, 1973, Yesiva Rambam celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> Silver Anniversary with a week-end at the Pine View Hotel in the Catskills. The school decided to honor nine alumni who achieved notable success since their graduation. The honorees included our sons, Kenneth and Dennis, and Kenny's good friend, Andrew Reinhard with his brother David. Kenny dormed with Andrew at Columbia College and both attended Harvard University; Kenny at the medical school and Andy at the law school. David went on to pursue a medical career. I related previously the path that Dennis followed subsequent to his graduation.

Kenny couldn't attend since he was at that time in Chicago being Chief Resident at Billings General Hospital. He sent a warm message congratulating his fellow guests of honor and the faculty and friends of the Yeshiva on the completion of its 25 years of physical growth and spiritual achievement. His letter was included in the Journal of the event.

After I finished my four year term as president of Kingsway Jewish Center which, incidentally, was the longest term ever held by a president of this prestigious institution, I began a 2 year term of chairman of the board. In my six year period of leading Kingsway, I was fortunate in creating a day school and in the construction of a building called the Early Childhood Center. Shelly Apfelbaum, who was executive director of the synagogue and principal of the day school, was of incredible help to me in achieving this success.

Several years later, when Kenny was the chairman of the board of the Moriah Yeshiva in Englewood, he asked me if Shelly would be available to be the principal of Moriah since his board wanted to make a change in the principal's office. I told him to contact Shelly to ascertain if he was interested. Shelly's response was, that if I acquiesced to his leaving Kingsway, he would make the change. I, immediately, told Shelly, that if he could improve his financial situation, I would not stand in his way and would give my blessing to the change. He, fortunately, took my advice and remained as principal of Moriah for many years until he retired. All my grandchildren attended Moriah while Shelly headed the yeshiva and found him to be an excellent educator and one who loved children.

In 1975, Dennis was asked by Shlomo Bardin to be scholar-in-residence for a week-end at the Brandeis Institute in Simi Valley, Ca. This institution was originally founded in 1941 by the Supreme Court Justice, Louis Brandeis together with Bardin to bring teenagers and college students to Judaism. After the demise of Brandeis, Bardin took over the reins of the institute and renamed it Brandeis-Bardin Institute (BBI). Dennis, evidently, impressed Bardin so that he asked this 26- year old young man to be Assistant Director of BBI. At that time, he announced that Dennis would be his successor; a week later, Bardin died at the age of 77 and Dennis became Director. My son immediately engaged his best friend, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, as Education Director. Dennis also engaged our nephew, Elliot Prager as Social Director. He would spend the summers there with his wife Sarah and his 2 children.

During the 6 years of Dennis's stay at BBI, Hilda and I would visit every summer and enjoy a pleasant Shabbat week-end there. Among the many wonderful friends that we met there were Ruth and Carl Brown with whom we remained close friends for many years; even after Dennis left BBI. For many years, we visited and stayed at their home in Whittier and, whenever they visited New York, they would stay at our home in Brooklyn. When Ruth passed away, our friendship with Carl did not survive her death.

On May 20, 1976, Jeannie gave birth to twins, Tamar and Benjamin, who was named after my father. We celebrated a bris and a simchas bas in our children's home inviting loads of guests midst a catered *sida* (brunch). Tamar was present throughout her brother's bris and beautiful readings and blessings were delivered to the new arrivals by several of our closest relatives.

In that same year, I obtained another client, IABM Bakery Systems, Inc. which imported bakery machines and sold the same to bakeries throughout the U.S. The two stockholders were Leon Angel and Alvin Mintz. Leon is related to the Angels in Israel who own the largest bakery in that country. I was the accountant for IABM for 25 years. In 2001, Alvin took sick and succumbed to cancer and the firm was dissolved. Leon returned to his family in Haifa, Israel; however, I still prepare his tax returns. Alvin's widow, Bella, still retains me to prepare her tax returns.

In 1977, my "third son", Alex (Zanny) Rosner, formed Intertex Trading Corp. in Miami Beach, an export company that sells textile machinery, machinery parts, findings and thread throughout South and Central America. Of course, he engaged me to be his accountant which I still am to this day. In the same year, I was approached by two friends of mine that I knew from Yeshiva Rambam and Kingsway Jewish Center, Nick Schwartz and Imre Lefkowitz to ascertain whether I would be interested in being their accountant for a nursing home that they were contemplating buying in Edison, N.J. I very rarely rejected the opportunity to increase my practice so my response was in the affirmative. I remained their accountant till 1989 when the home was sold.

In May 1977, Dennis was nominated to the California Board of Regents. By the age of 28, Dennis already had lectured in 40 states, Canada and Korea. He had already traveled through 52 countries on 5 continents.

On April 15, 1978, Kingsway Jewish Center and its yeshiva, Kingsway Academy honored all its living past presidents and their wives on the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. It honored Sara & Michael Hoffman, Birdie & Bob Judd, Fay & David Hammerman, Adrienne & Nat Packer and Hilda & Max Prager.

I now refer you to chapter 27, page 177 of these memoirs wherein I write about the inevitability of the emergence of greed by some of the nursing home operators due to the new system of reimbursement by Medicaid and Medicare based on cost-plus instead of a fixed rate. Thus, I was not surprised that in 1975 the media reported that many of these homes in N.Y. State were cheating the government agencies of millions of dollars. Consequently, all the homes were audited to discover the culprits.

Although audits had been performed previously, the new examinations were more stringent and comprehensive. The State, to cover its past inefficiency in controlling this industry, now treated the innocent with the guilty in the same manor.

Every operator and accountant was guilty in their eyes until proven innocent. Many expenses reported to the agencies on the annual reports submitted were suspect as fraudulent items. Therefore, I don't remember any home not being sued civilly and in many cases, criminal action was brought against the operators and their accountants.

At this time, my firm, Litt & Prager, already had 8 nursing home clients; 6 in N.Y. State and 2 in New Jersey. Fortunately, only one of my N.Y. clients was under investigation. All the accountants in this industry, including myself, were interrogated by Special Prosecutor Hynes' Office. Not ever being in this position in the past, I didn't know the names of any criminal lawyers. I consulted my very close friend's son to recommend a good criminal lawyer since he had worked for the Manhattan District Attorney's office on his graduation from law school. He suggested an excellent attorney whom I immediately liked when I met him.

My lawyer instructed me to never appear before my interrogators without his being present. After 2 or 3 sessions, I was informed that I was not a target for indictment by the Grand Jury and I was no longer a criminal suspect.

However, since the State knew that almost every accountant carried malpractice insurance, we had "deep pockets" and were easy prey for civil recovery of possible misdeeds. Thus, in almost every civil case brought by the State's Attorney General's Office, the accountants were sued jointly with their clients.

In 1977, Max Prager, Litt & Prager and the administrator of this particular client were sued for 2 million dollars; perhaps the Attorney General's Office were apprised of the fact that Litt & Prager carried 2 million dollars malpractice insurance. It seems that the State auditors discovered that my client in its annual cost report had unsubstantiated expenses which would be a cause for recovery of payments. When the administrator died in 1979, his estate and I were sued for 1 million dollars, instead of the previous sum.

When I was sued in 1977, I notified my insurance company to handle the suit. They turned it over to D'Amato & Lynch, a law firm who had the expertise in defending such lawsuits. I met with two lawyers from this office explaining the situation. I also told them that I would not approve of any settlement and if they exercised such action, I would sue them since I had committed no error in my report justifying any recovery.

Several years later, my attorneys advised me that a hearing was to be held at the Attorney General's Office to determine the validity of their claim. We entered the room and opposite of us sat a lady who was a Deputy Attorney General and the two auditors of the nursing home in question. It was quite apparent that the State was not able to discover any assets in the administrator's estate so that the only one they could hope to recover any money was from my insurance company.

I was accompanied by a lawyer from D'Amato & Lynch and an accountant who was supposedly an expert witness on nursing homes. Before we entered the room, I advised my attorney and the "witness" to say nothing and allow me to handle my defense. Neither one of them knew as much about the annual report that I submitted as I did. Believe it or not, they consented to my request.

The auditors' first complaint was the fact that the administrator had a very large number of relatives on the payroll. My answer was that he should have been commended for his altruism in aiding poor refugees from the Holocaust instead of being derided. Also, I asked the auditors if they found any of the relatives receiving a salary without working for their remuneration; their answer was "no". I then stated even if there were relatives that did not work and received a salary, accountants were not detectives to ascertain which employees worked and which didn't.

The second complaint was that the number of patient days included in my report was less than the actual patient days. This, of course, was a serious error, if true, since the reimbursement rate was calculated by dividing all the expenses by the number of patient days. Thus, the lower amount of days would result in a larger rate.

My defense was that these days were submitted to the accountant by management and it was not my task to ascertain the correctness of the actual days.

The third complaint was that I overstated the interest expense by reporting a figure of interest that was for the indebtedness of a corporation in which the administrator was a stockholder. I responded that I inadvertently did so, but when I discovered my error I immediately corrected this. Fortunately, I brought along the 2 reports showing the error and the amended report. I, also, then read the attestation that accompanied each and every report that I prepared. It reads: "We have examined this cost report including accompanying schedules, and to the best of our knowledge and belief, is true and correct."

The above were the major so-called errors that were the basis of the law-suit. After 3 hours, the Deputy Attorney General turned to the auditors and criticized them for bringing a law-suit without any merit whatsoever. They felt chastised and didn't reply. She then addressed me and stated that, based on what she had just heard, she agreed with me that I had done nothing wrong.

When my attorney and the "witness" left the room with me, they commended me for my performance and, in fact, the attorney asked me if I would be interested in being an expert witness for the insurance company in future suits; I declined the offer. Many years later in March of 1989, D'Amato & Lynch received from the Attorney General's Office a "Stipulation of Discontinuance" issued by the Supreme Court of the State of New York. I received a letter from my attorneys stating: "We are pleased to report that the plaintiff, State of New York, has agreed to dismiss this case against you and your firm."

What this unfortunate episode in my life demonstrated was that if one knows he is innocent, he should "stick to his guns" and not be intimidated. I am sure, that had I not stated unequivocally to my insurance company that under no circumstances would I allow a settlement, they would have settled to reduce their litigation time. That action would have besmirched my reputation as an accountant.

In the summer of 1980, Dennis met Janice Adelstein, a nurse at the Brandeis-Bardin Institute. Hilda and I were then visiting BBI and we both liked her immediately when our son informed us that he was interested in her as a prospective spouse. She was tall, pretty charismatic and wise; a perfect candidate to be our daughter-in-law. We

met her parents, Malvina and Jack and found them to be ideal *machitonim* (in-laws). Ten months later, on January 15, 1981, they were wed in the House of the Book at BBI which was situated on a hill with the most amazing scenery. Since Dennis was the Director, he invited all the members of the Institute to the wedding which was held around 1 PM.

The total number of guests including family, friends and members totaled a figure in excess of 500. After the ceremony, a reception was held with plenty of food and dancing. The two families then retired to their respective homes to redress and prepare for another reception at the Sephardic Temple on Wilshire Blvd. To this event, we invited 200 guests and had a wonderful evening with catered food, music and dancing.

I will now move to a current event – September 2004 – which I think significant enough to relate. At the start of the current semester in Englewood’s public schools, a new program was instituted. Since the Orthodox community voted against a proposed bill to expend an extremely large sum for the construction of more school buildings, two members of our shul who were educators thought it would be a good idea if about 20 of our congregants would volunteer to tutor the children at an elementary school.

The reason we voted against the bill was the fact that the Englewood school system was the worst in Bergen County, despite the fact that this county was one of the wealthiest per capita counties in the U.S. and large sums of money were budgeted for education. Like Manhattan in N.Y.C. Bergen County consisted of the very rich and those in the lower strata financially. In our city, the wealthy are mostly Jews and a good percentage of them, Orthodox. The least wealthy are primarily African-Americans with a sprinkling of Latinos.

We, Orthodox, wanted to demonstrate that, despite our negative vote, we were very much interested in the academic welfare of our less fortunate neighbors. Consequently, when Hilda and I were asked to join this program, we readily accepted. At the first indoctrination meeting, we were told that we would be tutoring the 4<sup>th</sup> grade consisting of 8 year olds, almost all black with one or two Latinos; not one white child. I requested that a black boy with no father be assigned to me as I wanted to be a “big brother” in addition to tutoring him.

The tutors were to spend one hour every Thursday with their assigned students. Since I missed the following 2 Thursdays due to my surgery, when I returned, a black girl of 10 years of age who had been left back either once or twice was assigned to me. It is possible that since I had asked for a problem child, this girl became my pupil.

As expected, at our first encounter, she was very shy and I had to make her feel at ease. Before commencing our reading assignment, I made conversation with her asking questions about her family, her likes and dislikes and through that rapport, “broke the ice”. She, now, is very comfortable with me and, in fact, keeps telling me that I remind her of her grandfather whom she adores. Her reading ability is beginning to show improvement, although she seems to suffer from a form of dyslexia. When she reads, she changes the words and when she writes, she omits a letter of a word. Her penmanship is incredibly beautiful. She also suffers from an attention span, becoming bored

frequently. I was advised to change the task we are engaged in as soon as she demonstrates her boredom. I am enjoying these sessions at least as much as she.

At our second session, a staff reporter from “The Bergen Record”, the only newspaper in our county, visited the school and interviewed me, the only one of the tutors; perhaps, because I was the oldest. His article was on the first page of the paper with the following headline: “Orthodox Jewish volunteers help in Englewood schools”. Hilda’s student is a pretty Latina girl who is also very smart. They both get along famously.

On the Thursday during the Chanukah week, Miriam Lubar and Billy Helft, the two educators who proposed the program, thought it would be a good idea to have a Chanukah party at the school for all the children whom we were tutoring. All of us contributed several dollars to purchase latkes, apple sauce, apple juice, dreidals and chocolate covered Chanukah “gelt”.

Miriam read from a children’s book relating to the meaning of Chanukah and asked the students questions about Jews and Judaism. I was pleasantly surprised at some of the answers. I never thought that 8 year old Negro children were familiar with anything Jewish. It is possible that their limited knowledge of the Old Testament and Jewish history which they learned in their churches was a factor in their being acquainted with Judaism.

None of the children ever attended a Chanukah party and were very elated to celebrate our holiday with us. We split up into groups of two children with two tutors to play the dreidial game. Jeannie and I played with Alexis Campbell, my student, and with Jeannie’s boy student, Brandon. They enjoyed playing so much that, when the hour came to an end, they were very disappointed as they wished to continue.

I now return to the chronological order of my memoirs. On September 7, 1981, which was Labor Day, we celebrated the first Bar or Bat Mitzva of a grandchild at Cong. Ahavath Torah, our shul. Karen was now 12 years of age and Hilda and I began to feel advanced age coming on. She was always a very bright child and we were not at all surprised at her excellent chanting her chosen *haftorah*, “*nachamu, nachamu*” which is chanted on the Sabbath when the portion of the Torah, *V’eschanan* is read. This is the Sabbath following the fast day of *Tisha B’av*, commemorating the destruction of both Temples. Since I was born on this fast day and I chanted this *haftirah*, it is possible that she had heard me several times in the past chant this beautiful and melodic tune. Be it as it may, her rendition was, at least, as good as mine.

After Karen read her *haftorah*, we all retired to the ballroom, where a wonderful catered reception was held. Karen then delivered a profound *dvar torah* (exegesis of a Torah text) which was on a Rashi interpretation of a sentence in that week’s portion of the Torah. It was a great feeling for Hilda and me to attend our first grandchild’s Bat Mitzva and, may I say, she has always been a source of great happiness and joy for us.

In September 1982, while Karen was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade at the Moriah Yeshiva, the class was instructed to write an essay for a project fair. The students could write on any topic that interested them. My grand-daughter elected to write the biography of her Papa. She interviewed me by asking many questions beginning with my birth, attendance at Yeshiva Torah Vadaath and Boys High School, my love for sports, attendance at CCNY, how and where I met

my wife, the birth of our first child (her father), why I volunteered to serve in the Navy, my duties as a naval officer, what I did after returning from the war, where I lived and facts relating to my parents and siblings.

The fact that she chose this topic increased my love for her, if that was possible. She and I have a very strong and affectionate feeling for each other to this very day.

On September 14 –our wedding anniversary- my mother-in-law, Sadie Friedfeld, whom I loved as though she were my mother, passed away in Florida at the age of 87. Although, since the day I met her she could not hear, we “spoke” to each other by her reading my lips. It was incredible that she understood every word that I communicated with her. We both had a deep love for each other. I always made her laugh with either jokes or other comical utterances and her usual retort to me was the phrase “meshigane (crazy) Mendel” stated with a large smile and much love.

In December 1982, the owners of Edison Nursing Home purchased another nursing home, Maple Hill Nursing Home in Maple Shade, NJ, which was near Cherry Hill and Camden. I retained this client till June 1987 when the Home was sold.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

When a book was published in 1977 by Random House entitled “Finding Our Fathers – a Guidebook to Jewish Genealogy” authored by Dan Rottenberg, I immediately purchased it as I was always interested in the genealogy of my family. What I learned from the book was the derivation of the name “Prager” and that they originated in Prague and over the centuries settled in England and Germany and ultimately in Poland.

In the spring of 2004, I went to “Google” on the internet and searched for “Jewish Genealogy”; I found “Jewish Genealogy Family Finder.” When I went to that website, I found the name “Krantz” and the city of Yadov. I became enthused because I knew of Yetta and Benny Krantz, she being the daughter of Finkel (nee Prager) Pargman. Finkel was the sister of Mendel Prager, my grandfather.

I inserted “Max (Mendel) Prager” and the city of Yadov hoping that I would receive a reply from Krantz. Since 8 or 9 months passed and I didn’t receive a response, I became less hopeful.

On November 18, I finally heard from Brian Krantz in Los Angeles advising me that he had “lots of information on the Prager family from Jadov.” A day later, he again sent me a message that he went to my website and was stunned to read in my memoirs a perfect description of his grandfather Benny. In this lengthy e-mail, he described his immediate family and informed me in detail all about my great-grandfather, Zalman.

He also related to me many details that I never knew about my father’s oldest brother Yisroel and his descendants who are presently living in Australia, Argentina, Israel, Los Angeles, San Francisco and New York. He also stated that in 2001, he connected through the internet with the Australian cousins; namely, Chana Prager Kogosowski Ida Prager Gurvis, and Eva Prager Slymovits, Yisroel’s grandchildren. Chana’s son Alan is a famous pianist performing throughout the world.

Five days later, I replied to his e-mail excusing myself for being tardy in replying since I had just undergone surgery. I informed him of information that was related to me by my father regarding Zalman i.e. his being the bal-tefila (cantor) for the Kotzker Rebbi, my wearing Zalman’s tefillin (phylacteries) and his genes being inherited by many of the Pragers as regards their singing ability.

Whenever the Pragers would meet in the Bronx, where most of them lived, song was more important than food. I mailed him a Prager family tree that I prepared and asked him to correct any errors that he discovered. He mailed me a tree that he prepared which was very much more detailed than mine.

A day later, Brian e-mailed me a message telling me how happy he was in meeting me. He related to me many details about his parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts and his cousins, some of whom I had met in the past. It was extremely interesting reading which I disseminated to all members of my family. He included a synopsis of Chana Kogosowski’s memoirs. When I contacted her at a later date, she mailed me her memoirs in full which Hilda and I read with much interest. She is an excellent writer.

He also advised me that there exists “The Book of Yadow”, containing a small section in English and Hebrew and the major part of the book is in Yiddish which I am presently reading. I thank Kenny for buying the book when I told him about its existence; I was going to buy it but he beat me to it.

On Dec. 1, I e-mailed him correcting some facts in his family tree for which he was very grateful. I then gave him information about Hilda, Kenny, Dennis and our grandchildren.

We exchanged interesting e-mails several times until Dec.16 when he told me that he received a phone call that morning from Ida Prager Gurvis who lives in Melbourne, Australia with her husband Stan and her sisters, Chana (Hannah) and Chava (Eva). Ida was attending with Stan the birth of their first grandchild in Sausalito, Ca. She requested that Brian forward to her all my e-mails as she, too, is very desirous of “meeting” other Pragers. He, of course, has been complying with her wishes to this day.

On January 31, 1983, we were blessed with another grandchild, David, born to Dennis and Janice. Of course, we were delighted to travel to L.A. to participate in this great simcha (happy occasion) and bris (circumcision). I was honored to be the sandik (the person holding the child in his lap during the circumcision). I was extremely happy to have my brother Murry and Gert present at this enjoyable event in our lives. David entered this world with wonderful traits; handsome and good which, I must add, he has retained to this day. Hilda and I have loved him right from birth as he is a beautiful person in every respect.

In the following year, I increased my practice by obtaining another 5 clients. Rappi’s son, Michael, who became quite famous in the diamond trade by creating a monthly newsletter containing the latest prices for wholesale diamonds and which became an instant success, engaged me as his accountant. I retained this client till 1988 when he immigrated to Israel where he continued his business to this day.

The stockholders of my client, IABM Bakery Systems, became interested in real estate in addition to their bakery machinery business and purchased 4 buildings which my firm audited. Since 3 of them were quite successful, I decided to invest in the fourth. You guessed it – I lost my entire investment.

In 1986, Kenny who was Chairman of the Board of Moriah School, a yeshiva in Englewood where all 4 of his children attended, was honored together with Jeannie at its annual dinner. You can just imagine the pride and joy that Hilda and I experienced.

I am now writing in June 2006 for the first time since January 2005, an 18 month hiatus. This long delay was due to the tax seasons of 2005 and 2006 and, more importantly, Hilda’s surgery and stay at the hospital.

On June 29, 2005 about 3 am, I was awakened by Hilda having a conversation with Dovid Mehler, our nephew. She was speaking in a loud voice and very animatedly; except for the fact that she was not speaking into a phone. She was sitting at the edge of her bed the entire time and the phone was resting in its base. Of course, I was alarmed but did not interrupt her conversation which lasted about 5 minutes. She went back to sleep and, after an hour or so, she went to the bathroom. When she returned to the bedroom, I asked her why she spoke to Dovid in

the early hours of the morning. She thought I was crazy, asking such a ridiculous question. Now, my fears became stronger. She definitely had an amnesia attack; however, the question was what caused it.

We went the following morning to Dr. Livelli, our primary doctor, for consultation. I related the entire incident to him and he advised us to immediately hospitalize her to undergo several tests to rule out any possible physiological malfunction of the brain.

I brought her to Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital that evening, so that Kenny can be with her as much as possible. After a stay of 2 days, she was discharged as all the tests were proven to be negative. All the physicians said that these attacks of amnesia occur and, if they come again, she should immediately consult a neurologist.

Two weeks later, Hilda decided to attempt for the second time the insertion of stents in her left leg which had an extremely low flow of blood. Two years previously, she had stents placed in both her legs at Roosevelt Hospital. It increased the blood flow in her right leg but did not do so in her left leg.

She was admitted at Columbia-Presbyterian on July 14, a Thursday, for the stent surgery and was expected to be discharged on Friday. The second attempt failed but what was even more disheartening, was the phone call I received from her on Friday afternoon telling me that she experienced a mild heart attack and would have to stay over the weekend at the hospital.

On Monday, they performed an angiogram and, unfortunately, discovered that Hilda had 4 coronary blockages and would require a quadruple bypass. The surgery was performed on Wednesday by Dr. Smith, the surgeon who performed the bypass on Pres. Clinton. I assume that Dr. Smith, knowing Kenny very well, elected to operate on his colleague's mother.

Hilda was an exemplary patient throughout her recovery. In fact, while in the recovery room, she asked me to give her the lipstick tube so that she could makeup; that's my Hilda.

After 6 days of post-surgery, she began a period of 14 days of rehab and finally, after 27 days she was discharged. For her entire stay at the hospital, I was with her from 10am to between 7pm and 10pm every day. Although I am an excellent sleeper, gazing at the empty bed beside mine was agonizing and I found it difficult to fall asleep. Also, very troublesome thoughts kept entering my mind; i.e. how would I react if she would leave me. After 65 years of marital bliss, we functioned as one individual respecting, however, each of our desires and even our foibles. Words cannot express the feelings we have for each other. May God grant us many more years of happiness together with our devoted children and grandchildren.

Several days later, Hilda commenced with rehab therapy at home. Nurses and therapists from Englewood Hospital visited her almost every day and, may I say, every one of them was efficient, cooperative and pleasant. In fact, I wrote to President Duchak of Englewood Hospital telling him how pleased we were with his staff naming every one of them.

On May 17, 2006, Kenny delivered the Invocation at the graduation exercises of the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. He has been a Professor of Medicine at this college for many years. At the

graduation, he received the Humanism in Medicine Award for his devoted service at the college. Tonight, June 13, we are all going to a dinner at Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital where Kenny will receive a Service Award as Clinical Professor of Medicine.

I now return to the chronological order of my memoirs. In 1987, Danny Retter, the son-in-law of my friend and client, Leo Rappaport whom I mentioned several times previously, gave me 8 real estate clients. He is an immigration lawyer and was an investor and attorney for all these companies. I kept these clients for a period of 4 years during which time many of the properties were sold.

For several years I had cataracts in both eyes, although I was not aware of this. I knew that my eyesight was failing to a small degree but, as usual, paid very little attention to this fact. When the condition became worse, I realized that I had to remedy this situation. Kenny suggested that I see Dr. Trokel, an eye surgeon at the Eye Institute at Columbia-Presbyterian. He suggested surgery on one eye and surgery on the other the following year. Both procedures were so successful that I have now excellent vision, not requiring eye glasses for distance and very weak glasses for reading.

In 1989, Dennis married Fran, a divorcee with a daughter Anya. Fran was born in Kansas whose parents were Lutheran. She was divorced from a Jew and, although it was possible that she converted to Judaism at the time of her first marriage, Dennis would not marry her unless she went through a year of study with an Orthodox rabbi. She consented and after a year she and Anya were converted according to Orthodox halacha (law).

The marriage ceremony was performed in the Young Israel of Century City by Rabbi Muskin, an Orthodox rabbi in Los Angeles. It was attended by many members of our family and Fran's mother, brother and members of her family; her father had died many years ago. What amazed me was the joy and elation exhibited by her family at this very Orthodox wedding. We accepted her as a true and devoted daughter-in-law and she reciprocated in the same manner.

While walking to my shul on a Shabbat morning, I had to stop suddenly, not being able to walk another step. Fortunately, my friend Jack Walker came along and helped me walk to the shul. When this occurred several times again, I realized that something had to be done to relieve my predicament.

Again, I consulted my son, "the doctor," who suggested that I see a neurologist at his hospital which I did. After a very intensive examination, it was suspected that a stenosis in my back was the cause of my inability to walk. He suggested that I go through a series of tests to confirm this diagnosis. After CT scans and bone scans, it was determined that I had stenosis in the fourth and fifth vertebrae of the lumbar area and only having surgery would eliminate the problem.

As people age, the incidence of arthritis developing increases. If this condition occurs in the spine, you have what is called "spinal stenosis" causing the spinal canal to narrow. This squeezes the back nerves, putting pressure on them. It is this pressure that causes the back pain. Numbness, pain, and weakness in the legs can also occur. The most common symptom of spinal stenosis is pain that gets worse while walking and is relieved by sitting down. It

was suggested that surgery called “a laminectomy” would eliminate the stenosis. In this procedure, one of the laminae, which are large bones emanating from the spinal column, is removed relieving the pressure on the nerves.

In 1988, I underwent surgery at Columbia-Presbyterian performed by Dr. Jost Michelson a neuro-surgeon. I was told that I would remain in the hospital for 5 days and the recuperative period at home would last for about a week. Unfortunately, this was not achieved. I stayed in the hospital 10 days and my recovery lasted several weeks; enduring severe pain during that entire period. Also, may I add, another vertebrae developed stenosis and I refuse to undergo another laminectomy considering what I went through the last time. In fact, although the distance between my home and the shul is only 1/3 of a mile, I have difficulty in walking to shul on the Sabbath. I purchased a scooter in 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>006 which I use only going to shul on Saturday. Since I am a Sabbath observer, my scooter is equipped with a box invented in and imported from Israel thus allowing me to use it on the shabbat. I turn it on on Friday so that I can use it without violating the shabbat.

From the time of Hilda’s surgery in July 2005, I would push her in a wheel chair to shul every shabbat. After a while, Kenny forbid this practice, fearing the effect on my health. Consequently, we engaged young boys from our shul to push her. Since this practice did not work out too well, she finally consented to purchase a scooter in Jan. 2007 and now we race each other to shul evoking many remarks and glances from passersby.

After Dennis and Fran were married for 3 years, they decided to adopt a child which they did in Nov. 1992 when Aaron was born to a young unwedded couple in the state of Washington. This event gave us our 6th grandchild.

On Oct. 16, 1994, our first grandchild, Karen, married Mark Kramer, a young man whom all of the family fell in love with because of his character, looks and his wonderful family. At the time of his marriage, he was a computer programmer at CUNY in Brooklyn, NY. In 1998, he felt that this is not he wanted to do for the rest of his life and went back to school to take courses leading to teaching the subject of history. He graduated 2 years later and his first position was in Summit H.S. in Summit, NJ. He did so well there, that after 2 years he was offered a position at the very prestigious Bergen County Academy in Hackensack, NJ to teach history. The administration recognized his superb ability in his profession and he was granted tenure 4 years later, making him the youngest teacher at the school to gain this honor. Last week, in Jan. 2008, he took a group of students called the “Model UN Team” to compete at Yale University in the “Yale Modern UN” competition and his team garnered the second spot amongst teams from all over the country. A wife could not ask for a better husband and a child could not ask for a better father. We are all extremely proud of Mark and thank Karen for her choice in selecting a spouse.

## Epilogue

I related previously in my memoirs events through 1986 that I felt would prove interesting to the reader; except for unusual occurrences that were part of my life that took place subsequent to that date. I omitted events i.e. weddings, bar and bat-mitzvas and births which are part of all families; not only mine.

Now, I would like to express my philosophy of life which strengthened me throughout my 90 years of existence.

Whether this attitude is a reflection of genetics, environment or a strong belief in God is difficult to ascertain. Perhaps, it is all three. As far as genetics is concerned, I feel that I inherited my father's genes. He was a man who earned very little money in his life and could care less. He loved music and spent much of his idle time reading. His family was the source of his happiness. He had a great sense of humor and would amuse us with tales of his boyhood and his serving in the Russian Army. Never did we hear any complaints or regrets relative to his service. He would tell us about his love affair with a girl as a single man while he was stationed in an armory close to this girl whose name was Chasha.

It is quite possible that I inherited this attitude as I served in the U.S. Navy during World War 2 and I too never complained nor regretted my enlisting, nor service. Fortunately, two of my siblings joined me in his philosophy of life that imbued us with a zest for life and created three happy individuals. However, my mother was not a very happy person. Although she was a very intelligent woman, her glass was always half empty. In her case, genetics played a very important role in her life. Whenever she was down in spirits, I remember my father saying "what can you expect from Sarah's daughter?" Unfortunately, one sibling inherited her disposition and met a tragic and untimely death. I always say that I inherited her aggressiveness. If I had inherited my father's aggressiveness, I would have been satisfied to get a job in civil service. As I stated in these memoirs, if my mother was the wage earner, we would have been better off financially. Thus, I was fortunate in inheriting the best of both parents.

As regards environment, my home was neither a sad home nor a jovial abode. Considering the fact that I grew up in the midst of a severe economic depression, it is amazing that we experienced many jolly moments. My mother, although a very serious person, would make us laugh with her excellent imitations of people we knew. In addition, I still repeat to my children and grandchildren her frequent sayings that were wise and funny. Thus, as you can surmise, she was not always sad. Perhaps the fact that my two sisters never married did not add to her happiness.

My father's disposition was quite different. It is possible that there were events in his life that were not joyful; however, he reacted differently. I assume that since he could not control these happenings, he accepted the adage "if you can't beat them, join them." As a teenager, my sibling relationship was mainly with my sister, Irene. While attending City College at Lexington Avenue and 23rd Street, she and I would travel together daily. We walked to the subway station and traveled on the subway together; she getting off one station before mine.

My strong faith in God may have been the most powerful in structuring my attitude and philosophy of life. From the earliest phase of my life, He has been a spiritual part of me. I have always felt that I have two fathers - my biological and spiritual. My love for and dependence on both permeates my being. Since I attribute some events, good or bad, in my life to Him, I feel they were beyond my control. Thus, my attitude is fashioned based on His desires. Now you know why I titled my memoirs, "Attitude and Gratitude."