ROSES IN DECEMBER

A Memoir Of My Parents

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DEDICATION

To Emma, Belle, Arnold and Birdie, who loved as dearly as I did.

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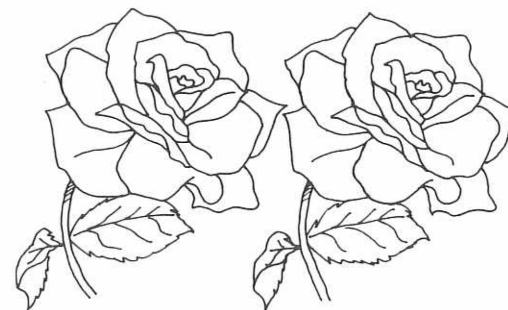


"God gave us memory so that we could have roses in December."

—J. M. Barrie

PREFACE

During the past few decades the world of the written word has been flooded with essays, stories, novels, and biographies that are reflective of the authors' family history. An overwhelming number of these works have been by Jewish authors who write about the immigrant experience, the making of Americans, and their interpretation of Jewishness through the characters they write about.

Perhaps they write because Jews have long been a people of literary expressiveness. Maybe this was why the Prophet Mohammed gave to the Jews the name "The People of the Book." Perhaps they write because they recognize the end of an era and they hasten to record that era, as when Elizabeth Herzog and Mark Zborowski were commissioned by Columbia University to write **Life Is With People,** a book about the shtetl. Perhaps the television series of Alex Haley's **Roots** gave many of them the impetus to put on paper an account of how their forebears found their way to the United States, how they reacted to their experiences, how they preserved their identity in the midst of change, in short, how they became the people their children and grandchildren knew.

Whatever the reasons Jewish writers may have for recording stories of their families, probably the reason that has brought about the greatest number of works is the most elementary one, that they dearly loved their parents and wanted to share what inspired that love with their own descendants. I am among this last-named company.

I don't remember wanting, as a child, to know the story of my family and I don't remember ever talking to my siblings about it. True, my mother used to mention now and then the smell of the woods when,

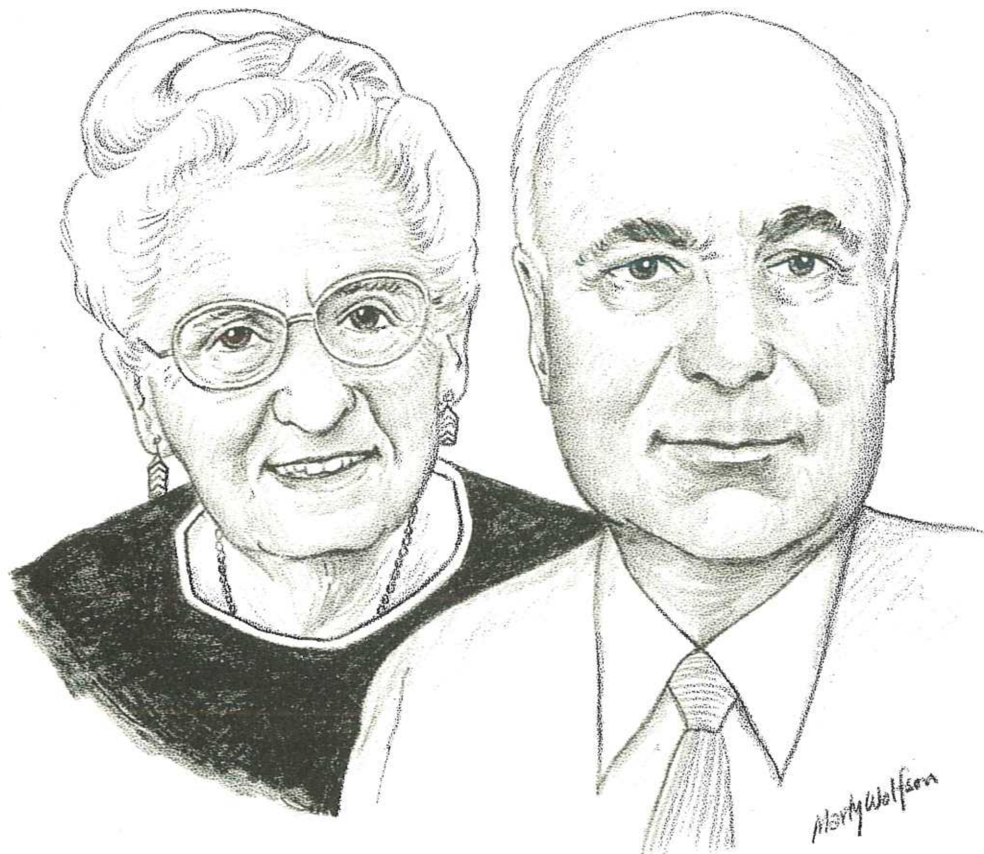
in Latvia, she and her friends gathered mushrooms, or the teasing of her older sister, Chaya, about the size of her nose. But I don't remember really wanting to know about her childhood and youth, and probably, in the superiority of adolescence, I allowed to be visible how boring I found such conversation.

Now I am filled with a terrible sense of loss because there is no way to learn all of the story. Since my mother's death in February, 1980, a thousand questions have come to mind that will be forever without answers, and with the loss comes self-reproach. Why did I not realize the valuable resource I had in Mama's ability to remember? Her mind was clear and her philosophy free of ambiguity and we, her children, should have been more aware of the permanence of the void that her impending death would bring.

On a precious springtime afternoon in 1952 my father, knowing but not acknowledging that he was near the end of his life, told me a few incidents about his trip to America. I remember well his pleasure in talking about these small events that were so large at the time they happened. I marvel now at the inability of the young to appreciate the enormous gift that the old offer them when they share their memories, and I wish I had asked for much more of the story, but I had not the wisdom at that time to do so.

And so this history will be incomplete although my sisters and my brother have shared with me all the facts that they know. Each remembers our parents quite differently, of course, because everyone has his own memories of those he or she loved. The facts are the same for all of us, but the point of view is mine alone.

MAMA AND PAPA
MY MEMORIES AND REFLECTIONS



Abraham Berman was born in 1889 near Rezitza, Latvia, a town of about 18,000 of whom about 10,000 were Jews. He was the second child and first son of Jacob Bookmuz and Ettle Metter.

Jacob was a lazy man, a tailor by trade, who spent his time in Shul pretending to be a scholar. Bobah Ettle, as she was eventually known to her grandchildren, in addition to bearing and raising seven children, had to be the breadwinner of this poverty-stricken family. She was a feisty sort of woman, like her father before her, a carpenter who had successfully nursed his wife and many children through a typhus epidemic before himself dying of the disease. Ettle's spunk and toughness, as well as the need to put food on the table, made her try all sorts of ways to make a living. It is from Ettle that Avram, my father, inherited his initiative and his strength.

The Bookmuz family of nine rented part of the small house owned and occupied by the Gordins, Mama's family, which consisted of parents, five children, and a blind grandmother, so that the future Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Berman knew each other from their earliest years. Mama told me that Papa's family seldom paid the rent. Then she added with a mischievous smile, "Do you know why? Because they didn't have it!"

At the age of twelve Avram was apprenticed for five years to a watchmaker in another town, perhaps the city of Riga. There he spent much of his time acting as nursemaid and caretaker to the children of his employer, and was taught his trade on the side. He became a fine craftsman so we must assume that he was taught well.

The man to whom the twelve-year old was apprenticed was a heavy-set man and one of the fringe benefits of the apprenticeship was to receive the cast-off clothing of the boss. Just imagine a rather slight boy wearing a much too large coat or pair of pants, looking after a bunch of little kids, and trying to learn fine handwork! All his life Papa hated clothes that were too large and we can easily see why. Even though for most of his adult life he had the typical Jewish businessman's overweight figure, he was a neat dresser and wore clothes that fit well. Papa, as an adult, never ate jelly and the reason for that goes back to this same time, his apprenticeship, when he was always hungry. Once he pilfered a jar of jelly from the boss's larder and ate the whole thing. He got so sick from the jelly that he developed a distaste for it that lasted all his life.

While apprenticed, for some reason unknown to me he slept overnight in a boat, caught a severe cold which developed into mastoiditis, was operated on, and lost all his hearing in one ear. No doubt he had suffered so much misery in his ear that he could not conceive of anything more painful. When his children were growing up and he wanted to discipline one of them the worst threat he could possibly make was to give one "a slap over the ear." He never made good the threat, but he kept us in line because we knew that a pain in the ear would be a horrible punishment.

These are trivialities, scarcely worth mentioning, but they tell us of hunger, of pain, and of poverty and we catch a glimpse of the lot of the average Jew in Eastern Europe early in the twentieth century.

After his apprenticeship Avram had a special permit from the representatives of the Czar to live outside the Pale, a privilege for a Jew, and he traveled around the countryside visiting army camps to pick up watch repair jobs. The soldiers were likable trusting fellows, like unsophisticates anywhere, and they gave him their watches to repair. So he was making a living at an early age and eventually saved enough money to buy steamship tickets for himself and his brother Harry to go to America.

I don't know how the decision to emigrate came about, but it was probably arrived at in the same way that millions of others reached it. The bleakness of the future was the deciding factor, of course. This movement of Jewish individuals, then their families, and then whole villages has been written about by innumerable social historians and novelists and I will add to this wealth of records only the sadly few personal items that I know.

Lena, the oldest child, went first across the sea with a girl cousin in 1905. They landed in Philadelphia and, late at night, left the ship to set foot on the Promised Land. In retrospect this seems impossibly naive, especially in view of the hazards of White Slavery, a fact of life at that time to which Irving Howe and other social historians attest. Lena and her cousin walked into a saloon that was run by a Jewish family who, to the great good fortune of the girls, took them in and looked after them until they got settled. They got jobs in a clothing factory and Lena became an expert seamstress, living very frugally so as to save money for passage money for others of the family.

Two years after Lena's arrival Avram and Harry made the trip in steerage, where people traveled like cattle in the hold of the ship. In England the ship made a stop and a swarm of peddlers came aboard selling all kinds of foods. Avram bought two apples, one for Harry and one for himself, and was delighted with the large coin he received in change. Too late he found out that the large coin was a bottle cap!

The trip from England to Philadelphia took more than two weeks and for more than two weeks the boys vomited every day. When they debarked they were thin and pale, but happy and hopeful, and Avram held tight to the case that carried the tools of his trade, the key to his future. They found their sister Lena who fed them until their almost bottomless stomachs were full, and then the three young people, aged 19, 17, and 15 set out to make a home and to save enough money to bring the rest of their family to America.

Then came the job-hunting, often with only a fifteen cent bag of peanuts for a day's nourishment. Avram had a big advantage over the immigrants who were forced into the sweatshops because they were unskilled. He had a trade and a tool kit, and he was bright and enterprising.

He saw a barbershop with a table in an unused area in its window, so he talked the owner into renting that space to him and then he set up shop. The first customer was a young dandy — when Papa told me this story he described every detail of the man's attire — who left his watch for repair. The repaired watch, running perfectly, was picked up by the customer who paid for it with a bill and magnanimously said

there was no change due. Being paid with paper money seemed to the watchmaker to be the first step on the ladder of success. Then the young greenhorn learned that the "bill" was a cigarette coupon!

Avram worked for an established watchmaker or two during this time and, with Lena and Harry, saved enough money to send steamship tickets to the rest of the family. There was a ticket war going on part of that time, just like the gas wars that have been common in my generation, with each company undercutting the others every day. For a while the tickets cost $36.00 for steerage passage, but at one time the rivalry got so intense that a ticket could be bought for $1.00. No matter what price was paid, the people at the European end had to be fairly ready when they received their tickets because after sixty days they became void. My grandparents and their remaining four children were more than ready when their tickets arrived three years after the two boys had left for America.

When the family was reunited, Lena was dating a young man named Berman and was being teased by her friends who called her "Mrs. Berman." The Bookmuz family thought that Berman had a nice American sound and so they all adopted it as their own. Lena did not marry young Berman but the Bookmuz family is deeply indebted to him nevertheless.

Part of becoming adapted to a new land and to a new language is the acquisition of a new name and the story of how Bookmuz became Berman is one of thousands of such stories as varied as they are numerous. With first names, however, there is a more definite pattern in Jewish families and Jewish immigrants usually had three first names. At birth the child was, and is, given his Hebrew name, usually in memory of a deceased relative, most often a grandparent. If family records are studied one can usually find the same name repeated in every other generation as parents named their offspring for their own dead parents. Sometimes in genealogical searches people have been helped to trace their family tree by recognizing this pattern of names which appear in every second generation. Thus there is a thread of tradition woven into the tapestry of most families.

The street name was the Yiddish version of the Hebrew one and, like the Yiddish language as a whole, was used familiarly. Often it evolved into a colorful nickname that attached itself and never let go. The third name was the English version. Sometimes the English name was an accommodation to the whole new world, as when Shmuel became Seymour instead of Samuel or Itzhak became Irving instead of Isaac. But in Papa's case Abram — Avram — Abraham translated only to Abraham which was shortened for everyday use to Abe.

Somehow, in this account, as soon as Avram set foot in America, in my mind he became Papa and that he will be from this point on.

Papa's father has almost no identity in any part of this story. He came to America with his wife and younger children, looked around, and then returned to Rezitza. He came a second time and then returned to Rezitza for good, abandoning wife, children and responsibilities forever. There were many, many other fathers who did exactly the same

thing because they could not live with the culture shock they experienced. In their home towns they had been treated with deference, especially if they were scholars or played the role of scholars and their families placed them on the pedestals created by the traditional Jewish reverence for learning. These fathers, if they did not become part of the work force, found no place at all in society in America, and so they faded into the background or went back to the old country. In the excitement of the new world and with the need to make a living and a new life, Jacob Bookmuz became a rather useless appendage to an active wife and a houseful of working young people.

It is somewhat painful to be aware of a lack of respect for one's grandfather. Had Jacob been a rascal, but an enterprising and energetic one, I might feel a grudging admiration for him. But he was simply a man of little scholarship who took refuge from life in a Shul. For hundreds of years the flame of Jewish life had been kept burning through constant study, even in the poorest of yeshivas. Students were supported all their lives by parents, sisters, and wives' parents and the only requirement made of them was that they bring honor to their families by the act of studying. Small wonder it was, then, that an admirable idea was perverted and that some who were not exceptionally intelligent chose to be yeshiva bochers, students, in order to avoid physical work. Jacob was the product of his times and perhaps should not be blamed too much for his inability to cope with the bewildering new world. But I, the product of my times, do not truly feel sympathy for the grandfather who evaded his responsibilities and ran away, not once, but twice.

Established in North Philadelphia, Ettle became Mrs. Ethel Berman as she reverted to the traditional position of mother and homemaker with her children pooling their energies and their earnings. After a three month course at night school Lena had become a registered nurse but the family always joked that her training was useless when one of them got sick because Lena's emotional involvement made her develop diarrhea! Reba and Edith worked in garment factories and learned skills that were invaluable in their roles as mothers. Harry and Papa, scrabbling hard to make a living, nevertheless found the energy to go to school at night for three months and they both became licensed optometrists. No matter what were the standards applied in later years for the practice of optometry, these original licenses, renewed year after year, remained in effect, and Harry in his office in Philadelphia and Papa in his examining room at the rear of his store in Altoona each had a faithful clientele as long as they lived. William became a salesman and a small-time promoter and Anna, who was young enough to attend school for a few years before going to work, became a stenographer.

During his five years or so in Philadelphia Papa had a girl friend who worked in a paper flower factory. Every Sunday afternoon he would come to visit at her house and they would go for a stroll past all the row houses where the tenants were sitting on their front stoops, watching the world go by. Papa wanted to break off with this girl because she had a strong body odor and he saw no future in living with that. But he was a true gentleman. He gave her some polite reason for wanting to break off the relationship and she evidently accepted it. Then they agreed on how she could save face. The young couple staged a big fight for the benefit of the stoop-sitting viewers and then she told him off and kicked him out of her life. The circumstances are ridiculous, of course, but I think that Papa's appreciation of the girl's position shows great gallantry and sensitivity.

It would be charming to say that Papa and Mama were promised to each other from before his emigration, but that was not the case. Since he had left home to be apprenticed at the age of twelve he and Mama had scarcely seen each other and certainly hardly knew each other as young adults. Papa was spending an evening in Philadelphia at a landsmanshaft, a lodge or club formed by people who came from the same area or village in Europe, and there he met a former neighbor from Rezitza. From casual conversation he learned that Tsiveh Gordin was still unmarried, and from this encounter the courtship began which led to Papa's sending a steamship ticket to Mama.

Tsiveh Gordin was the youngest child of Aaron Sholom Gordin and Brocha Liebeh Cahan. From Brocha's name, Cahan, we see that she was from the elite in Israel, the Cohanim (priests), an honor which was passed on to males only, but which, of course, was lost to Brocha, to Mama and to her sister, and to the descendants of the sisters. Not evident from these names is the fact that Aaron Gordin was a Chassid, a follower of the group who revolted against the dry scholasticism that dominated Jewish life and thought in the eighteenth century. These Jews wanted emotion, color, and zest to be part of their faith, and at one time fully fifty per cent of the Jews of Eastern Europe were Chassidim.

Mama's paternal grandmother, Fruma, for whom I was named, had been married to Reb Hendel Gordin, a melamed, a sort of lower echelon scholar. When she was left a widow with six children she became a baker of bread to support her family. The oldest son, Aaron, Mama's father, began to support the family at the age of thirteen when the neighbors got together and bought him a horse and wagon. He became a balegola, a drayman, somewhat like Tevyeh, the milkman of the Sholom Aleichem stories and of **Fiddler On The Roof** but of an even lower social level because he was not an independent merchant like Tevyeh, but was merely a drayman for hire.

Brocha Liebeh had not wanted to marry Aaron but her mother insisted because Aaron's father had been a scholar. Here we see again the same extreme respect of the Jew for those who study. In this case the respect for the scholar was extended to his son, Aaron, regardless of his own merits, and all other considerations that contribute to happiness were ignored.

Like most Jewish children of this place and period, the Gordin children were educated in a Cheder, yet Mama's mother had an idea that there was something to be learned in the world at large, and so she sent her children to the public school for a short time. To earn the tuition money she sold some of the milk from the family cow, milk that used to be consumed by the family.

When Mama was sixteen her father died and she was sent to live

with her married sister, Chaya, in Riga. Her being there was illegal because Riga was beyond the Pale, the overcrowded, poverty-stricken area where Jews were permitted by the Russian government to live. In Riga Mama worked in a grocery store and there she learned to wrap packages in a very special and artistic way that we children used to admire. She already spoke Russian and in Riga she learned some German because that language was used in the world around her, but the language of Latvia, Lettish, she seldom heard and never learned. In the Jewish world of that area and always among themselves Jews spoke Yiddish.

When plans were made for Mama to go to America there must have been great sadness in her family as well as happy excitement. She was the baby of the family and her mother, sister and brothers knew that they might never see her again. We can only imagine what sacrifices they made to see that she had a decent wardrobe and that she could take with her the traditional items necessary for the establishment of a Jewish home. The Gordin family at least had the comfort of knowing that their daughter was not going to be among strangers, since Papa's mother and her children were so well-known to the Gordins.

So, at the age of twenty-two, Mama went to America, dressed in a neat tailored suit and a wide-brimmed hat. She traveled in third class which was far superior to the miserable conditions in steerage where women wore babushkas on their heads and almost rags on their bodies.

Mama brought feather quilts, perrinahs, with her, filled with feathers plucked by the women of her family from their own geese. I was the first one in our family to marry and Mama gave me the feathers that are now in my living room pillows, thus continuing the custom of starting a daughter's household with a traditionally valuable item. My sister Belle, too, has some of this family treasure. The bolster pillow that Erin, the daughter of my daughter, Elissa, sleeps on is filled with some of these same feathers, so the goose feathers that left the shtetl of Rezitza in 1911 have come a long way and are now sweetening the dreams of a fourth generation.

Mama also brought a samovar that my husband once spent half a day polishing so that we could make tea in it on our patio, with the water being heated by the hot charcoal in the center tube. The wooden handle on one side had been broken long before that time and Papa had made a new one, but it was a pretty bad match. There is a stamp on the samovar in Russian which Mama translated at our patio tea party as "By Appointment To His Majesty, The Czar." Today the samovar, professionally polished and lacquered, stands proudly as the focal point in my sister Birdie's living room, a memorial to those courageous people who carried their past with them while they looked to the future.

She brought, too, a heavy brass shtaisel, or mortar, but today the pestle is missing. I don't remember ever seeing the shtaisel being used to pulverize cinnamon or other spices, its original purpose. Mama used the shtaisel for a doorstop for years and it is now in my house, waiting for polishing and for an idea for its use. Recently I saw in a curio shop an identical shtaisel, complete with pestle, marked to sell at $190.00,

an amazing price for a battered brass doorstop!

The brass candlesticks, without which no Jewish bride could set up her household, were sent to Mama by one of her brothers as a wedding gift and for all my childhood and youth those candlesticks, set on a folded newspaper to catch the dripping wax, represented the Sabbath. They went with the chicken soup, chicken, chalah, sponge cake, and pink jello, the jello a tradition created by Mama in America. Today my sister Emma's youngest child, Marilyn, has the candlesticks which Mama gave to her.

When Emma and I were small we used to explore in our attic another item that had crossed the sea with Mama, a round-topped trunk, the kind that is now being manufactured as an item of decor. It was lined with a small-patterned paper and had a removable sectional tray. The most fascinating thing in it was a wig of shiny black hair that Mama would not tell us much about. It must have been part of the treasures she brought to her marriage, the traditional shaytel to be worn by a woman from the moment her hair was cut upon marriage in order to lessen her attractiveness to other men. My guess is that the wig was never worn because there was always an embarrassment, a sort of evasiveness about Mama's response when we asked her about it.

Mama landed in Philadelphia and lived with the Bermans for three months, working in a factory where her fresh complexion and unspoiled good health were the envy of those young women who were already sallow and weary from their too long imprisonment away from light and air and sunshine. They teased her about being such a greenhorn — they were already oldtimers — but much of that teasing must have been rooted in jealousy of this pink-cheeked girl who had just left the old world and who had a man with a trade already making arrangements for their marriage. How many thousands of young women there were in this period who spent their lives at sewing machines in dark factories so that their families might eat and their men, brothers or betrothed, might be educated! Much has already been written about them but let me add a wonderful word from the short-lived experimental magazine **Lilith** that describes these women perfectly. **Lilith** called them "The Enablers", those who sacrificed their lives to enable others in the family to realize their potential.

Mama was not of the Enablers because Papa had already gone to the village of Houtzdale, Pa. to work for Jake Luxenburg who had a jewelry store. Perhaps the connection for this job was made through a traveling salesman but my guess is that skilled craftsmen were sought out through the pages of the **Yiddish Daily Forward,** that powerful educative force in the lives of Jewish immigrants.

Three families from Rezitza lived in Altoona, the Morris Pachters, the Philip Troops, and the Harry Troops, and it was in the home of Harry Troop that Mama and Papa were married. The wedding had to be witnessed by people who knew other people that they knew, so that there would never by any doubt about their being legally married. In light of today's views this seems to be of small importance, but in 1912 Victorian values were still strong. In addition, the Haskalah, the

Enlightenment, and the prevalence of what was called Free Love, an outgrowth of the revolutionary movement in Russia, had their effect. So Papa made sure that there would be no doubt as to which camp he and his bride were in.

In a tape made by Birdie's son, David, in 1975 Mama described their wedding at Harry Troop's house. She said that there were three witnesses, one bottle of schnapps, one loaf of bread, and four herrings for the festivities. When the bride and groom went to the Colonial Hotel on Thirteenth Avenue and Thirteenth Street in Altoona, Mama said she was terribly ashamed to walk past the people sitting in the lobby because in Rezitza a hotel was a place where only loose women went. But Papa announced very firmly to the desk clerk that they were Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Berman.

Twenty three years later the need to renew ties with their past was expressed at my own wedding when the only non-family guests on the Berman side were some of these people, Mr. and Mrs. Pachter and Mr. and Mrs. Philip Troop. The Harry Troops had moved away. We had not had much contact with the Troops and the Pachters during the preceding few years but to Mama and Papa it was important that they be present because they represented links with their childhood and youth. Continuity and rites of passage are synonomous and so at the wedding of their child they were saying, "This is where we came from, these people share our heritage and the future of our daughter has evolved from this past."

After their wedding night in Altoona the newlyweds went by train to Houtzdale. Today it is hard to believe that the mountains of Pennsylvania were full of short railroad passenger lines, mostly part of the Pennsylvania Railroad system, and that one could travel from one village to another in otherwise inaccessible areas. The traveler got very dirty, since soft coal was used, but he could be certain of his arrival in Patton or Nanty-Glo or Clymer or Windber or wherever he was bound.

These villages were pockets of the old world, transplanted almost intact, much as were the ethnic sections of the big cities. There were Poles, Irish, Ukrainians, Italians, Welsh and others living closely with others of the same tradition and language and religion, yet they shared with people of a different ethnicity the hard labor, the strangeness, the need to adapt to the new world.

But Papa and Mama were different because they were not part of a group, since other than Jake and Claudia Luxenburg, there were no other Jews in Houtzdale. They lacked the comfort of group support and sometimes the feeling of isolation was almost unbearable. One summer day when the windows were open Mama thought she was dreaming when she heard Yiddish being spoken. She rushed outside and found a new family that had just arrived, the Eisenbergs who had two little boys. What joy she must have felt to hear and to speak Yiddish!

Emma was born in Houtzdale and Claudia, who had two sons and was pregnant, was of immeasurable help to Mama. Claudia, who wanted a daughter passionately, used to love to change Emma and she almost reveled in looking at her bottom as she said, "Oh, if my baby only has

that!" She did give birth to a daughter, Emily, who became my contemporary in Sunday School in Altoona and who, later as Emily Brett, bought the house that Emma and her husband had built.

One day when Emma was an infant, Mama had a horrible experience. She had just wheeled the baby up and down the streets of the small mining town and had come home to cook dinner. Carefully she pulled the baby carriage up the long stairway to the second floor apartment, balancing it on each step as she pulled it backward. When she got to the top and settled both pairs of wheels on the landing she looked inside and saw that the carriage was empty. The baby had disappeared! She flew down the stairs and there at the bottom lay Emma, peacefully sleeping on the pad which had quietly slipped out of the tilted carriage at the first step.

Mama was overwhelmed by the marvels of American freedom for Jews and non-Jews alike. A box of matches without a government tax seal on it was a symbol to her of that freedom, of the absence of governmental oppression. To the end of her days she remembered the exact moment when she realized how much the lack of that tax seal meant.

Shopping for food was a matter of pointing, since at that time the store clerk brought every item to the customer and the supermarket cart was not yet even an idea. Without words Mama pointed to what she wanted. Once she wanted prunes and could not find them to point to. So the store owner marched her up and down the whole store and showed her every item he had, but he never showed her prunes, so Papa had no dessert that night.

In autumn of that first year the young Bermans decided to make sauerkraut, a staple of their diet in the old country. Mama placed an order with a farmer for nine pounds of cabbage. He brought it on his next trip to town — ninety pounds of it! We will never know whose lack of language skill caused the error, Mama's or the farmer's. What is more, Mama never told me what happened to all that cabbage.

It was ironic that the Luxenburgs did not speak Yiddish. Claudia spoke a little German and since German and Yiddish are somewhat related she and Mama managed to communicate. Claudia taught Mama to bake bread and to make bagels and in general helped her through the first year. Being dreadfully ill with morning sickness added to life's problems but the loneliness was the worst part of all. However, there was a most unexpected relief for Mama in the development of the movies. Like every village, Houtzdale had its nickelodeon and Mama told me that it really saved her sanity. The terrible loneliness and homesickness were made bearable because in those early flickering pictures she could find temporary escape and she went to the movies as often as she could.

It is difficult to think of Mama as being carried away by something as unrealistic as those early movies in which people were presented generally as caricatures. She was an intensely realistic woman who realized only very much later in her life that in everyone there is a need to indulge in flights of fancy, but at first her practicality was so strong that she believed that a child who was imaginative was lying. It is to her credit that she was able to understand this difference when Mrs.

Rockel, a minister's wife in Altoona, explained the distinction to her. The movies were a terribly important part of life in Houtzdale as they were everywhere and Mama's pleasure in them was shared by millions of people all over the world.

Always, Mama believed that the measure of a movie or play was whether or not it was true to life. I remember her anger at the enthusiasm of my siblings and myself after we had seen **Peter Pan** in the silents with Betty Bronson and Mary Brian. We were all "flying" off the edge of our beds, exulting in "believing" and having a wonderful time in imagining Peter's world. But to Mama the world of imagination was ridiculous and to be avoided because it was not true to life.

A movie whose background pictured poverty in a village or city slum was worthwhile to her because that was what she knew about, and so it met her criteria. I remember how highly she regarded **Hungry Hearts,** a silent picture based on stories about Jewish immigrants by Anzia Yezierska, and I remember the frustration and anger of the mother, (Mary Gordon, I think) as she swung a hatchet at the tenement walls. The landlord had just raised the rent because the tenant had improved the place by painting it. Mama must have identified only with the downtrodden of the earth in the movies, and if they were Jews they were that much more true to life.

A few years before she died Mama went to a movie with Belle and Birdie that they did not know was somewhat pornographic. The two sisters squirmed uncomfortably at what they were inadvertently exposing their aged mother to until they realized that she was periodically jabbing one or the other of them with an elbow and chortling, "Ai, yi, yi!" She probably thought that, except for the presence of the camera crew, it sure was true to life!

The movie was **The Diary of a Mad Housewife** and one of the characters was an especially contemptible man. Mama's adaptations to English were often far more vivid than the same thought expressed in standard English. The morning after seeing that movie Belle asked her how she had slept and she said, "Not very well. That paskudnyak — he laid on me all night!"

Leo Rosten in **The Joys of Yiddish** says that a paskudnyak is "nasty, mean, odious, rotten, vulgar, and insensitive, and the word is one of the most greasily graphic in Yiddish." So when Mama used this word to tell us what she thought of that character she really said a lot. How much more expressive and descriptive it is to say, "He laid on me all night" than to say, "I couldn't get him off my mind!"

In spite of Mama's admirable ability to learn and to change, the practical side of her remained strong. For example, on the night when the whole world was watching on television the awesome sight of the first moonwalk, Mama was viewing the spectacle with Belle and her family. Instead of being amazed at the enormity of the wonder on the screen she asked, "But what good is it?" And no one had an answer.

People like Mama and Papa came from homes that were, with rare exceptions, kosher and their decision to do away with the keeping of separate meat and dairy dishes was a major break with tradition. The

sheer impracticality of buying kosher meat in an area as isolated as Houtzdale no doubt contributed to this decision, but the Bermans had to have been psychologically ready as well. Their acceptance of a non-kosher kitchen was also a statement that life in America was a departure from the constriction of the old ways. The breaking away from tradition in regard to kashruth was partly the rebellion of youth that occurs in one form or another in every generation and partly adaptation to necessity. But in the truly important traditions of the Jewish home, strength and stability and love and loyalty, there never was any break with the tenets of Judaism in regard to the home. This tradition was the cornerstone of Mama's and Papa's life from the beginning.

Several years later, when there were already three children in the family, Bobah Ettle came to visit from Philadelphia. She brought a few small pots and some separate dishes and silverware. She cooked her own food and continued the old ways for herself in Mama's kitchen, with each woman respecting the needs of the other.

At about this time Papa in his world away from his own house learned to enjoy oysters and so Mama one day planned a special treat for him. She went downtown to Gable's, the department store that had a specialty foods section in the basement, and bought a carton of fresh oysters. It was a long walk home and on the way she carried the thin cardboard carton that, in that pre-plastic age, was beginning to leak, and she thought about what it represented. Even though she had rejected the keeping of separate dishes and had tried to shake off the bonds of the laws of kashruth, she still could not swallow the forbidden foods. As she walked up Washington Avenue, her ingrained revulsion at the oysters overcame her, and when she got home she went straight down to the basement and threw the carton of oysters into the coal-burning furnace. There was never any ham or bacon or forbidden sea food brought into Mama's house after that.

Although neither Papa nor Mama were religiously observant, they had an almost fierce love of their ethnicity which they nurtured all their lives in a thousand ways.

Papa told me of the exact moment when he removed religious observance from his life. He was about twelve years old and had gone to the Simchas Torah service, one of the two services in the year at which the celebrants sip a bit of wine and at which it is even permissible to become a little tipsy. All the men and boys were jostling each other in trying to touch the Torah which was being carried around in the Shul, but the richest man in the congregation roughly shoved the others aside and took to himself the honor of carrying the Torah. Young Avram decided that if wealth determined who received the greatest honor in Shul, then religious observance was not all that important.

Isaac Bashevis Singer describes this type of perverted religiosity, the control of local religious life by the most wealthy, in **The Slave,** although, of course, the circumstances in the book are far more dramatic and far-reaching. Fundamentally the events leading to Papa's philosophy and to that of Jacob in Singer's book were the same, and fundamentally Papa and Jacob reached the same realization, that "the

essence of the Jewish religion was the relation between man and his fellows." I wish Papa could have read this story. It makes me even more certain about what I have always believed, that he was basically a religious man.

Evidently this childhood event set the pattern for Papa's religious life, because I can remember exactly five times when he attended services, the Confirmations of his children. But late in life he did establish an odd tradition of his own. When Mama and her grown children went to Kol Nidre services on Yom Kippur, Papa always did the dinner dishes so that they could leave the house early!

One can only guess why the Bermans left Houtzdale after slightly more than a year, but the move to Windber, another Western Pennsylvania mining town, could not have changed their life style. They lived in Windber for ten months and then moved to Altoona where Papa opened a store on Bridge Street, which is now the access road to the Seventeenth Street Bridge.

The Bermans lived in a three or four unit apartment on Nineteenth Street in a largely Jewish neighborhood and by the time I was born, late in 1914, the store probably was making a living, because Mama gave birth to me in the Altoona Hospital. However, nobody official must have paid much attention to this important event in my life because there was no record anywhere of my birth, as I found out in 1965 when I tried to get a passport. Mama had to swear to the fact of my birth in a notary's office in Long Beach, California before the U.S. government would issue me a passport.

Imagine the enormous change in the lives of these two at this point. Papa, always a strong-minded entrepreneur, owned his own business and could put all his energy into it, all his ingenuity, all his mechanical and artistic talent as a watchmaker and engraver as well as an optometrist, knowing that all the returns would be his own. And Mama was living with people like herself with whom she could communicate. She used to speak of the Goldsmiths, the Smalls, the Ruttenbergs, the Colbus family and others who were about her age and who shared their more Americanized ways with her. But she never baked as well as they did and never sewed well at all. Mama always said that doing things that were easy for others was very hard for her.

I remember some pongee coat dresses that she made for Emma and me. She practiced first on the identical pattern, using checked gingham, pink for me and blue for Emma to match her blue eyes. But the pongee dresses still looked homemade. Mama's sponge cakes were never the lightest and because we had it every Friday night I developed a distaste for it that is still with me.

This location on Nineteenth Street and Thirteenth Avenue, home for about two years, was never spoken of as an apartment but Mama always said, "When we lived in flet." Note: not "in the flat." Some words get frozen in the consciousness of people who never change their pronunciation because they never listen again to the sound. Mama heard an e and not an a the first time. Her English was good in general but there were a few words that did not evolve into correct pronunciations.

One was this expression "in flet" that never changed. Another throwback to the early years was that a child or dog "got runned over."

Since most of her time was spent in her own home, Mama had relatively little exposure to English in these early years, yet she was always aware of the need to improve her use of it. When I was about eight years old several of us children had a lovely serious discussion with Mama in which she told us how much she wanted to learn to speak correctly and admonished us to be sure to correct her whenever she made a mistake. Then she said, "And now, Florinkeh, go to the store and buy a bread." With her freely given permission still in my ears I said, "Mama, you should say *a loaf of bread*." She gave me a terrible tongue lashing because her demand for respect for one's elders, so much a part of our upbringing, was stronger than her desire to learn better English, at least at that moment.

There were lots of other oddities in Mama's speech although in the main her use of English was excellent and she had a good sense of grammar. She pronounced Allen and Ellen exactly the same and gave the identical vowel sound to needles and pins. She said <u>te</u>lephone and <u>te</u>legraph with the accent placed correctly on the first syllable, but she moved the accent to the third syllable for tele<u>vi</u>sion. For years I thought that ecka was a Yiddish word and only recently found out that it was Mama's personal corruption of eke as in "ecka out a living." I can bring to mind "I can't tell the different", "It gets on my nerve", and "It sounds pretty good, isn't it?" These grammatical misconstructions were rare but they were firmly entrenched in Mama's English and she never changed them.

The sociability of life among other young Jewish people was the best part of living in the apartment on Nineteenth Street. Mama and her friends, at the end of the day's work, used to sit outside on the "payment", Mama's lifelong pronunciation of "pavement", and there they chatted, told jokes, and played casino, and all the while the process of Americanization went on.

Life in the apartment must have been less than comfortable or perhaps the business began to thrive, because in about two or two and a half years the family moved to a house on Twenty-fourth Street near Eighth Avenue. The neighbors who became close friends there were the David Aarons who had four children, Mary, Ida, Belle, and Joe. Several year after we moved from this house, Mrs. Aaron died and Mr. Aaron soon married again, but the second wife made his life so miserable that he gave up completely and killed himself, leaving a will in which he circumvented the estate laws by explicitly leaving his wife one dollar.

Papa, as a close friend, was deeply involved in the welfare of the children and helped to arrange to have Belle and Joe, the youngest, placed in a Jewish orphans' home in Erie, Pa. Ida, whose life as a comfortably fixed matron crossed Emma's life when they both lived in Harrisburg many years later, was sent to live with relatives, and Mary, the oldest, stayed with us for a while. The contacts, however sporadic, were kept up through the years and Mary, now Polovoy, of Baltimore kept up her relationship with Mama until Mama died.

Parenthetically, Mary was visiting our house when I was engaged in 1934 and she very sincerely and earnestly advised me not to have a child the first year, saying that it was important to have at least a year to enjoy one's husband alone. Her daughter, a difficult child, was one of those children who never gave her mother a moment's peace, so I could see Mary's point without her spelling it out further. But I conceived in three weeks. So much for advice to newlyweds.

The house on Twenty-fourth Street has one memory for me. We had a horsehair sofa in the hall, one of those with a built-in rise for the head at one end, and this was called a "lunch." Upon reflection, Emma and I as schoolgirls stumbled on the revelation that this was a mispronunciation, a corruption, if you will, of the word "lounge." It was while sitting on this lounge that we two, aged three and nearly five, went through the horrible experience of hearing our mother screaming in great agony upstairs. Terrified, abandoned by adults, we sat there, numb with fear, until eventually someone told us after the screaming had stopped that a new baby, my sister Belle, had been born.

Probably my mother's labor came upon her too quickly for anyone to give a thought to the two little girls, but perhaps it never occurred to anyone to arrange in advance for their absence. After having progressed to the point of having the second child in the hospital, having the third one at home had to have been because there was no time to go the hospital. But after more than sixty years I still wonder why somebody did not take those two little girls for a long walk.

The Bermans naturally wanted a boy very much and Mama was enough a product of her times to believe that it was a woman's responsibility to give her husband a son. Who knew about chromosomes, etc.? She hated so much presenting him with a disappointing third daughter that she let Papa think for three days that he had a son. How she pulled off this deception is unimaginable, and his embarrassment at learning that he had been made a fool of is equally unimaginable. But Mama never changed this story in all the years, so there is no doubt that it happened exactly as she said.

Soon after Papa became reconciled to the truth, that he had three daughters, he magnanimously gave Mama a diamond dinner ring and for a time all was well and she felt forgiven. Mama, with all the work entailed in running a household with three children under five, could not have worn the ring much, but one night when she put it on she found to her horror that one of the diamonds was missing. Anxiously she searched for it but never found it. Then the suffering began, the shame and embarrassment of having to confess such carelessness. Finally she got up her courage and told Papa the awful truth. Instead of berating her he laughed at her misery and told her that the ring was his revenge for her deception at Belle's birth, that the ring had cost fifty cents at the five and ten, and that now the two of them were even!

Mama was never much of an expert about stones. Long after Papa had died, when she began to distribute her jewelry she gave Birdie the beautiful center diamond from her diamond ring. Then she had a zircon set into the still valuable platinum basket mounting that had small

diamonds and blue sapphires in it. She believed that it would be thought to be a diamond because she was the widow of a jeweler and what else but diamonds would a woman whose whole family was in the business wear? This was before the good imitations, the yags and the cubic zirconiums, were developed, and the zircon was an inert glass-like stone in a mounting not quite old enough to have the class of an antique. But Mama wore it even after some of us told her how ugly the stone was. After her death Arnold had a handsome colored stone set into the mounting and it was sold.

At about the time of Belle's infancy the store was moved to a location on Eleventh Avenue, the main street, and it was two doors from the important Strand Theater where all of us spent so many Saturday afternoons. Now there was a fulltime clerk named Josephine who wore rimless glasses, and Papa had an optometry room in the rear. His hours were long, sometimes from 6:00 A.M. to nearly midnight, because much of the watch repairing had to be done after business hours. Opening at 6:00 A.M. was necessary because the morning shift at the Pennsylvania Railroad shops began early and some business was picked up from the men on their way to work. Papa never turned down a means of improving his situation because of laziness and the energy he expended to become a successful American businessman was formidable.

Today we are constantly aware of strikes, the method by which workers refuse to work until they have come to terms, be they an improvement or not, with the bosses. At this time in my parents' life a reverse strike occurred, a lockout, when the doors of the railroad shops were slammed in the faces of the workers. Altoona was in a terrible state. It was a one industry town with scarcely any diversification in its source of income and the wheels of the whole town simply stopped turning. Because the Pennsy had deliberately made it more convenient for its workers to own their homes than to rent them, the whole labor force was tightly tied to the shops by the cord of their real estate. The railroad management, in true robber baron fashion, had a captive force and they knew that they had only to wait for hunger to win their battle for them.

Things were so bad in the Berman household that Mama had for Passover an inch of shmaltz in a jar and no money at all. In the Jewish neighborhood there was an old man with a beard who kept a small grocery store with Jewish foods and a few other staples. He saw the plight of the young immigrant couple and advanced them credit so that they could eat. Mama always called this man Reb Hartsick. Long after the old man was gone, a fellow named Herzog opened a grocery store in the same neighborhood and Mama always managed to give him some business even though shopping at his store was somewhat inconvenient. I used to be aware of something odd in this regard but did not learn until many years later that Mr. Herzog was old Reb Hartsick's son. Mama, by giving him some business, was repaying an old debt.

Being hungry in America must have been especially painful because it was mixed with disappointment. Being poor in the shtetl was normal and being hungry sometimes was to be expected. But in America to own a store, however small, and not to have enough to eat — who

would have believed it possible?

Eventually the lockout at the shops ended and business improved so that the Bermans moved from Twenty-fourth Street to 1471 Washington Avenue. It is from this moving day, late in 1918, that my own memory begins to serve in these recollections of Mama and Papa. Although I was born in 1914, I can bring to mind three distinct pictures of this World War I period, and they are imprinted on my mind's eye as clearly as if I held them in photo form in my hand.

One picture is of the day in October, 1918 when we moved across the town to Washington Avenue. Mama is pushing the baby carriage with Belle in it and with Emma and me, aged nearly six and nearly four, trotting alongside. The moving truck passes us and I see Papa waving to us from beside the driver, smiling gaily with a pipe in his mouth. That was a truly sexist division of labor with the man doing a man's work, but riding to it, and the woman trudging all that distance with no thought of having the father take at least one of the children on his lap. It is possible that Mama would not have allowed a child of hers to do anything so dangerous as to ride in a truck (!) but I rather think it did not occur to her or to Papa to divide their respective tasks.

The second picture that is so clear in my mind concerns the influenza epidemic of 1918, when there were so many deaths that many insurance companies failed. Almost every family was affected and in the Berman family it was Mama and Emma who were ill. Papa stayed home from the store and I remember him with a tray in one hand, Belle being carried on the other arm, and me following him as he toiled up the stairs to care for his wife and oldest daughter. What a terrifying time that must have been with the death rate so high!

The third picture is indescribably sad. It is of Mama's stricken face as she sat under the schoolhouse clock in the kitchen on Washington Avenue reading the first letter from her sister after the war. All during the war there had been no communication between Mama and her family in Latvia and the pain of being cut off from them without even knowing if they were still alive had been almost unbearable. As we three little girls watched Mama reading the letter, she wept and then she began to wail in mourning. Her mother had died, probably of starvation. The Gordin family had conserved their strength by not consuming energy uselessly and by staying in bed as much as possible. Neighbors had allowed them to go over their fields when they were finished with their harvesting in the hope that a potato or a turnip had been overlooked. Life in Latvia during the years of World War I had been bitter indeed.

Suddenly Mama jumped to her feet and, with tears streaming down her face, she ran up the street to Wahl's grocery store to use the phone to find out how she could send help to her family. From then on packages of clothing were sent periodically, clothing that was not brand new, so that the recipients did not have to pay duty on it. When Papa could manage it they also sent cash, usually fifty dollars. I can remember innumerable times when Mama, carefully choosing the right mood and

the right moment, asked Papa if he could spare some money for her family.

This pattern of helping one's family was duplicated by my mother-in-law twenty-seven years later after World War II. Ray Karp used to wash newly bought hose and underwear so that they lost their newness and so could be free of import taxes when they reached her sisters in England.

In 1919 Arnold was born and this time there was no fake diamond ring. Arnold was an especially beautiful child and after three girls he was, of course, doted upon. He had the low voice that has been passed on to Steve and Debbie, two of his children. Perhaps Arnold, known only as Baby until he went to school, had colic and cried a lot, because at eleven months he was operated on for a hernia. Mama said that she had always expected that if she had a son he would have a hernia, a not too rare kind of thinking on Mama's part. She always took a pessimistic choice if there was a choice to be made, as if she were afraid to tempt fate. She might have been bracing herself to withstand the worst if it were visited upon her. Perhaps this kind of pessimism was an outgrowth of the "Kayn Einhorah" mentality in which one added that expression meaning "May no evil eye be cast upon" whatever one was talking about. Don Marquis, a humorist of the 1930's, once said that an optimist is a man who has not had much experience. Mama would probably have agreed with this philosophy because the fear of anticipating good rather than evil was a strong component of her nature, a fact that she never denied.

Mama was very much the immigrant housewife whose life was bounded by the needs of her family and her home, and she left it to Papa to take care of the world outside. But when Arnold, aged two and a half, developed a bowel obstruction while Papa was out of town, Mama's immigrant shyness and her embarrassment at her broken English fell away. While Emma and I, scarcely more than nine and seven, took turns at carrying the screaming child back and forth across the room, trying to soothe him, Mama managed to call an ambulance. At the hospital she authorized the necessary operation and when Papa came home the life-threatening crisis was over.

The handling of such an event and the course of action taken seem like a commonplace to us today but we must see it for what it was to a woman of those times and of that culture. It was a huge step forward into the world outside her home.

Mama acquired her citizenship through Papa and so she did not have to take the initiative in that respect. But her close friend, Rose Troop, at whose home the Bermans had been married, had a different experience. Her husband, Harry, a shoemaker, had become a citizen and Rose was preparing to visit her family in the old country. Suddenly the plans were abandoned and Mrs. Troop never left the United States. She had learned that her husband's citizenship papers were dated two days after the law went into effect that required both spouses to acquire their citizenship individually. She, who had thought herself an American, was still an alien. There were thousands of such cases at that time but Papa,

in characteristic fashion, saw to it that Mama had no such problem. His citizenship papers naturalized Mama as well as himself.

With four small children and a husband whose working hours were long, Mama had little opportunity to go out, but that did not stop her from trying to learn. She and Rose Troop engaged an elementary teacher from Garfield school to come to our house to teach them to read and write English. They sat at the kitchen table with Miss Kelly and struggled several nights a week until both of them could read and write. Not too many years ago I talked to Mama about this effort for which I had so much admiration and to my amazement she had not the slightest remembrance of it. Yet almost every other detail of her life was clear in her memory.

Had there been pain associated with this learning experience, I could understand her blocking it out of her memory, but it must have been a source of joy to be able finally to understand the printed and then the written word of the world of America. Yet when I insisted that she and Rose Troop had indeed engaged a teacher when I was about eight years old, Mama looked at me almost angrily and said that I was making it up.

With the birth of Arnold, Emma and I had to help a bit with Belle who was two. We had the traditional kind of wicker baby carriage that became a stroller when the hood was detached and the foot piece dropped. In this stroller I used to wheel Belle in front of our house. One day I got a bit daring where the sidewalk curved and, pushing at the greatest speed possible for a five and a half year old, I miscalculated the turn and dumped her into the horse manure in the street. Luckily it was old stuff and dry and a passerby helped me brush her off and put her back into the stroller, but I never, never told my mother.

Papa bought his first car, a Chevrolet, at this time and I remember the driving lesson — there must have been only one — because Papa took all of us along. Our boredom at the instructions so often repeated was intense but imagine how tough it was on Papa to have a bunch of little kids in the back seat! That was not one of our family's best outings.

Before long the Chevrolet was traded for a Kissel car, never called a Kissel. No one ever said Chevrolet car or Buick car, but somehow the name "Kissel" was never used without the word "car" following it.

Papa, an adventurous sort, soon announced that he was going to drive to Philadelphia to visit his family. His friends were aghast and told him that he was insane, but nothing deterred him and he took his wife and Belle and Arnold with him. The day that they left, Emma and I came home from school to find the house full of people, all friends who had heard of the accident near Huntingdon, Pa. Papa had not negotiated a curve properly and the car had overturned. Mama had pushed Arnold out the window to someone's waiting arms and eventually she and Belle were extricated, but Papa had been pinned behind the wheel for some time. Papa showed everyone the varicolored bruises on his hands and I remember, after being told that there had been an accident, asking over and over again, "What is an accident?" The impatient answer was always, "An accident is — an accident." There is an old saw about "If

you don't know, ask." It doesn't always work.

After a year or two Papa tried again. By now people were more used to the idea of trips of some distance by automobile and even though the title, Berman's Curve, was still applied by Papa's friends to a place in the road near Huntingdon, his friends no longer scoffed. One of the major disappointments of my childhood was expecting but not seeing a huge placque posted there saying "Berman's Curve!"

This time all four of us went on the trip with almost as much preparation as it would take to go around the world. With no MacDonald's, no Wendy's, no conveniences that we are so accustomed to, every need had to be pre-arranged and planned for. The fancy vases inside the car, meant for paper flowers, were put to a use the designers of the car never had in mind for our only boy, but the girls had to use bushes or trees set back a bit from the road.

Mama packed lots of food and Papa, always a hearty eater, ate lots of it, including the kosher dill pickles that he loved. On the road he got very sick and we all waited around in a railroad station while Papa stretched out on a bench. In spite of the sympathy I feel for the misery he suffered at that time I feel even more for Mama, trying to manage four tired little kids in a strange place far from home and help. When years later I asked Mama if she had been apprehensive about the trip or frightened at all by their predicament, she said with surprise, "Of course not. I was with my husband."

Arnold had suffered a cut on his forehead just before we left and on the way it seemed to be getting worse. When we reached Coatesville, near Philadelphia, all road traffic was stopped because of a bad fire. Mama took advantage of the tie-up and insisted that she and Papa find a doctor. It was already dark but they found a physician and when we arrived at our destination Arnold sported a professional bandage. But the wound had not yet healed by the time we returned to Altoona. Then Mama followed her instincts. She placed Arnold on the sewing machine top (when the machine was swung down into its recess the top became a surface put to a thousand uses) and applied a witch hazel compress every half hour or so. The infection was overcome. To the end of her days Mama used witch hazel this way for every possible wound.

Incidentally, that trip of 237 miles to Philadelphia took 18 hours.

Our aunts and uncles and cousins in the city teased us whenever they saw us and pretended to pick hay out of our hair, but our father was the one who had achieved the status of car owner and, as a result, to them we were the wealthy branch of the family.

To go for a ride on a Sunday afternoon was our main recreational activity. We used to pile into the car with a big picnic lunch and some empty water jugs. Often we went up the Buckhorn road, west of Altoona, and stopped at Gallitzin Springs, that memorial to a Polish nobleman, Prince Gallitzin, who had been a missionary in the Pennsylvania mountains years before. The water that gushed from the spring was sweet and pure and people came from miles away to bottle it and take it with them. We filled our jugs there as often as we could.

The road was narrow and there was not much space on the sides before the ground sloped upwards into the Alleghenies. We would find a reasonably level spot, spread a tablecloth on the ground and then would all sit around it to eat, but the ground was never level enough and we had to be careful that the hardboiled eggs and oranges and apples did not roll down onto the highway.

Sometimes we took another family with us for these Sunday rides and then we had to places boxes on the floor of the back seat for children to sit on. In these days of compact cars it is difficult to believe that there was that much extra space, but we managed to find room for the four adults and seven or eight small children in those pre-station wagon days. Sometimes we bought a peck of apples from a farmer or we split a bushel of potatoes between the two families. When we were going up a hill we all did our share by rocking in rhythm with Papa in an effort to help the car make the grade. We children were all quite serious about this and truly believed we were helping the laboring motor.

The many parks and roadside tables that we enjoy today were yet far in the future and Lakemont Park was too commercial and Bland Park a bit too far. Once Papa stopped to see someone at a roadhouse on the Duncansville road and the owner showed us the huge hole that had just been dug for the Mountain Lake swimming pool. This was an unheard of thing in that part of the world, but its popularity led to the building of Prospect Park pool in Altoona and then to the huge Ivyside pool that later became the parking lot of Altoona's branch of Penn State University.

Swimmers were almost unknown around Altoona when Mountain Lake went into operation and when Mama, who had learned to swim in a river near Rezitza, waded into that pool and swam away, sidestroke, she created a sensation. All of us learned to swim by a sort of hit-and-miss or trial-and-error method, but the stroke that I developed, half sidestroke and half overhand or Australian crawl, never had official sanction anywhere, and in my whole life I was never able to change it to a standard way of swimming.

One summer during the nine years that we lived on Washington Avenue we rented a house on Jelsky's farm within a few miles of Altoona. Aunt Edith and Marian, her baby, the same age as Arnold, about two, stayed with us. One day we were very firmly told not to go to the barn, so of course I went. There I saw Mr. Jelsky swing a sledgehammer at the head of a calf to stun it before slaughtering it, but when I ran to my mother in fright I got little sympathy, only some good whacks. Nowadays a mother would worry about the psychological effect on a child who had witnessed such a thing, but such worries were not yet popular subjects among most parents and I don't remember ever having bad dreams about calves and hammers.

Every family probably has catch phrases, private jokes, that have grown out of childhood events. Sometimes in our family someone would say, "Pee, pee, lotsa pee." Nobody outside the family could imagine the meaning of that. At Jelsky's farm we were all out in a field, quite a distance from the house when Belle, aged four, said she had to urinate,

— but where? Mr. Jelsky, who spoke mostly Polish and very little English, finally understood the problem. He took in a broad view of the green field, waved his arms expansively, and without leaving any doubt as to his meaning, he shouted, "Pee! Pee! Lotsa pee!"

Another Berman catch phrase was a possible conversation like the following: "I went downtown today." "Oh, what did you do?" "I bought some zoyersaltz." Can you, the reader, imagine the meaning of this apparent idiocy? It goes back to Philip Troop who worked for the railroad and had an unlimited pass on the Pennsy. He rode the train to Pittsburgh, spent some time in the city, mostly just waiting for a return train, and in the Jewish grocery bought some zoyersaltz, citric acid in rock salt form used for pickling. In our family the word came to mean something of no worth at all, a total waste of time and energy. If one of us was unsuccessful at shopping we said she had bought zoyersaltz, and the futility and fruitlessness of the day was clearly understood. Even now this expression is part of everyday Berman language.

Our years in the Washington Avenue house were the years of the growth of the activity of the Ku Klux Klan. Our back porch was on a level two stories up from the ground because the land sloped downward toward the rear, and from the porch we could see a high hillside three or four blocks away where the Klan often burned crosses. This was when Lilly, a village about twelve or fifteen miles from Altoona, became nationally known as a major center of Klan activity. As small children we could not have understood the implications of the fiery crosses, but I remember vividly the shuddering fear, the sobering terror we felt when we saw them.

Some psychiatrists tell us that there is no such thing as absorbing feelings from one's mother's milk. But we all felt these fears and sort of inhaled them from the air in our house, probably from Mama's behavior and attitudes if not from definite words. Margaret Mead expressed this idea exactly when she wrote in her autobiography, "We often forget that children may experience indirectly the impact of all the customary horrors that their culture provides, even though they may have almost no personal experience of them." Even though no truly anti-semitic act was ever experienced by any of us, the fear of such a thing was quite definite, at least in me.

Another fear that was communicated was the dread of governmental authority. Mama's life in Europe had taught her that governmental authority was equated with injustice and somehow this came through to us covertly and unintentionally. In fact, I trembled at uniforms until I was almost middleaged. When Michael Gordin of Riga, grandson of Mama's brother, visited here in 1975 I found out how far I had come from that fear of authority as I tried to explain to Michael that the government and its representatives in the Immigration Office in Pittsburgh are our friends and are there to help and to serve us. But his cynical smile told me that he thought me incredibly naive to trust anyone in a position of power of even the smallest degree.

Mama could not for many years appreciate the beautiful sound of church bells which made her shudder in revulsion. In her mind the

sound was associated with the Russian church, especially at Easter when the pealing bells gave approval to persecution of Jews. In time the sharp edges of her fears were rounded off and there was a more even balance between thought and feeling, but the scales were always tipped a little toward feeling.

Papa, during this period of establishing a home, a family, and a business reached out with open arms to embrace the American way of life. He bypassed everything religious, yet remained intensely proud of his Jewishness. He identified with everything basic to the precepts of Judaism and the Jewish people, yet never observed a single religious custom. His awareness of social problems made him a follower of Eugene Victor Debs and Norman Thomas, and then of Franklin D. Roosevelt. He used to speak of the evils of capitalism yet he was strongly supportive of the American way of life. As a child I asked him if, by trying to make an increasingly better living in the world of commerce, he were not trying to become a capitalist, and he refused to answer me except by an exasperated and contemptuous look. I think that the simplistic question was unanswerable because it came close to the truth.

In his book **World Of Our Fathers,** Irving Howe describes in detail the immigrant Jew who arrived in 1905-1906 and Papa fits into the picture so exactly that he could have been the model for the word "Yiddishist" so aptly used by Howe. But in one respect he did not fit the mold. Papa loved to hunt and fish, a most un-Jewish characteristic for those times.

He and a group of friends, all Gentile and almost all associated with the jewelry or optical business in one way or another, bought a hunting camp on Jack's Mountain near Clearfield, Pa. Access was by car, but only up to a certain point from which they had to hike to the cabin. Papa was a crack shot and told us one day of the huge turkey he had bagged, but he brought no trophies home. The men, Mr. Miller, Mr. Steffey, E. L. Brent, William Brent and others all took turns at being president, but as the members died the group grew smaller and hunted less and less. Papa was the last member and presumably when he died he was the owner of part of Jack's Mountain.

Hunting was a relatively small part of Papa's life but fishing was another story. He loved it with a passion and took it very seriously. At Ardenheim where we rented a cottage several summers, he stood in hip boots in the Juniata River many times patiently waiting for a bite. It was the real reason why he built the cottage at Cypher Beach near Everett, Pa. in 1936 or 1937 and of course the pleasure the rest of us enjoyed at the cottage was a bonus.

In 1948 or thereabouts, Papa, Ruby my husband, and Norman, my son who was about twelve, went on a fishing trip in northwestern Pennsylvania and based themselves at Tidioute on the Allegheny River. They had a room in the home of the postmistress and each day she cooked the fish that they caught. Ruby used to smoke his pipe, drowse a bit in the boat and hope that no fish would disturb his peace by taking his bait. But Papa would wake Ruby whenever his line became taut and then Ruby would obligingly act excited. The creel, full of fish, hung in

the water at the side of the boat until Papa was ready to call it quits. One day he told Ruby to haul in the creel. In doing so Ruby held it upside down and the whole day's catch went back into the river. Imagine the faces of the three! But not one word was said. The crime was beyond belief and Papa was utterly speechless. Ruby was too ashamed and embarrassed for words and Norman was frightened of the explosion that he braced himself for, an explosion that never came.

When Papa died the rabbi used Papa's love of fishing as the theme of his eulogy. I was not able to trust myself to listen for fear that I would lose control of my emotions and I wonder now how Rabbi Kaber managed to use Papa's passionate love of fishing as the measure of his value as a human being.

In spite of the fact that Mama and Papa were not religiously observant, they did not ignore the fact that their children should have some religious education. When Emma and I were quite small we had a melamed, an elementary teacher, come to our house to teach us Hebrew, but it was only for a short time. When Arnold was five or six years old a teacher was again engaged, but Arnold could not be made to concentrate and he wanted only to tell the melamed about his new trains and tracks upstairs, a remark that became part of the family lore. Just as we understood in later years what "Pee, pee, lotsa pee" meant in unrelated circumstances, so we also shared the idea that "I have trains and tracks upstairs" meant that one was not listening. From what I have since read about this type of teacher, it is no wonder that we did not learn much from them, since they were generally at the bottom of the educational ladder and were people who had minimal learning and even less ability to teach.

Eventually all four of us were enrolled in Temple Beth Israel Sunday School where for a long time we were outsiders of a sort. Altoona was a perfect example, almost a microcosm, of the two kinds of Jewish cultures. I am not referring to the Sephardic and the Ashkenazic groups, but to the subdivision in the Ashkenazic world. The immigration of the German Jews in the middle of the nineteenth century brought to America a group of non-Yiddish-speaking merchants, as German as they were Jewish. They established themselves, organized themselves, and Americanized themselves fifty years or more before the great numbers of eastern Jews appeared in the United States.

It is an accepted fact that the German Jews and the Reform movement were ashamed of their co-religionists, of their poverty and ignorance and of their low social level, and at first they tried not to acknowledge the relationship. But in time, the Deutch Yehudim, more to lessen their embarrassment than for any other reason, set up educational and Americanization institutions to help the Russian and Polish Jews. It took time but it worked, and now the two groups are closely intermingled and intermarried.

As children we sensed rather than knew that we and several other families were not quite a part of the mainstream at the Temple. Our parents did not attend Temple services in those early years even though we all were students in the Sunday School and we were aware that

somehow we were different from most of the other students. At a Sunday School awards ceremony whose importance was not known to Mama, one of us was presented with an award and Rabbi Abels said to the audience that he hoped the next time our mother would take enough interest in us to come. Imagine Mama's indignation when we told her of the remark! I still feel anger at the stupidity and cruelty of a rabbi who could humiliate children by publicly insulting their mother. Even if Mama had been as uncaring as that pompous man thought her to be, his remark showed him to be without tact or civility or even the most basic understanding of human relations.

At the age of eleven I won some sort of prize in Sunday School and was permitted to choose any book I wanted. I chose Eugene O'Neill's **Strange Interlude,** not because I knew anything about it but because I had read somewhere that it was an important new book. Someone blasted Mama for allowing me to have it at too young an age and her anger came down on me. Her wrath was really caused by her own lack of knowledge but how could she give vent to that? Of course I scarcely understood the book and so my psyche was spared. Another time I brought home a book from the public library called **Nine Months** by Hilda Maria Kraus, and when Mama saw that title she demanded an explanation, again in anger. Somehow I knew why. She must have felt as if her lack of education held her in a prison.

In time we all completed Sunday School at Temple Beth Israel and Mama became more and more comfortable there. Slowly those who were not Deutch Yehudim infiltrated the membership and now there is no division at all. It must be admitted that there was in the older eastern Jews a strong contempt for the Deutch Yehudim, no doubt the reaction to having been made to feel inferior, and it used to come through in Mama's voice if not in her words.

At first the organ and the choir were actually offensive to her but in time she grew to love the services and no longer enjoyed the Conservative, and certainly not the Orthodox, nearly as much. In Mama's last eighteen years when she would visit Altoona from California, she was always treated at the Temple with warm friendship and genuine respect and she felt completely at home. On thinking about the discomfort Mama felt upon mixing with the Temple people in the early days, I asked her a few years ago why she and Papa put themselves through that social discomfort. She looked at me as if the stupidity of the question surprised her and said, "The Temple then was the only Jewish institution that would teach girls." The transplanted shtetl was certainly not for Papa and Mama even in 1922.

Our childhood on Washington Avenue was a happy one and I am overwhelmed with memories of tiny things like the uneven bricks of the sidewalks that rocked under the feet and caused muddy water to squirt from under them when it rained. To rollerskate we had to go to "The Cement" which was a sidewalk about two blocks away. To iceskate we took the streetcar to Lakemont Park but we never had teachers and were not very agile, so we never learned to skate very well. On vacation days we took hikes up the streets toward West Altoona and

sometimes even wandered to a nearby farm road. If Mama was with us we always sang and sometimes we made up the words as we walked. We chased ice wagons in front of our house so as to get a little piece of ice to suck and we put on amateur shows to which the admission price was two straight pins, nobody knows why. We made taffy and pulled it with friends invited in to help, and Emma learned to make wonderful fudge, but my specialty was only plain muffins. We played jacks every night after supper with other girls and all of us marveled at Mama when she showed us how to play with only small stones and no ball. The time our ball took to bounce made our game much easier than Mama's.

Sometimes we filled up balloons from the small gas laundry stove in the basement — I wonder if any adult knew that we did that dangerous thing. In the fall, we watched the coal truck men shovel coal rhythmically onto a chute that emptied into the small windows in every house's basement, and in the spring we planted the peach trees that were distributed on Arbor Day at school, but, alas, we never saw a peach or anything else. We watched peonies come to bud in our backyard and every year we found the buds snipped off, we never knew how, just as they were ready to bloom.

We learned responsibility early and Mama constantly emphasized the trust she had in us. As six-year-olds we walked the mile or so to Wright School and crossed all the streets without benefit of school patrols. At the age of seven Emma walked downtown alone to Papa's store so he could take her to the Altoona Hospital to have her tonsils removed. On the way she said to a neighbor, "Guess where I'm going! To the hospital! Isn't that wonderful?" When she was eight she was deemed old enough to take a streetcar alone all the way to Hollidaysburg for scalp treatments. Of course the streets were safer then, but the enormous difference in the attitude towards children then and now certainly gives one pause.

We were two sets of siblings because there was a three year gap between Belle and me and so Emma and I were in charge when Mama was away, and Arnold and Belle were supposed to listen to us. Belle was always the rebel and sometimes she refused to go to bed on time, so Emma and I would sit at the top of the stairs to block her way when and if she would decide to go to bed. But she knew how to deal with that — she **never** wanted to go to bed!

Arnold learned early not to fuss when Mama went out because Mama had taught him that if she said she was going to the movies there was no possibility that she would stay home no matter how hard he cried. But she really did not go the movies most of those times. She went to Ladies' Aid Society meetings, Jewish Federation meetings, and, above all, P.T.A. meetings because she loved to make contact with teachers and other educated persons. She would speak of someone with near reverence as she said, "Well, she has a High School education!"

Mama placed teachers and doctors on the same pedestal and this same respect was deeply inculcated into all of us. My children, when they were going to college, tried hard to teach me that teachers are not super-people and that my extreme respect for them was not based on

reality, that there are stupid teachers who happen to have fulfilled the requirements for degrees, and that I need not feel inferior. But Mama's influence is still strong in this regard.

When Emma was only five and a half years old Mama falsified her age in order to have her admitted to Wright School. When the teacher complained about Emma's immaturity to Mama, she burst out in defense, "But she's not six years old yet!" Later on the teacher told Emma that her mother had lied, a wretched sin to perpetrate against a young child. To this day Emma and I cannot decide whether Mama was anxious to have schooling begin in our family or whether she just needed to get at least one of four kids out of the house.

At the end of every afternoon Mama rested briefly, cleaned up, put on a fresh apron and sat on the front porch on the swing, reading the **Yiddish Daily Forward** in full view of the whole neighborhood. What an agonizing experience that was for us kids, to have our mother flaunt her differentness! I used to cringe at the sight of the Jewish paper that proclaimed to the world that we were not exactly like our neighbors, that we were not quite Americans. But there was one saving grace to our living in a non-Jewish neighborhood and having a Yiddish newspaper in our house. On Halloween when the big boys took everyone's garbage cans and mixed them up, each owner had to find his own. We never had any trouble identifying ours because the garbage in our can was wrapped in the Yiddish paper!

I find it ironic that the source of my embarrassment is now the source of great pride in the bilingualism of my parents, a feeling that is probably shared by the descendants of all kinds of immigrants.

On Saturday afternoons we went to the Strand theater where for ten cents we saw the show twice, had lots to eat that we had brought with us, and came home with a Japanese-made souvenir. We brought pears or apples and Mama's milchikeh, sweet yeast rolls that were heavenly with cinnamon and sugar and raisins. Of course the movies were silent and of course we had to take Arnold, who could not yet read. Sometimes we would become so engrossed in the film that we would forget to read the captions to him. Then he would say quietly, "Read it to me." The second time it was a louder "Read it to me" and the third time was a shout, "READ IT TO ME!" And the others in the audience all shouted, "Read it to him!"

We had our birthday parties exactly according to the plan Mama had worked out for Emma. At ages five, ten and thirteen we could count on a party and the long gaps in between made the anticipation wonderfully delicious, and therein modern children are deprived because they have so many birthday parties. Somehow, in this regard less is more. At Emma's first party Mama made a social error. She served tea to the children and never forgot the criticism she had to take from some of their mothers for doing what must have seemed logical and natural to one arrived from a Russian area only six years before. If there was Koolaid at that time Mama had not heard of it and milk was expensive at thirteen cents a quart. In this day of iced tea at any age this seems truly to be a tempest in a teapot.

There was structure in our household and each of Mama's days had its allotted tasks. The days whose pattern we felt most strongly were Thursday and Friday. On Thursday the upstairs was cleaned and all the beds were changed with clean pillow cases and top sheets, used top sheets to the bottom, and bottom sheets and pillow cases to the laundry. (Fitted sheets had not yet been invented.) Then each of us had a bath and shampoo that night, going to bed with hair still damp. If we woke up with hair sticking out at odd angles, we called the unruly hair "chickens" and why "chickens" will probably never be known.

Thursday was the day that Mama baked milchikeh. Dinner was always a dairy meal with wonderful baked whitefish or salmon loaf and scalloped potatoes, preceded by Russian borsht or stchav, both soups eaten with pumpernickel bread and butter. Stchav was cold sour cream soup made of sorrel that we knew only as sourgrass in English. We never went for a long walk without looking for sourgrass to pick, but later on when I had a large lawn to care for I lost my affection for the weed. In my later life the presence of sourgrass had one saving grace. It showed the gardener where lime was needed in the soil.

Fridays had their very definite pattern, too. The downstairs was thoroughly cleaned and Mama cooked the same foods almost every week. The menu was chicken soup, chicken, potatoes or rice, peas, salad, and almost always sponge cake and pink jello. Now and then, as if to prove that we were as American as we were Jewish, Mama made apple pie. My main memory of Friday is the feeling of peace that pervaded the house. Mama was tired, of course, but she felt completed and whole and happy that she had done her job for another week. This was long before the abomination of Friday night store hours went into effect. Papa could pore over his paper or a Yiddish book and Mama, too, could read, content and at peace. It is odd to think that even though there was scarcely any religious observance except for the lighting of the Sabbath candles, in our house every Friday night there was a feeling that made it a night different from the other nights of the week.

When **Fiddler On The Roof** first appeared in New York I went alone to see it and was warned by everyone I knew who had already seen it that I would cry. The show came on and I loved it, but as it went on I began to wonder whether I had a stone for a heart, because I did not cry. It was just a fine musical. And then the scene of the lighting of the Sabbath candles came on and, with no forewarning, I was overcome with emotion and broke into sobs that made me glad that I had no company. That scene with its lovely song is the most touching and most memorable in that marvelous production. We, who have been forced by circumstances to place Friday night on a level lower even than an ordinary weekday night because our children's fathers could not be present at dinner, have deprived our children of one of life's loveliest experiences, the setting aside of a definite time for family unity, for a sensation of shared peace. This was not a religious experience, since there were no prayers other than the blessing of the candles, but it was an expression of the love and caring that Mama and Papa had for each other and for us.

Mama had dark, slightly wavy hair that was quite long until about 1923. After the war, with the flapper era came bobbed hair and eventually Mama succumbed to the fashion of the day and had her hair cut by a barber, just straight across with none of the shaping that we take for granted today in a haircut. When Papa came home for dinner he was aghast and did not speak to Mama for days.

Just a few days before she died I was trying to make Mama more comfortable in her hospital bed and was braiding her thin white hair. She told me more of this episode except that the period that Papa refused to talk to her had, through the years, been extended to weeks. She told me that she had said to him at that time, "Abe, if you had ever once said you liked my hair I would have talked it over with you before I did it."

What an enormous revelation this was of Papa, of his inability to express loving emotions for fear of appearing to be weak or sentimental, in fact, for fear of not appearing to be manly enough. How very far we have come in human relationships when we hear discussions about the fact that it is o.k. for boys and men to cry and to be tender and openly loving. We will really have made it when it is no longer even necessary to talk about this because everyone will be used to the idea that it is normal for males to express tenderness and love with no inhibitions.

From this little story we can gather that Mama must have been starved for more than respect and caring and faithfulness and matrimonial satisfaction. How many men, even three generations after this one, still are not aware of the great value that women place on expressed affection!

In this same conversation in 1980 in the hospital Mama told me that some years later she began to dye her greying hair and again Papa was angry at her, although he did not go so far as to cease speaking to her. Perhaps he thought it immoral for a woman to dye her hair, which was probably a vestige of the Victorian era, but he got used to the new dark look. Then a friend of Mama's, Mrs. Lang, developed a severe reaction to her hair dye and was hospitalized, so Mama let her hair go and became half grey again. Once more Papa did not like it because now he had a wife older looking than he was used to!

When Mama's hair was completely white, after she had moved to Leisure World in California, she bought a matching braid of nylon hair that she pinned on top of her own hair. It looked like an elegant crown and gave to Mama a truly regal quality that impressed everyone who saw her. But Papa had died long before and so we can only guess at how he might have reacted to this final change.

Papa had what I was told was a fine Yiddish library. I used to wonder now and then at how he had known to buy Dickens, Thackeray, Hawthorne and others in addition to Tolstoi and other Russian authors. But it was a fleeting wonderment and I never asked about it, probably because I never wondered enough. In 1976 the remembrance of this struck me when I read Howe's **World Of Our Fathers** in which Howe writes of the Yiddish translations of classics which were peddled to Jewish immigrants of exactly Papa's period and type. He says that many

were poor translations but the promoters were well aware of the hunger of these people to share in the riches of the world of literature, and so they set up an early version of our Book-of-the-Month Club. I feel an enormous debt to Howe who explained this and other facets of my parents' lives that I would not otherwise have been able to understand. When Mama sold her house in Altoona and had to consolidate her possessions she could not find anybody who wanted her Yiddish library so all those books were shipped to Long Beach, California with her furniture and were given to the Long Beach Jewish Community Center.

Mama and Papa were active in the Workmen's Circle, the labor organization of Jewish Socialists that flourished from the mid-nineteen-twenties and is still in existence today, although its scope and influence are much smaller now. The immigrants of whom Mama and Papa were so much the prototype identified strongly with their Jewishness. They had a passionate pride in the history and ethnicity of the Jews, and Jewish foods and Jewish literature were very much a part of their lives. These Jews voted together as Socialists, were strongly supportive of Jewish charities, and reached out for culture and for educational improvement in any way they could. But few of them were religiously observant and, in fact, Papa was somewhat contemptuous of all that was implied in observance.

It must be remembered that the observance of Orthodoxy at that time in a small town was not a reasoned thing. It was rather a transplanting of the shtetl's version of old customs, originally based on the needs of centuries before and distorted by mindless repetition. If one tracks down the origin of some religious customs one can see from what necessity or need they developed and the present version can be understood. But without knowing the history of a custom it is easy to feel only a kind of disgust at what seems to be almost superstition. Perhaps this is why Papa pushed away from himself any observance, this and the desire to become Americanized. He was the perfect example of that group that Irving Howe called "Yiddishists."

The Workmen's Circle (Arbeiterring, in Yiddish) was the ideal background in which Yiddishists could function. In Altoona this group of men and women, struggling to be a community and just beginning to make a living, bought a small building on Thirteenth Avenue that had been a Talmud Torah, a religious school. It had a main hall with a stage at the far end, a small room with some book shelves, and a small kitchen. This building had the impressive title of "Labor Lyceum." I have always wondered if the true grandeur of those two words was really understood by the people who used them. What a grandiose connotation there is in "Labor Lyceum" and how much those words tell us of the aspirations of those who chose that title!

Here the members met, brought in speakers, supported Eugene Victor Debs (after whom Birdie was to be named had she been a boy), and supported Norman Thomas as many times as he ran for president. Eventually they ceased to be Socialists when Franklin D. Roosevelt, a Democrat, practically adopted the Socialist platform. Papa even ran for

School Board member in one election. He lost, but he did receive two thousand votes.

The improvement of conditions for the working man was dear to Papa's heart so that during a miner's strike he had Emma and me go up and down Eleventh Avenue, the main street of Altoona, on a tag day activity for the benefit of the striking miners. We have become used to tag days, but at that time they were rare and what we did was truly unusual. Emma remembers vividly her utter exhaustion and I can bring to mind the face of a middle-aged man with a dour look, probably a dyed-in-the-wool Republican, who stopped me and asked me crankily if I realized the evil of what I was doing.

The Labor Lyceum sponsored dances for the young people of the community just as the Jewish Community Center did later. Mama had a special way of using the word "gathering" where young people's get-togethers were concerned. If the affair were of some importance it was called a dance, but if it were a less elaborately planned one it was, in her parlance, a gathering. In our home, a carefully planned affair with a reason such as a birthday was called a party, but if we called together a bunch of friends more casually it was called a gathering.

Every time there was any sort of event at the Labor Lyceum the children of members were pressed into performing, just as children of all organization workers are, and our family contributed its share of performers. Belle had a sweet and true voice, Emma was a hard-working pianist who eventually became a teacher of piano, and I played the violin. Emma and I were not gifted but we practiced conscientiously and learned our lessons well, so that we played a little bit better than others of our age. Belle had genuine musical sensitivity but she refused Mama's suggestion that she take vocal lessons and concentrated on dancing lessons. To this day she carries herself better than most people do and even when she is seated there is a distinctive lift to her head. So we were the prototype of the Jewish immigrant family with a pianist, a violinist and a dancer.

Mama had a sweet singing voice, always truly on pitch. It was a rich contralto of very small range, so that she was constantly shifting from one octave to another, but she never failed to land at exactly the right pitch in those shifts. Mama sang a lot and the sweetest song she sang was in Russian, "Vich a jhu, a dinya na doh-ro-o-ghu." Whenever we went for a walk or were completely at a loss for something to do she would always say, "Let's sing something." The earliest song I can remember Mama singing is **Oh, You Beautiful Doll** which was popular just after the first World War. There were Yiddish songs, of course, and the one all of us learned was **Rozhinkes Mit Mandlen** which we thought was a folksong but which I later learned was from Goldfaden's operetta **Shulamith.** Perhaps today, because the song is still enormously popular and is thought of as a folksong, it can be classified as such. Since the explosion of so-called folksongs in the activism of the sixties it no longer seems to be a requirement that folksongs be anonymous in origin.

Of all the music that we played or sang the most beloved was a lullaby that came about when Birdie was an infant. We called it a looley

because those were the syllables that were used for the melody and there never were any words. Belle made it up and no one knows whether it came entirely from her own mind or if it grew out of something already written, but we always thought that Belle's looley was beautiful. As it goes through my mind right now I see no reason to change that judgement.

Belle's voice was not the only sweet one. Birdie came along much later and she, too, inherited something from Mama in that regard. Emma was passable, but Arnold and I inherited the voices of Papa's sisters, who laughed at themselves and what they called "The Berman Voice." In my synagogue in Kittanning, Pa., we once had a rabbi with a fine voice who organized a choir. I was one of the few who could read music so the rabbi asked me at one point to sing one line solo. Because there was no one else to do it I agreed, but it never came off. At every rehearsal at the point of my solo I burst into laughter, not from nervousness, because I was not shy, but because the humor of "The Berman Voice" in solo simply overcame me.

Papa was the prime mover in presenting Yiddish theater at the Labor Lyceum. He was organizer, director, make-up expert, and actor in some of the most ambitious plays ever written in Yiddish. Upon reading of the heyday of the Yiddish theater one realizes the quality of what was being done in New York and other places by people like the Adlers, the Schildkrauts, the Thomashevskys and others whose descendants are even now lights in the world of the theater and of music. When Papa and his friends presented such works as **The Yiddish King Lear, Gott, Mentch und Teivel,** a Yiddish version of **Faust,** and other plays they were following the lead of the great artists of the Yiddish Art Theater of New York. Whether or not the productions were a threat to the members of the New York company I cannot say, but I can say without any doubt that Papa had lots of chutzpa.

Papa cast me at fifteen in the role of the ingenue opposite Harry Rifkin in a play whose name I cannot bring to mind. I could not read Yiddish so Papa read that whole three act play to me while I wrote it down transliterally and then I memorized it. Only one line comes to me, of someone asking Harry why he wanted to marry me in such a hurry. "Have you wronged the poor orphan girl?"

In another play Mr. Sam Groban, who worked in our store, was a doctor whose patient had died and Mama, in the tiny area of about three feet behind the stage backdrop, banged on the door and in a tight frightened voice she called out, "Let me in! Let me in to my husband's murderer!" I can hear her voice now and still wonder why she had such stage fright, since she was visible to no one.

In a mood of tremendous tragedy, another production was set in deepest Russia in about 1870. The sadness and hopelessness were pervasive and the audience was on the verge of tears. Mr. Sack, a neighbor of ours on Washington Avenue, was on stage and a scheduled knock came at the window. But Mr. Sack, who was to say, "Imitzer clapped auf dem fenster" (Someone is knocking at the window) instead said, "Imitzer clapped auf dem vindeh." The interjection of accented English into

nineteenth century Russian Yiddish broke up the audience and the tragic mood was over for the night. The laughter engendered by Mr. Sack's slip of the tongue made this show a hit in a way that the author could never have dreamed of.

The most memorable role that Papa performed was that of the Yiddish King Lear, which shows that there was no limit to the ambition of which he was capable. His acting was so realistic that Emma in the audience wept in sympathy and this, to Papa, was the ultimate accolade. He often spoke proudly of the fact that he had been so good that he had made his own child forget that it was only make-believe. Would that Morris Carnovsky or Lee J. Cobb had seen Papa's performance!

Papa became an expert at putting on beards of all colors and sizes. He really was an adventurous sort because he had not the slightest background for any of these activities, but he had chutzpa, the gutsiness that gave him the nerve to experiment with activities foreign to his training. In short, in spite of the picture he presented of the typically short, stout, unflamboyant businessman, lacking in glamor and colorfulness, he was a man with a zest for new and untried experiences. His worth was appreciated publicly when the Workmen's Circle gave him a testimonial dinner for his many years of devoted and productive service.

Papa's strong sense of responsibility to the Jewish people never faltered. Although he almost never participated in worship services, he was a member of both the Reform Temple Beth Israel and the Conservative Agudath Achim Synagogue in Altoona. For years he was an active board member of the Altoona Federation of Jewish Philanthropies and was instrumental in raising money to help the victims of the Nazis. On one of his last visits to Florida Papa received a letter from the Temple requesting a donation for the Reform Rabbis' Retirement Fund, a new concept at that time. Papa sent a generous gift at once remarking, "After all, the rabbis work hard and they deserve some help in their old age."

Papa had his own dancing specialty. He used to entertain visiting small children, especially nieces and nephews from Philadelphia and then grandchildren with an odd sort of jig. His belly would wobble as he moved up and down like a dancing bear, and after he had properly impressed the children he would bask in their wide-eyed admiration. But eventually one little boy, a total skeptic, watched scornfully and dismissed Papa with a scathing "You're not so hot!" Papa loved to tell that story.

He had a gift for endearing whimsey. When Belle was only eighteen she went to Harrisburg where she had gotten a job with the newly established State Liquor Board. Papa somewhat unwillingly let her go and he was fully aware of how scared she was. Going to work in a strange town where she knew exactly one family and being on her own at such a tender age was not to be compared with going to college where a girl's life was well supervised in the thirties. Papa, always careful to hide his emotions, could not allow himself to express the concern that he felt but he was able to tell Belle that he loved her and that she could count on him by means of the following nonsense note.

May 24, 1937

*"Here is a letter to my little ketzeleh Belle. (***Ketzeleh means kitten***) How are you kid? I'm fine. I'm busy looking for a cottage and repairing our bathroom and looking after our lawn and our garden and looking after the sun that it shall not get lost on its way and the same way about the moon and there are so many other things which it requires my attention — for instance the Spanish war or Hitler in Germany or Russian kazatzkes, so as you can see for yourself that you ought to feel privileged if I have found time to write to you . . .*

Well I remain as ever your boy friend Abe."

Some years later, when Belle and Egon Gartenberg had been married for a short time they realized that for them a piano was not a luxury but a necessity. In spite of the fact that he was not a part of the world of music Papa understood how important a piano would be to the Gartenbergs and he knew how little they could afford it. He offered to pay half which delighted Belle and Egon, but when the check arrived it was for the full amount. Accompanying the check was a letter saying that when he visited them in Chambersburg in the future he did not want to always wonder whether he had paid for the black keys or the white keys!

Music and music lessons were always a big part of our family life. At the ages of nine and seven Emma and I started to take piano lessons and after three years I switched to the violin. We were conscientious about practicing and really made the most of our very slight talent, playing at all sorts of minor events in Altoona. Emma and I did not really get along well musically, partly because it was difficult for Emma, as accompanist, to take orders from me, the soloist, since I was also her younger sister. When Belle had studied piano for some time she began to accompany me and we were better attuned to each other. She was younger and so it was easier psychologically for her to be the accompanist, but there was also another difference. Belle was a more flexible person than Emma, and although she was not nearly as proficient or as well-trained as Emma, she was able to repress her own musical feelings and thus was a better accompanist.

Arnold did not learn to play an instrument but Birdie, when her turn came, studied the violin and played well. I was a member of the Gerhart String Ensemble in 1928-1929 and then played in the Altoona Civic Symphony from its inception in about 1930. Birdie, too, played in the Altoona Symphony but we were never there at the same time.

Mama was really the reason why we learned as much as we did. She listened attentively to our playing and commented on it with careful words like "It sounds a little better and if you practice it will improve." She encouraged us but was stingy with praise, being fearful, she admitted many years later, that one of her children would get a swelled head. She did not push us like a stage mother and did not nag at us to practice but sometimes she had to remind me or Belle, although never Emma. She communicated to us a sort of moral obligation to do what

was expected of us and made us feel that practicing was a part of every day's unquestionable routine, just as was brushing one's teeth.

Cultural events were few in Altoona but Mama took advantage of whatever she could and managed to take us, usually one at a time, to a few operas that came to the Mishler Theater. I can now only imagine the quality of a traveling opera company in a town like Altoona in the 1920's, but Mama seemed to know that exposure to whatever came to town, regardless of quality, was worthwhile. We saw **The Mikado, Madame Butterfly** and **Carmen,** all done in English. For months after **Carmen** Mama sang to herself and to us the **Habanera** and the only words she could remember to that wonderfully rhythmic music were "You love me not, you love me not."

Papa came to many of the Symphony programs and I remember one special night when he sat in the front row in the Roosevelt Junior High auditorium, his gleaming bald head catching the light. Josephine Antoine, the lovely Metropolitan Opera star who died very young, was the soloist. She sang the happy **Je Suis Titania** from **Mignon** and as she laughed her way through the joyful music she seemed to sing directly to Papa. On stage, even though I was playing the accompaniment with the orchestra, I could see the direct contact and rapport between the beautiful soprano and my delighted father in the front row.

A story unknown to the family turned up in April, 1981, a story about Papa's support of what he considered a worthy cultural cause. Fannie Abelson reminisced at an Altoona Temple Sisterhood meeting about the time that two women from what was then called Palestine, Brocha Zvire, vocalist, and Nachum Nardi, pianist, gave a concert in Altoona. They stayed at her home and enjoyed it so much that they showed no signs of leaving. Finally, in desperation, Fannie told them that she needed the room for another guest. They asked her for one more favor — Would she drive them downtown to see how many of their records they could sell? This she did, and in all of Altoona they sold exactly one, to A. Berman, the jeweler.

Papa moved into his last store in 1922 at 1311 Eleventh Avenue where he followed another jeweler, M. Berman, no relation, into the location, so that the letters BERMAN'S embedded in the sidewalk in front remained appropriate. Oddly enough, M. Berman also had a son Arnold and a daughter Florence. The store was a handsome place, typical of the times, with impressive red cherry cases. One side had counters and wall cases and the other side had only wall cases. The office was behind the store room proper and the optometry examining room was behind the office. A narrow area was cut off for use as a grinding and polishing room and here, in addition to the common jewelry service work, Harry Rifkin made the glasses that Papa prescribed. The store stationery proudly listed as one of its services "Manufacturing Opticians."

Boxes and such supplies were in the basement and sometimes it was terrifying to go down there because of the huge water bugs, roaches, that were present after the historic Logan House near the railroad was demolished. The roaches moved across the railroad tracks on Tenth

Avenue to new homes in the basements of the stores on the main street, Eleventh Avenue.

Rubbish that accumulated each day on the floor of the store was left there at closing and the first order of the day was to sweep it toward the cellar door. Then, instead of gathering it up, the whole mess was swept down the steps and was picked up only after it hit the basement floor. To this day I shudder at the thought.

The store was a proud accomplishment and with a new green marble front it was an elegant establishment in the center of the best block in town, with four or five other jewelry stores quite close by. Papa was a good salesman who inspired confidence in customers and they often refused to deal with anyone else. He was a fine craftsman and an excellent engraver, the like of which probably no longer exists. Hilly Cohn, Emma's husband, has a beautiful wrist watch with a closed face that was given to him upon his engagement to Emma and the face cover has a handsomely engraved monogram that is an example of Papa's skill. He made each of his daughters a silver pin of intertwined initials in an oblong horizontal shape, beautifully designed, out of rolled silver bars, but he neglected to rhodium plate them, so that they tarnish easily. For his granddaughters he made smaller pendants of intertwined initials in a vertical style and all these pieces are treasured by their owners. Ruby told me that this kind of work is like handwriting in that the maker can be accurately identified.

Papa also set diamonds expertly, which few jewelers outside of trade shops do today. He did intricate repairs on watches and on jewelry and there was relatively little that he had to send out to be repaired. Harry Rifkin began to work for Papa at the age of fourteen or fifteen in 1924 and became proficient in the trade with training only from Papa.

In the jewelry business at least thirty per cent of the year's business is done during the Christmas season and so Emma and I, at fourteen or fifteen, were drafted as extra help during the last weeks. Our main job was to wrap dresser sets, those huge odd-shaped boxes whose value nearly exceeded that of the assortment inside of comb, brush, mirror, nail file, powder box, hair receiver, perfume atomizer, picture frame, pin tray, etc. This was the gift of gifts from the young man to his beloved and Papa and his clerks sold hundreds of them. Emma and I had to wrap each piece in tissue, stuff the empty places with more tissue and then cover the whole irregularly shaped box. The outside sleeve used today on odd-shaped boxes to make them wrappable was not yet in use and so we had some mighty struggles at the wrapping counter.

This was the period of big spending by miners and shopmen, perhaps because earning big money was a new experience to them, and because of this the credit business became a mainstay of Berman's Jewelry Store. The store had a full time bookkeeper who also interviewed prospective credit risks and Emma worked with her, writing up accounts. I stayed in the front, although I never learned a thing about selling because Papa never took the time to teach. He either was making a sale or examining eyes or fixing a watch or setting a diamond or engraving

something and had not the time to teach me or Emma anything about the merchandise or how to sell it.

Learning how to turn over a sale is something every beginner should be taught, but Papa never explained anything like that, although he expected us to learn. Once I had a watch customer and Papa came over to me to take over, but I did not know enough to leave. Then I felt Papa's foot on top of mine, and as the pressure grew my knowledge of when and how to leave increased and I just sort of faded from the scene.

A good merchandiser has to be a gambler and Papa gambled whenever he saw a possibly profitable item. He used to say that he had tried everything compatible with the jewelry business except singing birds. But Papa was the victim of bad timing when, in the days before bread was sold sliced, he bought a big order of a new invention and advertised it heavily. The invention was a bread slicer, a simple thing on which one placed a loaf of bread. Then a knife blade came down like a guillotine to cut measured slices. The week that Papa advertised the slicer was the same week that grocery stores first offered sliced bread!

I used to wonder at Papa's impatience with salesmen and was often embarrassed by his brusqueness. He was known in the trade as a buyer who made up his mind very quickly, but to me he always seemed to be rude when he picked out what he wanted and dismissed the salesman. But one time he was not rude. A new salesman came in with a line of watches and Papa, after a quick look, said, "How is your uncle? Does he still sell herring on the street corner?" The man was dumbfounded. Papa asked him more questions relating to his life in Rezitza until the man was beside himself with wanting to know how this man knew the details of his early life. Eventually Papa revealed himself to the man as his contemporary in the shtetl and they established a friendship that lasted as long as they lived and that was continued in the man's son with me and my husband. The man was Marcus Edelstein whose Delmark watches were a mainstay of the inventory of Berman's Jewelry Store for many years. His son Albert is my friend even now.

As the town grew and prospered so did the store and in 1927 Papa bought a lot in Allegheny Furnace and had house plans drawn up. In this day of constant mobility it is hard to understand the state of mind produced by the idea of moving out to such a far place as the area beyond Columbia Park. It was insane! With whom would one associate? There would be no neighbors close by! But Papa made decisions and they were not to be questioned. Mama probably had some input but certainly not very much.

Papa built a six bedroom two bathroom house with a study, a center hall and fairly large square rooms. But the tiny kitchen seemed almost like an afterthought with one small window and a work area completely inadequate for the number in our family and for the kind of cooking that Mama did. I marvel at Papa's stupidity in having built this kitchen although he gave in to Mama's pleading for more light and cut another small window in the rear wall — but it opened into the garage! The stove in the Washington Avenue house was the old black kind and Mama pleaded for a new stove in this fine new house. But there Papa drew

the line, cruelly telling Mama that she was too old to have a new stove. For a long time Mama had to do with the old one, but she had four new stoves by the time she reached the end of her life.

We moved into the house in December. On January 25, 1928 Mama gave birth to Birdie. All during the building she had been angrily pregnant, since fifteen months before Birdie's birth she had nearly died giving birth via Caesarean section to a grossly oversized child which was strangled by the cord. She had had three miscarriages through the earlier years, but the first Caesarean had brought her so close to death from peritonitis that she never expected to have another child, or even to live to see the house finished. So when Birdie came, also via Caesarean section, she was not at her most charming.

Birdie was cranky and cried a lot at night. I got up once and carried her around to soothe her. Then Mama came into the room and almost with malevolence she hissed at me through clenched teeth, "Will you let **me** raise this baby?" She was tired and always angry and resentful during this time and she told me much later that she had even hated to give the child a drink of water. Perhaps she felt that my trying to help, at thirteen, was an implied criticism of her inadequacy at that time. How sweet it is to know that Birdie became the light of Mama's life, the closest to her heart of all of us. When Birdie was married, Papa, in tears, said at the wedding dinner that she was the last jewel in his crown. And so she was.

In 1930 Emma finished High School, second in a class of over seven hundred, and she went on to the Progressive Series Piano Teachers' College and Washington University in St. Louis. I finished the next year, fourth in a class of six hundred four, and then I worked in the store. But the stock market crash of 1929 began to have its effect and gradually Altoona's businesses were deeply affected.

By March 1932 the three creditors required to force a business into bankruptcy got together and Berman's Jewelry Store was closed down. A week or so before the dreaded but inevitable event, Papa sent Emma a check to St. Louis to cover her expenses until the end of the term. When she did not cash it immediately he committed the unheard-of extravagance of calling her on the phone and saying, "For God's sake, Emma, cash that check!" It was characteristic of Papa not to let any of us know of his business problems and Emma had no idea that the situation at home was what it was. Even I, right on the spot, was scarcely aware of it.

For weeks before the bankruptcy every case in the store had a sign posted on it at an angle like a gift-wrap ribbon saying "Everything In This Case One-Half Off." But still there was no business. People simply had no money. During one winter of the Depression a young man, handsome and clean-cut, came to our back door at the house and asked to shovel our walk. He wanted no payment in cash but asked if Mama had an old coat or jacket that she could pay him with. There were apple sellers on street corners in Altoona and even affluent people went to meetings about Technocracy, the new theory of economics that had everyone excited and the meaning of which I had not then and have

not now the slightest idea. Almost everyone was poor. In our house Papa used to tell Mama not to come downtown no matter what she needed because it was only human nature to buy something once one was on the avenue. Mama was always frugal and being told this must have hurt her because she said angrily, "Abe, I **must** have a pair of stockings!" But Papa was adamant because streetcar fare was seven cents each way.

None of us children knew of the enormity of the closing, but Ruby always loved stories of bygone events and years later, when Papa had recovered both financially and psychologically from the terrible stress of these times, Ruby used to talk to Papa about it, partly because he loved history and partly because his father, too, had been a jeweler.

The business was lost, the house was lost, and Papa was sick, physically as well as otherwise. The store was placed in receivership for a year and a settlement was made of ten cents on the dollar. The most bitter part was that the receivers placed a young woman in the store as the manager and Papa, the rest of the staff, and I were answerable to her. For example, I bought some shoes and had to open the package for her when I left the store at closing. What a horrible humiliation such a set-up was for a proud man!

The ownership of the house reverted to the bank although we lived in it for a few years as renters until the rent became too much to handle. We made good use of the house while we lived there. Carpets were not wall-to-wall at that time so we rolled them up and had a hardwood dance floor. Twice, at real parties, not "gatherings", Mama engaged three piece orchestras, each time for ten dollars. We even made dance programs, had an even number of boys and girls, and wrote up each program so that every boy danced with every girl at least once. After that, the guests were on their own. One bitterly cold night a bunch of boys walked from town, about two miles, and one of them froze his ears. He probably thought that a Berman party was worth it. From our first New Year's Eve in 1927 we established a tradition of breakfast at our house and no matter where we lived after that or where we had celebrated the New Year the crowd came to our house where Mama made stacks of pancakes for everybody.

After the terms of the settlement had been satisfied and the load of indebtedness had been lifted from him, Papa started over at the age of forty-three. The enormous book of accounts receivable had shrunken to perhaps ten percent of its face value, a guess on my part, and so one of the previously most valuable assets of the business had become almost non-existent. People brought in all sorts of odds and ends of jewelry and even dental work to sell. Sometimes Papa had to crack and remove the teeth in bridgework before he weighed the metal and then he could offer only fifteen cents or so for the tiny bits of gold. The sellers were shocked when they learned how little the scraps were worth. Gold was worth only $35.00 an ounce at that time.

The money realized from the old gold was set aside and when $750.00 had been accumulated Papa told Mama that she could go to Europe to visit her family. In June, 1934 she took the momentous trip,

nearly twenty-three years after she had left home. When she returned in October the **Altoona Mirror** ran the following story:

ALTOONA WOMAN IS HOME FROM EUROPE

Mrs. Sylvia Berman, wife of A. Berman of 2601 Broad Avenue, has just returned home after having spent more than four months visiting in Latvia and Russia with relatives whom she had not seen for twenty-three years.

Mrs. Berman left Altoona last June 15, sailing from New York City on board the S.S. Manhattan on June 20. Landing at Hamburg, Germany, she traveled by train to Berlin and then Riga, Latvia, where she was met by a sister and two brothers, their families and other relatives.

The sister resided in Riga while the brothers live in Rezekne, Latvia, the latter place being Mrs. Berman's birthplace. During her time in Latvia Mrs. Berman used the two communities as her headquarters from which she made side trips.

She also spent almost a month in Leningrad, U.S.S.R., where another brother resides, as well as other relatives. Returning she spent two days in Paris, sailing from Le Havre, France, on board the Manhattan on Oct. 25, and landing in New York on Nov. 1.

While greatly enjoying the visit to her birthplace and the reunions with members of her immediate family after the twenty-three-year separation, Mrs. Berman found herself equally delighted to be again with her family and friends in Altoona. While she had no personal experiences with conditions in Germany, through conversation with train and boat companions she found the world apparently against Hitler, not against Germany.

Many details of life under the dictator's rule in Germany were told her by a German bride who came to this country on board the Manhattan and became quite well acquainted with Mrs. Berman.

Mama kept a diary in which she recorded her sensations and reactions up until September 10 when she must have grown tired of writing. She had a gift for the expressive word, especially for using words that native Americans would not use perhaps because they would be embarrassed to reveal themselves. Her very ignorance of the standard way in which we express ourselves gave added flavor and emotion to what she wrote and with quite ordinary words she could paint a vivid picture. For example, when the ship the **Manhattan** finally sailed from New York she wrote, "What excitement! So many people! One mass of baggage, noise, lines, lines, and lines. On board ship. Crowds and crowds. One mass of people, flowers, eyes full of tears, happiness and yet sadness.

The ship leaves out the last whistle. Visistors must go off. The first move."

She was always keenly aware of the world of nature around her and in Riga wrote, "We went swimming in the ocean. The kids think it's great that I can swim. Dinner on the outside around a big round table. No flys. Smell of sunburned needle trees and pine of the nearby woods. White birch trees all around us."

I remember Mama's excitement long before her trip when she first heard the fourth movement of Tschaikowsky's Symphony #4. The second melody of that movement is based on a Russian folksong about birch trees and her delighted recognition of the melody brought back to her memories of the beautiful birch forests near her childhood home where they had often gathered mushrooms.

On July 12 in Riga she wrote, "This was a real day, full of pleasure. The whole gang went to the beach. The sea was calm the swimming excelent. Aron and I and gang went boating on the beautiful river — A — What gorgeous woods! What wonderful cseenario! (Scenery) We rowed for hours in this glory."

Some words she misused all her life. They were not exactly wrong but they had not the right shade of meaning. For example, on July 15, she wrote in detail about a day that ended with a symphony concert, "The siphony and the conductor were divine. A hungarian girl violinist featured the guest artist. She certainly can produce!" The expression, to produce, she used in this way to the end of her days.

Mama had a gift for description of feeling as on July 31 when she had spent a lovely day. "It rained slowly. In the evening we went to Aron Gordin's girl friend. Was plenty to eat and drink. Sang all kinds of songs. Was old fashioned but marry and joly. I enjoyed it imensely. Went home at 1:00 A.M. It poured rain over our heads. No street lights, no flesh light. Tremped in the soft thin mud like nobody's business. I didn't mind it at all."

Until I reread recently Mama's account of her trip I did not realize why she used to make such a point of the existence of a separate Latvian culture. It was because she did not even realize before her trip that such a separate culture existed. When she was growing up in Latvia that country was part of Russia, and Russian culture and the Russian language and laws were all that she was aware of. At the end of the first World War Latvia became independent and its semi-buried separate culture emerged and was present during Mama's visit. Then Russia gobbled up the Baltic states again at the end of the second World War. Her joy at finding herself in a familiar Russian background was clear in her August 19 entry when she and her sister Chaya were on the train going to Leningrad. She wrote, "Train nearing to Russian border. My heart almost stops. At last Ostrov, Russia. Porters come in to take down our baggage for inspection. They look Russian — They talk Russian — They are Russians! I am home! In Russia! My heart crys out what a thrill! I do not believe it. I am dreaming. Sister and I go down the station to see our things inspected. I shiver. I am nervos. Its a good thing sister is with me."

The most elegant language could not have expressed better Mama's excitement at being in a Russian environment. Her tone tells us that no matter what oppression she might have felt as a young girl, she still had feelings of love for Russia and we are aware of the pent-up homesickness of twenty-three years.

Mama stayed in Leningrad visiting her brother Samuel for three or four weeks. In 1972 several of the Riga relatives left Russia and settled in Israel and from them we learned a horror story that was never told to Mama. Samuel had been interrogated about the visit of his sister from America and had been sentenced to hard labor for three years!

Papa and I went to New York to meet Mama who came home on the **S.S. Manhattan.** She brought with her the memory of four months filled with the joy of renewal of family ties, of being close again to her sister and brothers, of living with the people who had shared her childhood and adolescence.

An odd, trivial, yet interesting change came about when Mama came home. The constant running arguments, a sort of bantering, that used to take place often in our house about Russian words and expressions ceased completely. After her trip Papa never challenged Mama on a single word. I missed those semi-comic arguments.

During the four months of Mama's absence I had been the housekeeper. Emma was teaching piano in St. Louis, Belle and Arnold were in High School and Birdie was only six. No matter how hard I try to bring back that period, I cannot remember anything about how we got along or how we managed our household except for one incident.

Papa was a dedicated Socialist and when the Party brought Norman Thomas to Altoona to speak, Papa arranged to have the post-meeting reception at our house. I have one clear memory of that momentous event — offering some potato salad to Mr. Thomas! Mama evidently took a lot of pride in that evening when she learned about it. When I had already been a grandmother for a long time, she introduced me to a friend as "My daughter who, when she was only nineteen, gave a party for Norman Thomas."

When I first began this memoir, my lack of any other recollections of this period puzzled me. Generally, one small memory has triggered a second which was intertwined with a third, etc. until I was astonished at the wealth of trivia stored away in the attic of my mind. Small details that have not crossed my mind for as much as sixty years have been presenting themselves for examination and their vivid clarity has surprised me. But during those months of Mama's absence I must have been conscious in only one emotional area and nothing else must have been felt strongly enough to register. The reason that nothing else comes back to me is that I was deeply in love with Ruby Karp. Mama came home in October and late in November our engagement was announced.

Papa and Mama gave us whole-hearted approval at once. It took me many years to appreciate Papa's wisdom and perceptiveness when he told me that the fact that Ruby and I came from the same kind of people of the same economic level would be a valuable factor in creating a good marriage. So much of the wisdom of parents is wasted at the

time that it is expressed. It is not only the rebelliousness of youth that prevents appreciation, it is the fundamental inability of the young to understand. When Papa said those words to me I dismissed them lightly without realizing the depth of Papa's insight. Margaret Mead wrote that watching a parent grow is one of the most reassuring experiences anyone can have and writing this memoir has given me some idea of what she meant. It is not my parents who have grown, but my appreciation of their good sense and intelligence that has increased. Mark Twain spoke of how much smarter his father became as he himself grew older. It seems that in our different ways we are all saying the same thing.

The Abraham Bermans and the David Karps met in the dining room of our house at 2601 Broad Avenue and planned the small home wedding which was all that the times would allow. As the parents planned and discussed and debated, Ruby and I in the living room could hear a slowly rising tone in the voices of the women and then all their pent-up hurt at whatever disappointments they had endured for a quarter century burst out. Each woman's anger seemed to fuel that of the other as they reproached their husbands for lack of consideration when repeated miscarriages had been dismissed as unimportant illnesses, for pain they had suffered because of their husbands' insensitivity.

Probably this almost hysterical confrontation cleared the air of years of frustration and acted as an emotional catharsis, but for the two of us it was startling and painful. In spite of this ugly scene the plans were made and the wedding took place on February 10, 1935.

The Depression was still with us and so everything was kept as simple as possible with thirty-two people invited to the house. We could not even afford to have Emma come from St. Louis. The dining room was set up to seat everyone and Mama cooked the dinner with the help of a hired woman. The day of the wedding Papa happened to meet two friends, salesmen. He invited them and their dates to come, so a card table was set up for them in the living room. Mama was livid because there were so many other people she would have invited had there been room, yet now she was forced to make space for four people she hardly knew. I marvel even now that Papa did not realize the enormity of the sin that he committed with his casual invitation. With all the hard work and the natural tensions of putting on such a huge home affair, this upsetting development put Mama in a rage for the whole day and spoiled my wedding for her.

In the early years of my marriage I heard more of the accumulated bitterness that had been built up in Mama and almost always the root cause was insensitivity. Because I was married for three years before anyone else, I was exposed to hearing this from Mama as none of my sisters were. But with it all, the love between Papa and Mama was strong and the firmness of the foundation of our home was never for a moment in any danger.

Before long I was pregnant and when I told Mama that I intended to have my baby in Barnesboro where I lived, thirty miles away, she was horrified and argued that everyone went to her parental home for

childbirth. But when the time came I went to Miners' Hospital in Spangler, two miles from Barnesboro. While I was in labor and already having a bad time Mama came with Belle. I asked her to tell Belle to get out of the room but Mama said angrily, "No, let her stay. Maybe she won't be in such a hurry to get married." As my labor pains increased Mama was not openly sympathetic. She did what she always did when she was afraid that her feelings would get the best of her. She raged at life and its pain by scolding with a rough and angry "You are not trying!" But I caught the sound of the sob in her throat.

My baby, Norman, was large, nearly nine and a half pounds, and was the first of eighteen grandchildren.

Early in 1936 the Bermans moved to 3003 Third Avenue where they lived briefly as renters until they bought the house. How satisfying it was for them to be homeowners again after the lean years of being merely occupants! The house was far from new but it was comfortable and adapted easily to the changing number of inhabitants as my siblings married and we all brought our children home to visit.

Where houses were concerned Papa was entirely in command and Mama never did anything without his approval. She had wanted a garbage disposal for a long time and at last grew tired of waiting for Papa to agree to her request. She waited until he was out of town for a few days and then had a disposal installed. This was an enormously important step for her and it is not difficult to imagine her nervousness when Papa came home. She mustered up her courage, took a deep breath and, with a grand gesture proclaimed her defiance of the accepted rules with "Mr. Berman, meet your garbage disposal!" She turned on the switch. Nothing happened. The machine did not even cough. Mama's face, a battleground of conflicting feelings, was a study, and Papa burst into laughter.

A kitchen convenience is a mighty small item in the general scheme of things but with a garbage disposal Mama had struck a blow for ERA, for NOW, and for the Civil Liberties Union. She had moved one tiny step up the ladder towards equality.

In the spring of 1937 Papa built a cottage at Cypher Beach on the Raystown River near Everett, Pa. The cottage, which he named the Sylvia, had a living room with a working fireplace, a screened porch, a dining room with alcoves for cots, a kitchen and three small bedrooms, each with a squeaky double bed and a dresser with drawers that were always stuck. We used to put things on top rather than battle with the drawers. There was no electricity in Cypher Beach, so we used oil lamps and had a privy which we called a WPA.

The Works Progress Administration was a government effort to provide employment and to help get the wheels of industry going again. Anyone who needed an outside privy could have one built with the government paying the cost of labor and the owner paying only for the material. The WPA's that subsequently dotted the rural landscape of the United States were neat little structures on cement slabs with space for two users at the same time. While it wasn't exactly luxurious the privy, kept clean and well-limed, was a big improvement over the old

ones that we used so hesitantly at public parks and other rural places.

For water we walked about half a city block to a pipe that had been connected to a spring. This single pipe took care of the needs of the whole community. As for laundry, a nearby farmer's wife did that for us except for Norman's diapers which I washed by hand in the river. In those pre-Pampers days this was known as the joys of country living. No one who came to visit was ever allowed to sit down until he had accepted the two buckets that were immediately handed to him and had filled them at the spring. Ruby and Arnold rigged up a high platform in the yard and put on top of it a new garbage can in which they had drilled a hole and attached a valve. Then they dumped in bucket after bucket of water to fill the can and we had a shower with sun-heated water. Of course you had to soap yourself beforehand and keep your bathing suit on, and at that time they were not exactly bikinis.

We cooked on an oil stove with a box oven that was placed on top of the burners for baking and Mama made some of her best chocolate cakes in it. We had lots of company and Mama put in countless hours working in the kitchen because there always had to be a complete dinner. The pizzas and Colonel Sander's Fried Chicken that we settle for today were unheard of then and we had our roasted chicken or brisket or veal chops just as we did at home. Papa enjoyed good food and Mama naturally wanted to please him. Nobody pressured her to cook full and lavish meals but Mama's own sense of moral obligation made her work hard, so that she never really had a vacation at the cottage. Her recompense was knowing that she was providing a happy place for her family to get together.

Eventually electricity came to Cypher Beach and it changed our summertime lives. No longer were there the constant chores of cleaning the kerosene lamps and of carrying out the water pan from under the ice box. No one had to take his turn at cleaning and liming the WPA. We had an electric pump to bring water right into the house! Papa had an extension built on for a bathroom at the rear of the cottage with a sink, a toilet and a shower stall. The walls were plywood and they were always sweating but who cared? We had a flush toilet and no one even thought about the decor. Ruby borrowed a truck and brought a refrigerator and that, with water piped into the kitchen, and with electric lights, made our summers almost citified.

As the other children married and as we produced grandchildren all of us came to the cottage, sometimes for a day, sometimes for a few days, sometimes for a few weeks, and there was always enough room. The living room couch, a black horsehair convertible that is probably worth a great deal today as an antique, slept two or three and there was sleeping space on the screened porch as well. We had never heard of the sleeping bags that nowadays take care of extra guests.

There must have been times when we were bored, but when I look back over the ways we entertained ourselves, those times must have been few indeed. The river was the source of pleasure for everyone. To Papa it meant fishing every day and when he brought back a good catch, cleaned it outside and fried it immediately, he was truly happy.

When the river was low the boys dammed it up so that we had a pool area deep enough for swimming. Our boat, named the Sylvia for its parent, the cottage, was the biggest, heaviest, and clumsiest boat on the Raystown but we all learned to row it. Sometimes it would get stuck on the rocks and then its weight created a problem as we tugged and pulled at the scow to get it water-borne again. Later Papa bought an outboard motor but that was almost another era.

Arnold built a kayak and we learned to balance ourselves with the double paddle or get dunked. Some of the funniest movies Arnold ever took are of individuals struggling in the kayak. Time after time at home movie shows we laughed at the trepidation on the faces of those who felt themselves losing control of the kayak, knowing that they were about to be overturned.

The weeds near the shore away from the swimming area grew close and made a slimy thickness topped with bubbles from the gases of the decaying matter trapped below. We named the stuff "googlemuck" and this word, coined to describe a disgusting wet mass of unknown material, is an important contribution to the Berman private language.

We hiked through the neighboring farmland and picked lots of berries, played badminton badly and swung lazily in the hammock. We made butter in the Mixmaster from the rich milk we bought nearby, milk that we would not be able to drink today because we have all become conditioned to two per cent or to skim milk. We toasted hot dogs and marshmallows, either over an open fire or in the fireplace. At night the sweet damp air brought the sound of singing from up and down the river and the crickets broke the dark stillness with their music. Sometimes a boatload of young people languidly floating past would read the sign over our doorway and would call out to the Sylvia.

On the porch an endless gin rummy tournament went on and Ruby and Egon, Belle's husband, spent hours amassing and losing fortunes. All ages played parcheesi and Chinese checkers. Mama and her friends played mah jongh and bridge, which Papa said was too simple to bother with. He must never have tried it. Papa's game was pinochle and for many years he played regularly with his two cronies, Abe Klatzkin and Abe Parish and an occasional fourth. They were completely uninhibited with each other and the freely traded insults that crossed the table were symptomatic of how much they enjoyed each other's company.

Abe Parish was never known for his hospitality. Once, when a discussion came up as to where the next game should be held he remarked with shrug, "Your house, my house — loz zein your house." (Let it be in your house.) "Loz zein your house" became another part of the Berman lexicon and all of us use it with a whole world of meaning that a literal translation cannot possibly convey. When we use it we mean non-hospitality, a weaseling out of social obligations.

Abe Klatzkin outraged Mama and Papa by suggesting that he furnish a room in the cottage so that he could use it whenever he wished. On another occasion he talked about the new recreation room he was building in his basement. He bragged to Papa about how superior his room would be to ours, but Papa stopped him with "But we'll have

more fun in ours." To have his children enjoy their home meant as much to Papa as it did to Mama.

After Ruby and I moved to Kittanning in the summer of 1939 we continued to go often to the cottage even though we now had to drive about two and a half hours. One Saturday morning in 1943 Ruby called me from the store to suggest that we go to Camp Unity near Stroudsburg, Pa. with some friends for about a week. I made a huge pot of meatballs in spaghetti sauce, packed the children's clothes in a laundry basket, threw together our own things and then we took off to meet our friends at Camp Unity at dinnertime. Near Bedford we took the blacktop road to Everett and then the dusty winding one to Cypher Beach where we walked in unannounced on Mama and Papa and Ray Karp, Ruby's mother, who was their house guest. Without doubting for a moment that they would happily accept the charge, we gave them the kids, the basket of clothes, and the pot of meatballs and blithely left, certain that the three grandparents would "enjoy" the work and the responsibility that we so casually dumped on them.

I have learned a lot about grandparenting since then. In her autobiography Margaret Mead speaks of "the much trumpeted freedom from responsibility that grandparents are supposed to feel." She writes of the effort it takes on the part of grandparents to be "a resource but not an interference" and says that we do not allow sufficiently for the obligations we lay on grandparents. When I recently read these thoughts in **Blackberry Winter,** the almost forgotten incident of forty years ago came immediately to my mind, as if it had been waiting for the right moment to present itself for examination. Evidently I must have buried some well-deserved feelings of guilt that day in 1943 to have them reappear so strongly upon reading Mead's words. But at the time there was not a word of unwillingness from the grandparents when three children suddenly became their responsibility without even the courtesy of a request from the parents.

When we came back, rested and refreshed, we asked the kids how things had gone and Norman very soberly answered in a pained voice, "Too many bosses!"

We enjoyed the cottage for about twelve years and then gradually our visits became less frequent. The fishing was deteriorating and the water level was dropping so that the googlemuck took over more of the river. Finally Papa said, "There is a time for everything and the time for the cottage is past." Of course Mama was relieved because she was tired of the hard work involved in opening and cleaning the cottage in spring and then closing it in the fall. The rest of us felt a regretful sadness but we knew that Papa was right. There is a time for everything.

The cottage with all its furniture was sold in 1949 but just before Papa turned over the key to the new owner we all met for one last time in Cypher Beach to take whatever mementos we wanted. The best-loved item of wall decor was a carefully arranged collection of Petty girls, those voluptuous, long-legged cuties whose curves were the opposite of the flat-chested John Held girls which had preceded them in the world of pop art. Part of the family's private jokes came from those pictures. The

reader will have no difficulty imagining the sketch whose caption was "I don't know what I'll do to entertain him." Another showed a well-endowed young woman saying over the phone, "I'm the one with the part in the back."

Norman, who was in his early teens, took the Petty pictures and saw to it that none were folded or wrinkled on the trip home. He also took a miniature working oil lamp but failed to see that it still had a tiny bit of oil in it. On the long ride home the few drops of oil spilled on the pictures and by the time we reached Kittanning they were completely ruined.

Years later Norman, the only grandchild old enough to really remember the cottage well, took his wife and children on a nostalgic Sunday tour of Cypher Beach and he reported that the place had changed but little and our cottage still bore its sign over the doorway. I wonder if passersby on the river still call out its name as they go by.

In 1938 Mama and Papa had begun to go to Florida in the winter, largely because of their association with Ruby's parents. They vacationed on the west coast at Pass-A-Grille Beach, about twenty miles from St. Petersburg, sometimes taking a small apartment and sometimes staying at the Pass-A-Grille Beach hotel. Papa always loathed the pushiness and rudeness of the Miami Beach Jewish population and used to say that they were so ill-mannered that they would push you off the sidewalks, but later on, when the Bermans needed a change, they went to the east coast because it was livelier.

At Pass-A-Grille the land was a narrow peninsula bordered by the Gulf of Mexico on one side and by the waters of the bay on the other. Papa kept a boat with an outboard motor in the bay and throughout the winter months he fished happily, just as he sometimes did in the summer at Peterborough, Ontario. This area of Florida was entirely different from the way it is now. It was sparsely built up and the razzle-dazzle that is now characteristic of so much of Florida had not yet affected it. Papa still wanted to own a home that he could fish from so he bought a lot near the large Don Cesar hotel in St. Petersburg. But Mama had had her fill of operating a second home and was never enthusiastic about the prospect, so Papa sold the lot, making a profit of only $1,000 in an area that is now extremely valuable. The Don Cesar was used as a convalescent home for soldiers at the end of the war and the land nearby became a goldmine, but Papa no longer owned any of it.

In 1947 Ruby and I took our son and two daughters to visit Mama and Papa at Pass-A-Grille Beach. I went unwillingly because I wanted dining room furniture very badly but we could not afford it, yet Ruby decided unhesitatingly that we could afford the trip, a clear case of a difference of priorities. We took six days for the trip, stopping to see whatever was of interest on the east coast of the United States and learned that the only things of real interest to children, other than swimming, were comic books and movies. This was just before TV became a part of everyone's life.

At Pass-A-Grille Beach Papa had rented two rooms for us in the small apartment building that they were living in. We planned to stay

for a week and then to move on to tour the eastern part of Florida. There was absolutely nothing to do in that scarcely settled place except use the beach and all of us were bored beyond words. The sun was strong and since we were fair-skinned we had to limit our time swimming and sun-bathing. I counted the days until our week was up and was delighted when we began to pack. Then Papa came to our rooms, happy and excited with the news that he was giving us a wonderful gift. He had just paid the landlady a second week's rent for us!

That same year Papa gave a big dinner party at the Princess Martha hotel in St. Petersburg in honor of their thirty-fifth wedding anniversary. Since their circle of friends was fairly small Papa invited lots of people that he knew rather casually and some of them Mama knew not at all. The expense of this fancy affair galled her and she took no pleasure in it, in spite of the orchid she wore. While she was dressing she said to me angrily, "Papa is just a damn show off!" I remember her anger for the same reason, the inviting of mere acquaintances, at my wedding.

Papa had his beloved fishing for an occupation and Mama turned to handwork. She made purses of fine crochet work, of a tightly twisted dark yarn, sometimes shot through with gold or silver thread, but they were always too small or too fancy to be truly usable. Later, when she began to make afghans, she really found her metier. On the long rides to Florida she made hundreds of granny patches and she told me that some of the happiest hours of her life were those spent in the car with Papa while she worked the bright-colored yarns.

When Indiana University of Pennsylvania opened its branch in Kittanning I took an English course and for the subject of an essay I wrote about Mama's afghans. That essay, which now seems to me to be somewhat stilted, follows. You can guess why I never showed it to Mama.

CORNERSTONE

An afghan is a worsted blanket commonly used in informal living rooms and it is, in most cases, hand-made. To me and to the members of my family it is far, far more than a blanket; it is the cornerstone of home.

My mother, whose strongpoint is not fine handwork, learned to make an afghan of cheerful, variegated yarns. Beginning with a seven-stitch chain, she crocheted patches and then put the bright squares together with black yarn. The black yarn between the patches set off the brilliant colors and the scalloped edging unified the work into a gay mass of joyful hues.

As each of my sisters and brothers and I married, my mother made us an afghan, always in the same pattern and in the same lively colors. My youngest sister, traveling with her soldier husband, used her afghan to establish her home wherever the army sent her. No matter where she lived, the chains of stitches were links to those she loved and the warm

colors lit homefires for her in many cold and comfortless rooms.

In my house the afghan was a paradox. Its warm wooliness in winter was a shield against drafts for those who chose the spot in the living room which caught the air currents. But in summer it offered smooth comfort to bare-legged people who sat on the scratchy sofa.

Eventually my mother's grandchildren married and the oldest ones received with delight the afghans which had come to symbolize permanence and stability and warm family relationships. In spite of the inevitable mobility of those who are part of the new American way of life, our young people took with them the bright blanket into which their grandmother had stitched such love, and when they flung it over a sofa they felt themselves to be part of an extended family and not just an isolated couple.

When my father died the afghan became a source of comfort to the maker as well as to the users. The family realized that my mother was losing interest in life and that something more than grief for my father was affecting her. It became clear to us that the basic ingredient of my mother's life had been removed; she felt that she was no longer needed. And so my home developed an immediate and pressing need for a second afghan and of course my mother was asked to make it. As she crocheted and chained and counted, the feeling of uselessness and of not being needed gradually melted away. My mother knew that she was adding warmth to the home of one of her children and she understood that this need had no limits.

If, for some reason, I were placing notes in a cornerstone for the eyes of people yet to be born, I would include some of those bright wool squares, pages from the book of my family's life.

Eventually every one of the eighteen grandchildren owned an afghan and, except for the last few when Mama experimented with colors, they were all alike. Marilyn, Emma's youngest child, came home to her Boston apartment one day and found a strange backpack with one of Mama's afghans sticking out of it. Without a moment's doubt she knew that a cousin had come to visit and had left his calling card.

Mama began to work on afghans for her eighteen great-grandchildren but got only as far as Susie, my son Norman's oldest child. Then her eyes gave out and the rest of the great-grandchildren did not share in Susie's treasure. For the younger children Mama made hats, doll carriage covers and even dolls' hats so that almost all those of that generation have a memento made of the same bright-colored patches which she continued to make almost to the last year of her life.

Late in 1938 when the tales of the horrors of Hitler's Europe began to reach America Papa brought from Vienna his cousin Izzy Nagle and his wife Frieda. Izzy was the son of Papa's mother's sister. In World

War I he had been a Russian soldier who was sent to Austria as a prisoner of war. After the war he remained in Vienna where he met Frieda, a well-established maker of custom hats. With his skill in making pants and uniforms and her ability as a milliner they were making a nice living when they fled from the impending storm to Altoona.

They stayed with Papa and Mama for many months until they were both working and then they settled into their own apartment in Altoona. While they lived with Mama and Papa the Nagles often tried the patience of their hosts because of their arrogance and pride and inflexibility. Mama was often short-tempered with them and made them miserable many times.

Now and then Frieda would bake something Viennese and instead of using measuring cups as one does in America she insisted on using a scale for weighing out flour and sugar. For shortening she used only butter and would not even consider substituting vegetable shortening. Mama flew into a rage one day and accused Frieda of not trying to Americanize herself. I wonder now at Mama's insensitivity to Frieda's trying to hold on in a small way to the life she had known. She was not a young woman, as Mama had been when she came to America, and in most people every year of living adds to one's inability to change one's ways and customs. Maybe it was Mama's feeling that her domain was being usurped by an interloper that made her so cranky about whatever Frieda did in her kitchen.

Neither Frieda nor Izzy could read English at that time but the Yiddish daily newspaper, the **Forward**, came to the house every day and Mama remembered from her childhood that Izzy could read Yiddish. One day he asked her to read the news in the Yiddish newspaper to him. She flung the newspaper at him angrily saying, "Read it yourself! You used to be able to read Yiddish and don't have to be too proud to admit it!" A commentary, this, on the fact that the German and Austrian Jewish world had only contempt for Yiddish.

There were several delicious little instances when Frieda wholeheartedly approved of the American way and tried to convert Izzy to it. Papa was an expert at making gehackteh herring (chopped herring) and he contributed large platters of it to every festive family occasion, especially to the brisses of his numerous grandsons. One day Izzy told Frieda that he had a yen for chopped herring and he asked her to make some. Her answer was sharp, brief, and pointed. "In America the men make the chopped herring!"

On another occasion she insisted after dinner that he come into the kitchen to see a wondrous sight, Arnold helping with the dishes. "In America," she told Izzy, "the boys and girls do the same kind of work."

Frieda and Izzy had no children but Izzy had two sons by a previous marriage. Mama never could forgive him for making no effort to contact these boys or to try to bring them out of the boiling cauldron that Europe had become. Who knows what bitterness had occurred at the time of Izzy's divorce or how terrible or ugly was his relationship with his first wife and children? Mama, whose love of family was the

motivating power in her life, could not conceive of abandoning one's children no matter what the circumstances.

Eventually the Nagles moved to Los Angeles where Izzy's fine old-world craftsmanship as a tailor kept him employed by some of the best stores. Birdie and later, Mama, also lived on the west coast and kept up the family contact with Frieda and Izzy. They became Americanized to some degree although the stubborn arrogance, the suspicion of uniforms, the strong conviction that their way was better remained to the end.

When Hitler invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 we were all at the cottage and we heard the shattering news on the car radio. For the next two years we shared anxiety and dread with all Americans wondering not if, but when the United States would become involved.

Arnold was attending Pennsylvania State College of Optometry in Philadelphia and after graduating in June, 1941 he enlisted in the Navy. Belle, who had been working in Harrisburg, came home in 1941 and from then on she lived at home and worked in the store. Emma had married Hillis Cohn in 1938 and already had two children when we entered the war. Hilly was beyond the draft age and my husband found his draft status constantly being changed because of his age, his family, or his occupation as a watchmaker, considered at one point to be essential to civilian welfare. So all of us concentrated our worry on Arnold, who was sent to Officers' Training School at Northwestern University. He became an Ensign and later on a Lieutenant. Arnold had always wanted to go to a big university and we used to smile ruefully about the fact that he had at last gotten his wish.

Even though we were far from either area of conflict our everyday lives were affected by the war in innumerable small ways. We did not see Papa and Mama as often as we would have liked because gasoline was rationed and Altoona and Kittanning were eighty miles apart. Papa once came to Kittanning by train and when he debarked from the converted freight car dirty, exhausted, and almost in shock he said, shaking his head in disbelief, "I did not know there was such transportation left in the United States!"

We had red coupons for meat, blue coupons for sugar, green coupons for canned vegetables, and others for fats and for leather shoes, but because our children were small we never felt any shortage of essential items. Each member of a family was allotted the same coupons regardless of age and how we used them within the family was of no interest to the Ration Board.

We had never used margarine before. It looked like lard because the powerful dairy interests had made it illegal for the manufacturers to color it. But the margarine packers came up with the brilliant idea of enclosing a small packet of yellow food coloring with each pound. We worked the yellow color into the softened margarine and tried to imagine that it was butter. With real butter we stretched a pound to the volume of a pound and a quarter by working a quarter to a half cup of milk into the softened butter and then allowing it to harden. We learned to can tomatoes, peaches and string beans and I found out that peaches

got moldy easily and that string beans presented a botulism threat that, being invisible, made one hesitant about eating them. From a table in the five and ten I sold defense stamps to be pasted in bond books, knitted helmets, caps and gloves for the Red Cross and did whatever women with small children could do in their spare time.

In jewelry stores merchandise was scarce and often a showcase that normally would have been full had only three or four watches in it. But selling was relatively easy just because stock was in such short supply. A customer might come in for a $24.75 Bulova, the most popular price, and would buy a sixty-five dollar diamond one because that was all that was available. Gold filled jewelry was made with a base of silver instead of copper and so it tarnished almost overnight. Fountain pen sets, a popular gift to send to servicemen overseas, were almost unavailable in a decent quality and jewelry stores sold a junky plastic set labeled "Morrison" which we were embarrassed to handle. But people bought Morrison pen sets and sent them to their boys at Chistmas. "As scarce as Parker pens" became a popular expression in our family.

Merchandise was usually available to the man who personally came with cash to the wholesalers and so Papa made occasional buying trips to New York. I went quite often with Ruby to New York on this kind of buying trip because we always thought it might be the last time that we would have enough gasoline.

Repair material for watches and jewelry was scarce and Papa, exasperated because he could not get the half to three quarter inch spring bars needed for attaching bands to watches, exclaimed, "If they would melt down one small section of railroad track, enough spring bars could be made to supply the whole United States!" Even window trimming material was hard to find and when one of us found some velveteen or satin we shared our news of the find right away. The constantly changing excise tax regulations added a wretched burden to business operators. No sooner had a system been worked out to comply with an order than a new regulation would come through and every piece of merchandise had to be remarked and a new system developed to comply with the new red tape.

Harry Rifkin, who had worked for Papa since he was about fifteen, was drafted and left for the army in October, 1943 and the problem of getting watch and jewelry repairs done became acute because the trade shops were overloaded. Papa and Belle, swamped with irritations, struggled to keep the business functioning. Arnold's letters from Europe tell us that Papa considered selling the store in 1943, a terribly painful prospect. In September, 1944 Papa wrote to Arnold that he could scarcely find any merchandise on the open market. Arnold wrote back what I am sure Papa wanted to hear. "I think it does not matter how much business we lose to competitors by not patronizing the black market. Besides the whole idea running against my grain, being Jewish is just as big a reason not to." A clumsy sentence, to be sure, but an admirable thought.

Arnold, who saw service in North Africa, Italy and England with the Navy, wrote letters home that sometimes contained fascinating

evaluations of places and people. The letters were peppered with acknowledgements of the numerous boxes of cookies, stockings for girls, cakes, toilet articles and books and magazines that all of us sent to him. But the hard-boiled eggs that he asked me to dip in melted wax and then ship to him arrived with a most distinctive odor. Most of the letters were sent to Altoona and Belle faithfully copied them and sent the copies to Emma and me. Those V-Mail letters, tiny reductions of the originals, sometimes bore the heavy black bars of the censor if Arnold had mentioned his location. Sometimes, as an officer, he himself had to censor other servicemen's mail and he said that he loathed that job.

Over everything hung the grey pall of worry about Arnold, and Papa and Mama suffered as parents of servicemen were suffering the world over. In addition to her enormous anxiety about Arnold, Mama endured the pain of not knowing what had happened to her family. She had left them such a short time before, in 1934, and her memories of a vibrant loving family were fresh and glowing when the horrible news of Hitler's activities began to trickle through to the American public. The letters from her sister had stopped and there was no news of any kind from any relatives. Mama had Arnold, then in England, contact the British authorities to see if, through them, she could send a package to her sister but there was no way to break through the wall that the war had built.

For Mama there was only silence and waiting, a repetition of the suffering she had endured from 1916 to 1919. I cannot remember ever talking about this with her and I wonder now at my lack of sensitivity. Many years have passed and I have since then learned much about sadness. I know now how valuable is the sharing of sadness with people we love, more precious even than the sharing of joy. This sharing I (and perhaps my siblings as well) denied to Mama because I simply did not know how. Perhaps feelings are like muscles that have to be used in order to develop. It may be that the basic makings of empathy are there, deeply embedded in one's emotional equipment, but until time and experience have acted upon them they really do not function completely. Whatever the reason, I did not help Mama by asking, by listening, by caring enough to tell her that I cared.

In 1946 Mama learned that her sister, two brothers and most of their children and grandchildren had been killed. One brother and a few nieces and nephews had survived. The horror stories reached our family only in recent years when Mama's nephew Aaron and some of his family were allowed to leave Russia to go to Israel. When I met them in Israel in March, 1974 they told me of one nephew who had served on the German front with the Russian army. With the war over, he returned home and was immediately sentenced by his own government to three years hard labor because he had survived. The reasoning of the Russian government was that only by serving as a spy could a Jew have come back alive from the German front!

The stories of the Holocaust that have been revealed in recent years and the grief in the Jewish world that is expressed every year on Yom Hashoah, the Day of Remembrance, make one wonder how deeply in-

volved the members of our family were. In truth, together with most of the American Jewish population, we were scarcely more than onlookers. In our respective small towns we were as aware as circumstances allowed us to be. We followed the news as it seeped out of Europe and attended meeting after meeting where we listened to speakers who traveled from one congregation to another with one message — give money so that we can salvage at least some of our people from the destruction of Hitlerism. In every town Jews gave large sums, tremendous in relation to their means, and we were among them, but beyond giving financial and moral support we participated but little in that global tragedy. Fate, circumstances, good fortune, call it what you will, had placed us in a world separated from the monumental misery created by World War II.

When the war ended the Berman family continued its expansion. Belle married Egon Gartenberg, a refugee from Vienna, in 1945 and Arnold married Selma Slonimsky of Philadelphia later in that same year. In 1949 Birdie married Arnold Schulman with whom she had grown up, and so Mama and Papa had the satisfaction of knowing that all their children had found their mates and were safely settled into the standard middle-class marriages that were almost the sole goal of parents for their children at that time.

Birdie and Arnie settled in California after Arnie's army service and Papa and Mama flew to the west coast to be on hand when Birdie gave birth to her first child. Papa was always overweight, with the big belly typical of his age and build, and just before they left he proudly pulled his pants away from his belly to show off how much weight he had lost. Since he had had a history of heart disease for the preceding fourteen or fifteen years we were all delighted with the weight loss and at that time it did not occur to any of us that it was symptomatic of anything else. But it was the beginning of a long and painful dying.

Papa was ill with digestive problems and finally, in January 1952 he was operated on and the doctors found what they suspected, cancer of the intestinal tract. He lived the short remainder of his life with the indignity of a colostomy but as long as he was in control he never let Mama or anyone else help him with caring for his mutilated body. Papa was a proud and a very private person. During any illness in his life whenever anyone asked him how he felt he had always answered gruffly, "I feel with my hands!"

How difficult it was to pretend that Papa would recover when we all knew that he could not! He himself once said that for a while he had been afraid that he had cancer, implying that he no longer believed that. We wondered if, having performed briefly on the stage, he was consciously acting a role, and though we all discussed the subject we came to no conclusion.

In March of that year I presented to Mama and Papa for their fortieth anniversary two beautiful table lamps that we children had bought. I opened the bulky boxes and set up the lamps and we three said the proper words as donor and donees. Papa looked away carefully, Mama admired the lamps dutifully and I struggled, as always, with

tears close to the surface. Yet each of us was aware that we had to perform a role for each other and each of us did our duty.

All we children did what we could but Arnold, who lived nearby, carried by far the biggest load of helping Mama, and Emma, with four children, gave much of herself. Belle and I came as often as we could and toward the end I used to stay for two or three days each week. Papa was in and out of the hospital and Mama stayed with him constantly.

One day I came to the house just before Mama arrived home from her vigil and she found me cleaning the tarnished silver flatware because I needed to be occupied. She yelled at me that I did not have to clean her silver, implying that I was criticizing her housekeeping. There was no point in my answering her because I knew that she was really raging at the bitterness of the fate that was like a juggernaut bearing down on her life. I had come to understand that Mama's anger was often a mask for strong feelings other than those she was expressing.

One day in the hospital Papa said, "For God's sake, Sylva, (sic) get a new hat!" By this time Mama was numb and seemed almost to be sleepwalking. I took her downtown to the hat store next to Papa's store and she sat immobile, her face completely devoid of expression as the saleslady put on and took off numerous hats. When the saleslady and I decided on one of them, Mama agreed stonily and from then on she wore the new hat when she visited Papa.

There were numerous transfusions and everything possible was done, but early in June Papa came home to die. Birdie had arrived on June 1 with seven-month-old Davie and she and I lived sadly through the days just waiting while the nurses cared for the wasted body of our father. We were able to admit to each other that we would welcome a nurse's coming to tell us that the waiting was over, but Mama was unreachable. In her misery she had retired into herself. Soon after Papa had been established in the sun-parlor that had been converted into his bedroom, he slipped into a coma, his sightless eyes staring at the beautiful Atmos clock that is now in Emma's living room. Mama pleaded with Dr. Lass to give him another transfusion and he said, gently but firmly, "Mrs. Berman, what for?"

Sunday, June 15, was a bitter Father's Day for us and on Monday afternoon the coma ended with Papa's death. When we told Mama she became hysterical and shouted, "Tell everybody the man is dead!" She waved her arms wildly crying, "Give me some dishes to break!" Dr. Lass came and gave her a sedative and as she was yielding to it, lying down, Hilly said to me, "Florence, loosen your mother's corset." I would not have thought of doing that.

When Mama was in her eighties I asked her to tell me about why she had wanted dishes to break to express her mourning. I wanted to know what custom was behind her request, a custom I had never heard of. She looked at me in amazement and said that she had never heard of such a thing and had no idea of what I was talking about. My guess is that in her childhood she might have heard of such a custom, the smashing of dishes to express grief, and the submerged memory of it had bubbled up through her subconscious mind. This story and the one

about having Miss Kelly come to the house in the early twenties to teach her and her friend, Rose Troop, to read and to write English, these two stories are the only things that I ever knew Mama to forget completely.

A few of our relatives came from Philadelphia for the funeral. Uncle William, whom Papa had so often helped out of trouble, came and complained bitterly because Papa had not been wrapped in a tallis in his coffin. Mama was indignant at his lack of a sense of fitness, especially since William's life was devoid of any religious observance and he had been a worry and a source of aggravation to his older brother for many years. Papa had never been observant of ritual and Mama would not ascribe to him in death a piety he had not expressed in life.

Several days after the funeral when everyone else had left and I was alone with Mama, three women came in the afternoon to visit. Mama appreciated their paying a condolence call until they asked her, now that they thought she would be looking for something to fill her time, to take the presidency of the organization they represented. Outraged by their lack of feeling and insulted by what she felt was a deception as to the purpose of their visit, she quietly refused and after their departure I heard her express her intense fury. This time her anger was not a mask for other feelings and I agreed with her completely.

Many years later I was present at a Kittanning Area Women's Club meeting at which a member proposed that a major chairmanship be offered to a woman whose husband had just died. I remembered my mother's reaction so many years before and immediately objected to this insensitive invasion of the privacy of the newly bereaved woman. There was a shocked moment of silence at the degree of passionate anger in my words at this very sedate meeting. Not another word was said as the proposal was tacitly withdrawn.

I should have stayed longer with Mama. My children were older than those of Emma and Belle and were being taken care of well enough, so I probably could have remained in Altoona for a few more days. But I went back to Kittanning and only when my husband died, late in 1978, and my own children were so careful not to leave me alone too much did I realize how cruelly short was the time I stayed with Mama after Papa's funeral.

Papa had left his affairs in good order in the hands of his lawyer, Martin Goodman, and Arnold, who took care of Mama's finances and organized her income. But the cocoon of sadness in which she was enveloped was almost impenetrable. When Harry Karp, Ruby's brother, and Shirley Levine were married in August of that summer we had trouble persuading Mama to go to the wedding because she was so deeply immersed in mourning. We reminded her that Papa had arranged to have Shirley and Harry meet for the first time at our house, and that since Papa had been instrumental in creating such happiness she owed it to him and to the bride and groom to be there. Mama went to the wedding but her sad face never changed for a moment. Years later, when she had come out of her depression, Mama told me that it was not Papa but she herself who had seen the possibilities of the match and had proposed it to Papa, but that she had always let him take the credit.

In December Mama had abdominal surgery in Philadelphia and I stayed at the home of Selma's parents to be near the hospital. When she came home she convalesced at Emma's for six weeks and then, in mid-February, Ruby and I took her and Ruby's mother to Florida with us for two weeks. On the long ride home I reflected for hours on the change in Mama. She seemd to have lost the initiative for even the most trivial activity and appeared to be merely existing, as if she were marking time. Her sadness was to be expected but a peculiar dependancy was becoming stronger and stronger. On the last day of our snowy journey home we stopped for a sandwich and coffee and Mama said she had to go to the bathroom. I pointed out the ladies' room to her but she would not go unless I went with her. Then I realized that we had to make a change in how we treated her, regardless of how much we loved her and wanted to take care of her.

In Altoona Arnold and I discussed Mama's state of mind and I told him what I thought must be done. "You have to stop helping Mama so much," I said. "Teach her how to keep her checkbook. Insist that she pay her bills herself. And don't stop to see her every single day. Mama has to do her own living and if she is allowed to depend on you for everything, you and your family will be living her life at the expense of your own."

I do not know if Selma had ever reproached Arnold for his giving of himself so generously but the thankful smile on her face when I said this told me that my instinct was correct. None of us had been aware of the price that Selma was paying for Arnold's devotion to his mother. Arnold taught Mama how to write checks and to balance her checkbook and when she demurred he told her that she had no choice but to learn. Eventually, when she had the house remodeled into two apartments, she was able to deal with the workmen and she kept good records of her finances.

Years later when Mama and I were talking about this bitter learning period she said, "Every man should teach his wife to be a widow. I used to be ashamed 'to' myself. I could not even write a check!"

In the 1970's when the Women's Movement had affected everyone's point of view, regardless of whether or not one was involved in the movement, I asked Mama if she had not ever rebelled against the need to ask Papa for money for everyday use. She was strangely ill at ease for a time. Then she confessed that long ago Papa had offered to set up a checking account for her but that, after reflecting on it, she had said to herself, "Why should I be bothered? Papa will take care of me." So it came out that it was not Papa but Mama herself who had kept her so unknowing of even the most elementary business practices.

From this date, 1953, I must return to earlier times to mention Mama's efforts to write and to spell correctly. Mama was always embarrassed by her handwriting and that may have been part of why she did not want to write checks. Her self-consciousness extended to spelling as well and she made a determined effort to better it. From her earliest writings, as in her diary of her trip to Europe, to her last letters, a steady improvement took place. When Emma was at school in St. Louis

and then was a teacher there for several years, Mama had her send back lists of the words misspelled in her letters and then she would study the words carefully.

From the description of sights and smells expressed so emotionally in her European diary we know that Mama was keenly aware of the state of nature around her. On March 3, 1934 she wrote to Emma about her wedding anniversary. "Papa send me some gorgeus roses, twenty two of them. I put them in vases all over the house and oh! How good they smel and look. It is really beautiful, even in this house." We get so much information from that little word "even." It tells us how much Mama disliked the Broad Avenue house, that symbol of Papa's bankruptcy and of the painfulness of a new beginning.

In April, 1937 Mama wrote to Emma from the Third Avenue house. "It is raining terrible outside and it is sort of dreary. But nevertheless it is getting greener and greener. Our little crocuses are blooming around the trees and the tulips are shooting up, the lawns are looking well nurished and are prepairing to render beauty to the neighborhood. As I look out the window I see the rain still going strong and sure — can you hear it? But I notice some neighbors Magnolia tree opened up its buds and it is beautiful."

A month later she wrote again to Emma, "Yesterday Papa and I spent the whole day on the Raistown river. We were looking for a cottage for the whole summer. The sun, the river, the violets all added to the beautiful atmosphere of Spring. Papa was fishing too, but as usual, no fish cared to be hooked."

When I announced to my family the beginning of these memoirs Emma gave me Mama's letters which she had kept for so many years and I was amazed to see that Mama had called Emma "Honey." I could not remember ever having heard a "dear" or "darling" or "honey" or any other such endearment, and I was embarrassed to admit to myself the jealousy the letters engendered. Then the thought came to me that Emma's Yiddish name was Chanah, with the ch having the gutteral sound that is not present in English. Honey was what Mama had Anglicized Chanah to, except that it sounded more like Hahney. And so I got over my pique and reflected a bit on our names.

Belle and I were named for great-grandparents. My name is Fruma, which means religious or perhaps observant, and I chuckle a little at its inappropriateness. Belle's name, Blumeh, means flower. When she was being less than perfect in behavior she was called Blumkeh, and from this her older sisters derived Boomey. But of all the loving words Mama ever said the sweetest sound was the way she said Bleemaleh. Chanaleh was lovely and Florinkeh was nice, but the ch and the k lessened the musical sound no matter how much affection was implied. Bleemaleh with its m and two l's coupled with the mood that always was present in its use — Bleemaleh was a lilting melody when Mama said it.

More vividly than sights or sounds, smells can recreate other times and other places and Mama had an extraordinary sense of smell. She had a special love for lilacs because their fragrance always reminded

her of her girlhood in Latvia. When she walked through a wooded area she could always tell if mushrooms grew nearby from the smell in the air. Of course there was another side to this coin. She was aware of old cooking smells or dust that we, in our own homes, thought had been aired out completely, and she often told us when one of our babies needed to be changed, long before we even suspected it. Ruby's mother and Mama had little in common in personal characteristics but in this regard, an amazingly strong olfactory sense, they were exactly alike.

For nine years after Papa died Mama visited Birdie every year or so. Retirement towns began to develop during this period and Mama toyed with the idea of moving to Leisure World which had just been established near Seal Beach, California. She was terrified of making a major decision which would have such a far-reaching effect both financially and emotionally and she made up her mind and changed it dozens of times, a pattern she was to follow all the rest of her life.

Then Arnie Schulman's father, Clarence, bought an apartment in Leisure World, as did Leon Samuel, of Altoona, Dorothy Schulman Samuel's father-in-law, and that helped Mama to make up her mind. She reasoned that if these two men, whose business acumen she respected, were satisfied with the financial safety of this venture, she could trust their judgement. The emotional problems were even more overwhelming and Mama agonized for months over her decision. The pleasure of being near Birdie and in the lovely sunshine of California eventually won her heart and so she bought a three room apartment in the second unit of Leisure World. This community developed the reputation of being one of the most efficiently run retirement towns in the United States.

Having made her decision and signed the papers, Mama came home to get her affairs in order. She had to sell the house, to decide what to ship and what to dispose of, and to go through a long period of ambivalence, a torturous state indeed. She experienced all the mental anguish that such thoughts can produce and was torn between the fact that there were four children and fifty years of memories in the often snowy east and one child and the challenge of new experiences in the sun-filled west. We can scarcely imagine how traumatic this period must have been for her.

Finally the day came for her flight and I took Mama to the airport in Pittsburgh. At that time the collapsible passageways to the planes' entrances were not yet in use and the passengers had to say goodbye at the gate and then walk across an open area to the stairway leading to the doorway of the plane. I kissed Mama goodbye, both of us trying to be very matter-of-fact as we struggled with tears, and then I watched her walk away, her tan coat that I had always disliked blowing a bit in the wind. There was something so reluctant about the way she walked, something so doomed about the way she dragged her feet that even a stranger would have recognized that here was a most unwilling traveler.

Years later, after Mama had told me that her move to California at the age of seventy-two was one of the best decisions of her life, I

described how expressive her back had been to me and she said, "No wonder! When I walked toward that plane that day I felt as if I were going away to die." Seventeen years after Mama went to California when I expressed to Birdie my timidity about leaving my home of forty years in Kittanning and moving to Pittsburgh at the age of sixty-four, she settled my hesitation with a tart "I know a woman who moved across the continent at the age of seventy-two and managed to adapt."

In Long Beach the loving welcome of Birdie and Arnie and their four sons bridged the gap between the old life and the new. The Schulman family and their relatives and in-laws all extended themselves to help Mama settle comfortably into a totally new environment. Had she been an adventurous sort of person whose pattern of living had changed frequently, such a move would not have been so emotionally distressing. But Mama had never been a gambler with her future and had a strong streak of pessimism in her basic nature. She had been sheltered to a great degree most of her life and facing a completely new type of existence, no matter how lovingly supported, was an enormous undertaking. She bravely put her future on the line and won the gamble.

Leisure World, in nearby Seal Beach, was an excellent setting for her new life on the west coast. The complex was managed well and the interests and desires of its inhabitants were thoroughly discussed at community meetings. Inflation had not yet begun its crazy spiral and the monthly "rent" check that Mama paid also covered the use of the clubhouses, the swimming pools, the local bus that wound through the complex, and even part of any prescriptions ordered at the local medical center. The monthly amount was easily within her financial reach and Mama was thriftily comfortable.

She made friends, joined organizations (the one dearest to her was the Pioneer Women), attended Shul services at the clubhouse, and wrote her children in the east of all her activities. At one time she took Spanish lessons and at another she studied Hebrew. The Hebrew characters were not new to her since she knew Yiddish well and the characters are the same. She learned with particular delight that many of the words in her Yiddish vocabulary were really Hebrew and this was a delicious sensation for Mama because it gave her a certain "yichus." Aside from family status or prestige, yichus is the respect to which one is entitled because of one's Hebrew learning. Finding out that she knew many Hebrew words gave her more pleasure than any single other thing she ever learned in a classroom and she proudly told me many times about her newly discovered knowledge of Hebrew. But the mischievous smile that accompanied her words told me that she had not really lost her perspective about the yichus that her study of Hebrew had brought.

For a time Mama attended a Bible class but she never could understand that morality varies with culture. Whenever we would talk about the misdeeds of the people of the Bible she would bring up the story of Ruth. "How can we admire as a heroine a girl," Mama would say, "who would pretty herself up and then brazenly lie down in the bed of her boss, Boaz?" I explained that this behavior was morally acceptable in that era and in that culture and, in fact, that it was almost obligatory.

Mama would get a quizzical look on her face while seeming to accept my explanation. But a year later, if we came to the same subject, she would say the same thing and, of course, so would I.

Some years later Edith Rabin, Papa's younger sister, bought an apartment like Mama's about a block away. It seemed like an ideal situation because they had been children in Rezitza together and had always been friends as sisters-in-law. But oddly, their memories of their early life were completely different. Mama remembered many happy times while Edith could bring to mind only poverty and misery and she refused to talk about that period in her life. Even **Fiddler on the Roof** gave her no pleasure because it forced her to remember the squalor and deprivation of her early years. All the wondrous beauty of the music and the universal truth of the plot could not blot out Edith's long-held anger and bitterness.

The two women genuinely loved each other but they fought bitterly when one irritated the other. Then both of them would lose several nights' sleep until one would call up the other with an apology and their mingled tears would bring them together again. Edith was the sort who constantly told other people what to do about the small details of everyday life and Mama resented advice about how to manage her kitchen. When Mama would invite Edith for dinner it was with the express understanding that Edith was not to get involved in the cleanup. Many a possible battle was avoided by means of this pre-arranged truce.

Sometimes the degree of their anger was unbelievable. A crazy incident occurred when Birdie and Arnie were about to take me to the airport, with Mama and Edith going along to give me a grand sendoff. Mama had a very large abdomen. She was wearing a suit and the skirt had ridden up and was not able to fall back into place by itself. Edith walked into the room where we had gathered just before leaving, reached over and yanked Mama's skirt down to where it belonged. Mama flushed hotly and ran over to Edith, bent over to the bottom of her skirt and yanked it hard while furiously saying some appropriate words. We got into the car and rode in frozen silence, scarcely able to make the necessary small talk at my departure.

The whole scene had a hysterical quality that was insanely funny but Birdie, Arnie and I had too much respect for the women to laugh at what they took so seriously. Edith claimed that she was psychologically unable not to run the lives of others because the compulsion was too strong. Mama said that she could not restrain her anger beyond a certain point and then she just had to lash out in furious, uncontrolled rage. In calmer moments they talked about their difficulties and Mama said wisely to Edith, "We are like a married couple; we irritate each other but we love each other and we need each other. So we will go on putting up with each other." I am certain that Edith agreed with her. In spite of this agreement neither of them changed her ways and they "put up with each other" until Edith died in 1977. In spite of Edith's irritating ways and Mama's flaring anger the strongest feeling they had for each other was a deep abiding love.

We always made a great affair of Mama's birthdays when she

reached a major milestone. When she was seventy we had a beautiful dinner at the Penn Alto Hotel in Altoona and most of the children and grandchildren contributed in some way to make it a gala party indeed. But Mama did not seem to be truly enjoying it. I wondered if my imagination were suggesting this but, as it turned out, my suspicion was right. Mama was not having the good time we had planned for her. Shortly after the event she told me that she had not wanted that party because she did not like broadcasting to the whole community just how old she was! The very reason for our celebrating was exactly what she wanted to keep hidden. So much for our civilization's cult of youth.

After Mama's move to California all of us visited the west coast as often as we could, and at Mama's eightieth birthday Belle and Egon and Arnold and Selma arranged their visits so as to coincide with the birthday celebration. The party was at Birdie's house and because Emma and I were not there Birdie sent us a complete account of the food, the color scheme, the details of how the dinner was served, and most of all the program.

Arnold, after Arnie Schulman's welcome, introduced the performers and did a masterful job. Egon read my poem in Danny Kaye's style and Belle sang her own parody to **Der Greeneh Cousineh,** the tune a reminder of Jewish immigration early in the century. Birdie brought back the memories of the cottage in her song about her favorite things and then our least favorite things at Cypher Beach to the tune, naturally, of **My Favorite Things.** Selma read excerpts from letters that Mama had written long ago about her trip in 1934 and that Emma had saved. The four Schulman boys sang their own adaptation of **You Must Have Been A Beautiful Baby** with **Grandma, You Must Have Been A Zayer Shaineh Maidel,** and Mama ended the program with a lovely speech that no one had the foresight to record.

This time she really enjoyed her birthday party. Perhaps she had changed her mind about letting everyone know her age because she had come to California late in life and had an identity there only as an old lady. Perhaps becoming an octogenarian had placed Mama in a rarified atmosphere where the American obsession with youth simply could not intrude. Despite the physical infirmities that were humiliatingly visited upon her, Mama had decided to accept her age and to enjoy whatever pleasures it brought to her. She even learned to be comfortable with that condescending phrase "Senior Citizen" which she used to detest. She had come to share with her children their pride in her years of grace.

For Mama's eighty-third birthday Belle and I planned to celebrate with her even though it was not a big birthday. Months before the date of our trip we discussed the impossibility of finding a suitable gift. We wanted to give Mama something truly special but it could not be jewelry or stationery or a nightgown or any of the things that had been so lovingly given on so many birthdays. There had to be something brand new, something never thought of before.

Then a brilliant idea struck us. We would give her a concert!

I searched through stacks of sheet music and found a two violin and piano arrangement of Mozart's **Eine Kleine Nachtmusik.** I mailed

the first violin part to Birdie and the piano part to Belle, and kept the second violin part for myself. Then we set to work to bring back some of the proficiency that we had had before marriage and babies and other interests interfered with the daily practicing needed for music making.

All of us were rusty and well aware that the best we could do would be barely passable, but we worked hard in Long Beach, in Chambersburg, and in Kittanning to tone up long unused muscles while trying to produce respectable sounds. The brown tender spot reappeared on my neck and my fingertips became terribly painful until they were properly calloused. Gradually the discomfort lessened and when the travel date arrived I could listen to my playing without cringing.

I carried my violin on the plane and was glad that it was not a cello, which requires a ticket and a seat of its own. A fellow passenger delighted me by asking if I were playing with the Los Angeles Symphony that night, so at least I looked like a real violinist.

At Birdie's house we had a brief rehearsal and then Arnie brought Mama. After all the hugs and kisses, without telling her why, we had her sit in a big chair, front row center, in the dining room and then we presented our birthday gift. We set up the stands, tuned the violins and played the **Eine Kleine Nachtmusik** with its fanfare-like opening, its dainty minuet, its lovely romance, and its lively rondo. What Mama thought of as her middle-aged little girls recreated a scene from long ago we could not really tell. However touched she might have been she must have been tempted to say, "It sounds a little better and if you practice it will improve."

For Mama's eighty-fifth birthday, Belle, with the help of a good friend, Mary Lyon, wrote a complete script in which she used songs and skits written by others in the family as well as by herself and Mary. We four sisters had a gift for writing parodies that carefully respected the music we borrowed, and we had used this gift for Shul and Sisterhood and Hadassah programs in our various towns. In March, 1975 we pooled our collective experience and produced what amounted to the story of Mama's life put to the tune of well-known songs of various periods and origins.

I must put in a word about how to read Belle's program which follows. Reading a parody of a song can be particularly unsatisfying and even irritating if one merely reads the words. But if they are read with the tune going through one's head and with the emphasis being placed on the correct syllables, the result can be a delight. These words fit the music and each emphasized word falls on the emphasized note. Do try, as you read the parodies, to fit the words to the tunes, and you will get some idea of the joyful romp through Mama's life that the celebrants enjoyed.

> *"Hello, everybody. In this family we never just have a birthday — a big one. We always have to do something else too, and this is it.*
>
> *Tonight's presentation is being brought to you by an all star cast, literally assembled almost from coast to coast, whose only*

rehearsal consists of the ride from the airport to here this afternoon, and is guaranteed to be the corniest entertainment you've ever been subjected to. But we hope you'll like it anyway and enjoy, enjoy with us.

In case you're wondering just where I fit in, I am Belle, Mama's middle child — and did you know that when I was first born, my father thought I was a boy — for three whole days —. Now, that's quite a trick. QUITE A TRICK! And I've repeated that phrase because if you don't know it, one part of our songs won't make sense. Anyway, it happened and I've heard about it all my life — and I've always wondered whether it affected me somehow.

Our offering is composed of a few of the things which are important in Mama's life — and we're going to need some help at the beginning and at the end — so when I give you the signal — HELP!"

Belle leads. Tune: **Those Were The Days**. Audience joins in on signal with la-la-las.

It was in the year of eighteen-ninety
March sixteenth, the date of your debut,
Since that day you've made our pathway shiny,
We all owe so very much to you.

This is your special date,
That's why we're here to state
When you were made, they threw the mold away.
You're quite unique, you know,
Without you there's no show,
So take a bow, you are the star today.

All — La la la la, etc.

You came here from Latvia in Europe
Joining your beloved from afar,
Some girls bring to marriage a big dowry,
You brought pillows and your sam-o-var.

You made our lives worthwhile
You taught us how to smile
And even taught us how to play tricks.
On you we still depend, you're grandma, mother, friend,
That's why we love you, 'cause you're such a brick!

All — La la la la, etc.

Belle, Arn, and Birdie sing. Tune: **You've Got to Have Heart**

Then came number one
Family life has now begun,
Diapers, dishes, dinner, so much to do,
Depending on you, but it was fun.
Then came number two —
Second little girl for you.

Very shortly there's a third on its way,
A madel with eyes of grey.

Now you're wishing for a boychild,
And your wishes soon came true —
All the family seemed to go wild.
You relaxed — but you're not through, there's still another, (spoken) NOT a brother,
Our hostess today (point to Birdie) was the last to come your way,
We're so happy we turned out to be five
Just look how we manage things today —
'Cause we add up to five!

Belle, Arn, and Birdie sing. Tune: **Dearie**

Mama, do you remember baking
Bulkas for us to eat
At our Saturday movie treat
Fairbanks, Chaplin, and Valentino
Made us laugh and then cry,
Test your memory, oh
Mama, do you recall those shows pro-
Duced by the Arbeiter Ring
(talk) Some of us would play and sing.
Cheery, seldom dreary,
In the good old days gone by,
Do you remember, you should remember
'Cause you're a little older than I.

Mama, do you remember when we
All went to Cypher Beach
Anything else was out of reach,
With that special two-seater building
Made by the W P A
Test your memory, oh
Mama, do you recall when we made
Butter from Besser's cream,
(talk) Somebody sure had a lot of steam!
Cheery, seldom dreary,
In the good old days gone by,
Do you remember, you should remember,
'Cause you're a little older than I.

Mama, do you remember Papa
Fixing his famous roast
While we all burnt the toast
Cooking with our kerosene stove that
Brought a tear to the eye,
Test your memory, oh

Mama, do you recall Papa
Had someone build a boat —
(talk) How in the world did that thing float?
Cheery, seldom dreary
In the good old days gone by.
Do you remember, you should remember,
'Cause you're a little older than I.

Mama, we know the past has brought you
Many important things.
Now, see what the future brings,
Sitting there in all of your splendor
Catching everyone's eye,
Test your memory, oh
Mama, it seems that you've been taking
Drinks from the Fountain of Youth
Everyone knows we're telling the truth!
Cheery, seldom dreary,
Just like the good old days gone by,
Do you remember, you should remember,
'Cause you're much younger than —
(to each other) She's much younger than —
You're much younger than I.

*"Well, Mama's children finally all got married — and now we're going to hear from a few of the in-laws to tell us what **that** is like."*

Egon, Selma, and Arnie sing. Tune: **Bei Mir Bis Du Shein**

Our Mother-in-law has nary a flaw
We know 'cause we're married to her kin.
She taught them to cook —
To study their books
And what a predicament we're in.

We keep the highest values, never fail to be precise,
And even when they're nasty (point to spouses)
We still try to treat them nice.
We know they're like you
So wise and so true —
And that's why we really love **you** too.

*"One of Mama's principles has always been: "Keep on learning" and another was "You're never too old to study." As proof, we can mention her recent forays into the realm of Spanish lessons, Bible study, and Hebrew lessons — Yes, that's the one — and if Mama were singing now, she might sing **this** song."*

The three couples sing. Tune: **Brush Up Your Shakespeare** (from **Kiss Me Kate**)

Brush up your Hebrew,
Start working right now,
Brush up your Hebrew
And the youngsters you will wow.

If your goal is to read from the Siddur —
Learn a little and add to it later —
Just recite an occasional Kiddush —
It's more fun than a mouthful of Yiddish —

You'll look forward to Friday night service —
Soon you'll daven without being nervous —
Brush up your Hebrew
And we'll all be proud.

"And after the marriages of her children, what's the logical step? You guessed it. Grandchildren — 18 of them, to be exact, and now there are also 15 great grandchildren. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending on your point of view) they aren't all here, but those who are, know how they feel about their grandma, in no uncertain terms, and here they are."

David, Marty and Jay sing. Tune: **If You Knew Susie**

If you knew Grandma, like we know Grandma
Oh, oh, oh what a gal!
While TV's playing, she is crocheting,
Af — ghans, keeping every finger "dreying"
Always dressy, neat as a pin
Never showing, what a state she might be in
If you knew Grandma, like we know Grandma —
Oh, oh what a ga-al!

If you knew Grandma, like we know Grandma,
Oh, oh, oh what a gal —
She's our heart breaker and some cake baker,
(and) Lat-kes, not to mention taigel maker —
We all love her, you bet your life,
If she'll let us, we will take her for our wife.
If you knew Grandma like we know Grandma,
Oh, oh what a ga-al!

"And now we've come to our finale. Our big finish consists of two songs, and please join in and repeat the last one with us. The words are near your plates.

We're slightly prejudiced we know, but we feel there aren't enough things to say about Mama —"

The three couples and the three grandchildren sing.
Tune: **One of These Days**

For — she's — just

One of these gals that you meet now and then —
East coast to west coast she made lots of friends.
Never pretentious but always sincere
Truly devoted to things she holds dear (bum bum bum)
Fam'ly and friends are so dear to her heart
Teaching us how we should all do our part,
All of the good things that make life worthwhile,
She is one of those wonderful gals.

All sing: (Listen for key change for **L'chayim**)

To Sylvia, l'chayim
A toast to the star of the day.
Just like the simchas you had before,
we wish that many more
Happy events come your way,
To you l'chayim
To mother, to grandma, to friend,
We're hoping we made you smile today,
Made you feel young and gay,
Happy birthday, — l'chayim.

In November 1978, I lost my husband and for some of Ruby's final weeks and even for a short time after his death I did not talk to Mama on the phone. Always vulnerable to the sound of her voice and with endless tears invariably close to the surface, I refused to talk to Mama because of the pain that the expression of my grief would have brought to her. Perhaps I caused her more pain by shutting her out of the most traumatic event in my life. Love is, after all, a sharing of pain as well as of joy and she would have wanted to comfort me.

The following January I visited her and Birdie and the circle of those with whom I needed to share my grief was complete, but my memories of that visit are blurred. Those who have mourned or who have studied mourning will understand why. The anaesthesia of shock was still in effect and so I have little to record of Mama at that time.

The years were taking their toll and Mama thought a lot about her death and the circumstances in which she found herself. As each of us visited her she would show us her financial records, a marvel of accomplishment after her faltering beginning in 1952. Then she announced that since four of her children lived in Pennsylvania she would move back east so that "Birdie would not have to handle the mess by herself" as she put it. She had each of us inquire about nursing homes in our respective areas and then we reported our findings to her. To each possibility she had one answer, "Well, it's a thought." And then she decided to set the whole idea aside and to remain independently alone in her own home.

Several other times we went through the same procedure of gathering information and each time Mama put off making a decision. Then she broke her arm and after the initial recovery period at Birdie's she was settled again in her apartment, but with practical nurses around the clock. Everything those women did or said seemed to rub her the wrong way and that irritation, plus their enormous wages, kept Mama in a state of seething anger. So the frailty of her body coupled with her internal bitterness made her recuperation a difficult one indeed. Her anger was so intense at these practical nurses and at the speed at which their wages were draining her capital that when they told Birdie that they had to have more money, Birdie did not dare to tell Mama because she feared it would bring on a heart attack. So we each contributed to the raise with the stipulation to the nurses that Mama not be told.

She worked persistently at the exercises prescribed for her broken arm and was able in time to grip more firmly with the damaged hand than with the other one. But her long-standing rage combined with the physical blow to her whole system had depleted her limited supply of strength. Finally Mama accepted the fact that she no longer had a choice as to how she wanted to live.

In September Arnold learned that the Penn Alto Hotel had a vacancy in October of a two-bedroom apartment and he suggested it to Mama. She made up her mind and changed it a hundred times until Arnold told her that the manager of the hotel had to have an answer because he had a waiting list. Mama felt the door of life closing in her face. She tried mightily to hold it back but her eighty nine years pushed the door ever more firmly against her failing strength and she knew that the Leisure World part of her life must end. Reluctantly she agreed and Arnold signed a one-year's lease. Mama had said that she wanted to see the hills of Pennsylvania again and now she would get her wish.

Birdie arranged for me to fly from Pittsburgh to Los Angeles on Friday and for Mama to fly back with me on the following Tuesday. She would take with her just the clothes she needed for the immediate future and the other things that she wanted were to be shipped later. Birdie would sell the apartment and take care of everything else that had been left behind.

We spent Saturday just talking and then on Sunday, when Birdie and I had thought that we would help to select clothes and other items, Mama refused to even talk about what to take with her, as if perhaps the bitter truth would go away if she refused to face it. She went over boxes of old birthday and Mother's Day cards, acting as if nothing unusual were going on, even as she dropped into a wastebasket the seventeen years' accumulation of expressions of love. In spite of our understanding the powerful undercurrents of emotion and the enormous finality of this weekend, Birdie and I were exasperated, but we cooperated quietly because Mama was immovable, so we spent the day as she wished. Now I understood why Birdie had arranged for our trip to Pittsburgh to follow my arrival so quickly. Had the plan not been so explicit Mama would have delayed our departure indefinitely.

On Monday the clothes were selected and packed and Mama and I went to bed. At 5:00 A.M. after a sleepless night she got up and washed; then she rested. At 5:30 she put on her underwear; then she rested. At 6:00 she put on her corset and then she rested. And so she paced herself, using up her small store of energy and then replenishing it with what she called "a lie-down." By the time Birdie came for us she was ready and she marched out of her much-loved apartment with a brave purposeful step and without a backward glance.

The goodbye at the airport was sad, of course, but intentionally brief, and with Birdie's promise to come east very soon still in her ears, Mama boarded the plane with me and we took off on the last leg of Mama's nearly ninety-year journey. On the plane we chatted casually. After an hour or so I put down the armrests between a row of empty seats and Mama had a reasonably comfortable nap.

While Mama slept my mind raced. What should I do if she slipped away during her nap? Would I tell the stewardess or would I be like Ma Joad in **Grapes of Wrath** and keep it a secret until we arrived? What were the moral implications? Thoughts like these whirled through my mind and were mixed with feelings of guilt for having such thoughts. But Mama woke up, refreshed somewhat, and when we reached Pittsburgh at night she was at her very best, perky and excited about being met by dear ones.

Emma and Hilly were there with a wheelchair and my Lissa and Emma's Tela were waiting as well. It was decided that the best plan was for Emma and Hilly to take Mama directly to their home in Hollidaysburg and for Lissa and Tela to take me home to my apartment. While I was disappointed at not being able to show Mama my new home in Pittsburgh, I could not but agree that the fewer complications in her travels the better.

Mama stayed at Emma's for several weeks until the apartment in the Penn Alto was prepared and Emma and Arnold ran an ad for a housekeeper-practical nurse. While Emma was on a grandchild-sitting assignment I stayed with Mama at Emma's home where Arnold brought the applicants to be interviewed. Not one was worth considering until June Crum appeared. Her pleasant demeanor and her experience as a practical nurse much earlier in her life left no question in my mind or Arnold's that she would be a wise choice. Then, in accordance with a plan pre-arranged by Mama we summoned her from the bedroom and as soon as she and June shook hands we could feel their rapport and mutual respect.

Mama was established at the Penn Alto with a living-dining room, a kitchen, two bedrooms and two baths. The building was old and the furniture somewhat shabby, but the apartment was bright and airy. The arrival of her own lamps and end tables and pictures helped to make it homey but there is no denying that modern elegance was lacking. However, Mama was in the center of town where the possibility of being visited was the greatest and she was near to four of her children, living in her own place and not in a nursing home.

Without Selma's help Mama's settling in would have been far more difficult. Since Emma did not drive, it fell to Selma to do the thousand errands required in setting up a household. She made herself available almost every day, shopping for Mama and bringing to her the numerous small items that were missing for her comfort. Even when Mama was cranky or disappointed or out of sorts in general she was aware that the devoted attention of her daughter-in-law was indeed a rare blessing.

After the initial adjustment and after the exciting stimulus of the new situation had worn off Mama began to brood about how she had reached her new life-style and she did not conceal from me her anger at the way Birdie and I had so quickly effected the change after she had agreed to the move. Much experience with how difficult it always was for Mama to come to a decision had made it necessary for us to take the responsibility but that was impossible to explain to Mama. She had been managed, an idea that was always especially repugnant to her. "You took me like from a fire!" she reproached me a dozen times and I could not answer. When some small item of convenience was missing or when she could not find a certain comb or toiletry item she repeated this angrily. But it was the same old story. She was angry at life and her own incapacities and expressed her anger by railing at us.

June took care of Mama with genuine affection and skill and tried hard to learn to make Jewish dishes according to Mama's instructions. The teaching of Jewish cooking and the explanation of Jewish customs and holidays were an unexpected source of pleasure to both June and Mama. But there were times when anger took over rationality and Mama explicitly demanded that June leave the room when any of us visited. June, to her great credit, took no offense and quickly retired to her bedroom. When I tried to smooth over what I expected to be much-ruffled feelings, June always said, "Don't worry, I understand your mother and it is all right."

Mama's hatred of being managed affected her financial life, naturally. She controlled her checkbook and said, "I pay the bills and I call the shots." But when she was told of the new high interest rates in 1979 and that it would be advisable for her to change her investments so as to take advantage of them she said, "Why should I have to make this kind of decision at my age?" She wanted to call the shots, as she put it, yet feared to make financial decisions. However, with the gentle guidance of Arnold she did make changes without ceasing to be in charge. There were two warring forces struggling within Mama, the undeniable need for help with her mundane everyday physical needs and the powerful desire to retain her identity as a person of mind and spirit. At times the inner battle made her behave somewhat disagreeably, but it was plain to all of us that this very "rage against the dying of the light", this refusal to surrender to the besieging forces of age and infirmity, were what kept her in a home of her own instead of in a nursing home.

Mama's ninetieth birthday was approaching and all of us began to work on a program for the party. Emma and I spent a lot of time writing new parodies and deciding what old ones should be repeated.

We wrote some fine words to go with **It's A Grand Night For Singing, Downtown, I Don't Know Why I Love You Like I Do, Happy Talk,** and my proudest accomplishment, Yiddish words to **Tumbalalaika.** We never had the party for Mama's ninetieth birthday on March 16.

Mama never liked to sit back into a soft chair but usually remained perched on the front half. She never sat straight in a car, sitting slightly twisted so that fastening a seat belt became a hassle. She took a lot of kidding about her awkward-looking position but said that that was the way she liked it. On February 14, while sitting on the corner of her bed, she lost her balance and fell to the floor, fracturing her hip. While in the hospital she was heard to say, "I thought I was an intelligent woman. Wasn't that a dumb thing to do?"

The doctors of Altoona Hospital put a pin in Mama's hip and she got along remarkably well. Twice during Mama's short hospital stay Belle found time in her busy schedule to come from Chambersburg and late in the week following the operation I spent the whole weekend in Altoona not only to visit but also to give Emma some relief. Arnold, desperately in need of a vacation, had been encouraged by all of us to take some time off and he had gone to Florida.

That Saturday that I spent with Mama will remain in my mind forever. Her hearing had vanished completely, perhaps because of medication or shock, and Mama was enveloped in utter silence. No sound penetrated the insulation that cut her off from the world of sound. Concurrently with this frustrating total deafness, Mama wanted to talk and she talked unceasingly until I left at around 10:00 o'clock. She told me firmly that she was not afraid to die and said that I was to be responsible for the distribution of her small remaining store of household and personal items. To each grandchild his gifts were to be returned and to one or two friends a memento was to be given. The two fancy urn-shaped vases that Papa had bought long ago were to be mine because I had never received any special household item. Oddly, I had never really liked those vases but now that they are part of my own possessions, I consider them to be dear treasures.

Mama talked of her life as if she had an obligation to get everything said before it was too late. For one startling moment she lost touch with reality and asked me if I ever knew her mother. I shook my head and she came back to the real world without wasting another moment. I braided her thin hair and she told me the whole saga of Papa and his reaction to what she did with her hair, as I have recounted earlier.

After a rest the talking began again with "Where will you gather? Will you go to Emma's house?" I understood that she wanted to know about her funeral and I somehow made her aware that Emma's was too small and that we would probably meet at Arnold's. Then she sat up and, shaking her forefinger at me as if I were a young child, she fixed me with her tired eyes and said, "I want you all to dress mentchlech, but not too flashy." Mama, who had raised her children, now in their fifties and sixties, to be totally respectful of their elders, was still teaching them how to behave! The possibility that the conservative Bermans might overdress for their mother's funeral was so unlikely as

to make me smile, but still Mama wanted us to dress "mentchlech", well enough not to disgrace her. She went over the population of Altoona and told me exactly which individuals to call. Then she insisted that I call Arnold and Rabbi Kaber, also in Florida, to come home at once and raged that I did not make the calls on the spot. I guiltily promised to do so that night, even though I knew I would not.

The next day Mama was almost mute and I felt without any doubt that she was disappointed to find herself alive. She had accepted the imminence of death, had made her peace with life, had taken care of details so as to leave the fewest complications for her children and then had found that she had to face more pain and difficulties. Her silence seemed to express a stunned disbelief. I went sadly back to Pittsburgh.

On Tuesday afternoon, February 24, 1980, Emma called to say that Mama was gone, probably the victim of a blood clot resulting from the hip operation. Instead of being surrounded by loved ones as she had planned, Mama died with none of us present, suddenly and almost instantaneously.

The funeral was delayed until Friday so that Arnold and Selma could get back from Florida and Birdie, Arnie and Jay, their youngest, could come from California. To Rabbi Gary Klein of Temple Beth Israel in Altoona, who scarcely knew Mama, we gave the programs and songs of the birthday parties and from them he was able to get a feeling of what kind of woman Mama had been. Little did we realize when we were writing our birthday tributes how invaluable they would be in helping to create the eulogy that so accurately reflected Mama's life and personality.

Her death gave each of us an intense awareness of life because it left us with no barrier between us and our own mortality. When we gathered at Arnold's home after the funeral, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and friends, we did not mourn Mama's death. Instead we shared with each other a great joy as we celebrated her life.

If it is true that "God gave us memory so that we could have roses in December" then my house is filled with roses every day.

EULOGY FOR SYLVIA BERMAN
February 29, 1980
by Rabbi Gary Klein

The years have shed their days and the days have scattered their hours. One by one, they have fallen into the lap of eternity, like autumn leaves falling from the tree of life. The long passing of the hours, nearly 90 years, warm and memorable years, has brought to a close the life of Sylvia Berman. The veil of eternity has parted to receive her soul and your hearts are left behind in sadness.

I know that everyone who is here today feels as if his own being is somewhat diminished. And I also know that each of you will miss Sylvia Berman, for you loved her. Yet her death does not mark her end, for she has left you a beautiful legacy. And it is to this legacy that you must turn for consolation. Although she has parted from our midst, her memory will continue to live with those whose lives she touched. Her children, Emma, Florence, Belle, Arnold and Birdie; their spouses; her 18 grandchildren and her 18 great-grandchildren; as well as her many friends will always remember her for she was truly a wonderful woman.

The legacy that she has bequeathed is most precious. It provided basic and fundamental lessons about living. All of us can learn from the way she lived. By way of example she taught those who were close to her to revere life and to enjoy life; to cherish family, to seek knowledge and to respect the dignity of others. She imbued in her children and her grandchildren an appreciation for the beautiful in the world. She had an intrinsic sense of right and wrong and dignity; yet she didn't allow her sense of propriety to lead to stodginess or rigidity. She was a modern woman. She brought the world into her life with books, travel, study and warm relationships with other people.

She had many friends in California and Altoona. I remember the sense of excitement and anticipation that was felt in this community when people heard that she was returning here.

She was a committed Jew, a dedicated wife of 40 years and a loving mother and grandmother. Her children were her joy. She took pride in their achievements and received much pleasure from their happiness. She was dedicated to them and they to her. Although she was independent and self-sufficient and maintained her own apartment until about a year ago, like all elderly she required some care. Fortunately, Birdie was close at hand.

She loved her children's spouses as she loved her own children and her sons-in-law and daughter-in-law all treated her with the reverence due their mother. Her grandchildren and great-grandchildren were an important part of her life just as she was so much a part of theirs. They, like many young people, were attracted to Mrs. Berman and they confided in her and engaged in serious and stimulating discussions with her.

For each grandchild and great-grandchild she crocheted a beautiful afghan, every afghan having the same magnificent pattern. That pattern

became almost a family emblem, a symbol of the family cohesiveness that she considered to be so essential. She felt a commitment to every member of the family and throughout her life she maintained her commitment to remember the special events in everyone's life. In recent years this meant sending 51 birthday greetings and gifts annually to children, grandchildren and others.

Her commitment to learning was exemplary. She came to this country from Latvia without any knowledge of the English language. Yet all who knew her can attest to the fact that she overcame that handicap exceedingly well. Later she studied Spanish and Hebrew, Bible and Jewish theology; and despite difficulty hearing, continued attending classes until very recently. She passed this appreciation for learning on to her children and grandchildren as we can clearly see through their achievements and interests.

In Mrs. Berman's view the acquisition of knowledge alone was not enough. One had to use that knowledge to its fullest, finding ways to touch other people's lives with it and to create joy and fulfillment for oneself as well. From her earliest days as a member of the Arbiter Ring there was an attempt to enjoy oneself and to provide joy for others. I know that her children recall even the early vacations that the family spent together. And I know that she maintained this commitment to live life to the fullest throughout her years. I also know that she bequeathed this value to her offspring. For her children, grandchildren and all of their spouses are vibrant creative people, who do not allow life to pass them by. Their lives are characterized by an appreciation of music and drama, photography and travel. There is recreation and there is also service to others. Many of those things were part of her life as well.

I have had the privilege of reading the texts of a skit and a birthday tribute prepared by her children for their mother. One of those skits begins with these words, "In this family we never just have a birthday, we always have something else too". In other words, events in the lives of members of the Berman Family never went unnoticed. Instead they were highlighted and observed in such a manner as to create beautiful memories. Mrs. Berman knew how to create memories and she bequeathed this rare talent to her children.

I remember the celebration that preceded Joel and Kathy's wedding, a celebration complete with a magnificent slide and musical presentation prepared by Arnold and Selma and Belle and Egon. Although Mrs. Berman was not able to be present, she was very much a part of everyone's thoughts that evening. And I sensed a feeling of gratitude toward her for imbuing in her children the approach to life that was responsible for the joy that all of us were experiencing.

Sylvia Berman bequeathed so many gifts to those who knew her. I am sure that her entire family feels privileged to have had such a mother, for it is clear that she had qualities that all of you strive to emulate. The various tributes presented to her over the years attest to this, and to your gratitude to her for her many gifts of the spirit.

Perhaps a fitting tribute to Mrs. Berman today, would be to share a letter written by her daughter Florence on behalf of the entire Berman Family on the occasion of Sylvia's 85th birthday.

Dear Mama,

How many people 85 years old get a love letter? Yet that is exactly what this is. We love you for your strength. You represent to your children, their children and their children's children, the basis of all we build on. Your strength has established a foundation for all of the values that we live by and has pointed out to us the treasures that are really worth taking into account.

We love you for your emotional frankness. You have shown us, in letters and cards, that it is not impossible to say deep-felt loving words that warm the heart, and if this letter brings on a tear, remember that the writer learned from a master, yourself.

We love you for your alert intellect which keeps all of us open to learning what is not directly related to making a living or making a home. There are not many grandchildren who share with pleasure their intellectual activity with an 85 year old but our children are among the few who are fortunate.

We love you for the pride you take in yourself in the physical person you show to the world. From the way you look in body and in the bearing that shows your spirit, we have learned the quality of self-respect, a quality the world is quick to recognize. We love you for your lack of perfection, for not always being sweet and in even temper, and for now and then showing a weakness or two. Without the yeast of variation, the dough would be flat, dull and not very tasty.

In short, Mama, we love you because you are you.

Our religion teaches that the memory of the righteous shall be for a blessing. The memory of Sylvia Berman will be for a blessing. We rise in silent tribute to her memory.

THE FAMILY OF ABRAHAM AND SYLVIA BERMAN

PAPA'S PARENTS

Jacob Bookmuz

Ettle Metter

PAPA'S SIBLINGS

Lena Perlman

Reba Broodno

Harry Berman

Edith Rabin

William Berman

Anna Waldman

MAMA'S PARENTS

Aaron Sholom Gordin

Brocha Liebeh Cahan

MAMA'S SIBLINGS

Hendel Gordin

Tsalel Gordin

Chaya Slava Shneer

Shmuel Gordin

THE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM AND SYLVIA BERMAN

EMMA AND HILLIS COHN

Tela and Joseph Zasloff
Anne, Eva, Beth, Karen

Burton and Miriam Prizent
Laura, Rachel, Sheila

Howard and Nicole Nakash
Natalie, Stephanie

Marilyn and Larry Posner
Joseph

BELLE AND EGON GARTENBERG

Valerie and Charles Sayre

Vicki and David Ginsberg
Sara

Andrew and Linda Boswell

FLORENCE AND REUBEN KARP

Norman and Nancy Friedman
Susan, Michael, Jordan

Diane and Irving Bloom
Cara, Joel, Ellen, Steven

Elissa and Charles Hirsh
Erin, Amanda

ARNOLD AND SELMA SLONIMSKY

Stephen

Joel and Kathy McCoy
Laura

Deborah

Alan and Debra Zegas

BIRDIE AND ARNOLD SCHULMAN

David and Barbara Effros

Avi and Eve Ben-Ora

Martin

Jay