

# An Autobiography

by Jack Belkin



Volume 1

One Man's Family:  
A View from the Bottom



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## Introduction

Neither my Mother nor my Father talked about their childhood in Europe, or even about their early days in the U.S., maybe because my parents wanted to be assimilated in the American experience, distancing themselves from their status as "greenhorns", that is, immigrants just off the boat, and perhaps the only word I ever heard my Dad use with some contempt in his voice, or maybe for reasons I can't even guess at. In any case, the family history is limited to the memories of their five children. I don't want my family's history to be interrupted again and so these pages are intended for my children.

These pages also may be the only link between my children and their paternal grandparents since my Mother died when I was a teenager, and my Father died when my older two children were five and three.

The only grandparent I knew was my maternal grandmother- but I knew her only as a sickly old woman, who spoke mostly in Yiddish, a language I never learned. I hope that if my children have children, these pages will help them to know their Grandparents better than I knew mine.

I also intend these pages for my siblings. Although, as the youngest, I can relate only events that they lived through, each of us experiences events in a singular way, and maybe if I share my experience, they will document theirs.

## Chapter 1

My oldest three siblings, two brothers and a sister, were born in a six year span. Six years later another brother was born, and four years after that I was born. I can presume without hint by any word or action, that the arrival of these last two children, which stretched already strained resources, was viewed as a mixed blessing.

I was born during the height, or perhaps more accurately the depths, of the Depression, although I suspect that the course of the Depression's hardships varied by family. Several years before I was born, my family had lost a house they were purchasing; the last house they were to own as a couple. They were living in an apartment at the time of my birth. They moved soon after, perhaps prompted by my arrival, but more likely just continuing a pattern of moving from rented home to rented home that my brothers and sister talk about experiencing throughout their childhood, and a pattern that would persist during my early years.

They moved to a single family house in the same neighborhood that is known in my family's lore as "The Shack". I have only vague

memories of that house, but considering the quality of houses I do remember, it must have been singularly bad to earn that sobriquet.

The first house I remember well was at 7223 Mt. Vernon street, an address I seem to know without having to remember. The address must have been impressed into my brain so that I would always be able to tell a stranger where I lived, although that was totally unnecessary, since my only recollection of ever being alone was when I waited for my brother to pick me up after school at the first grade room.

The house was on the high side of the street-in Pittsburgh every street has a high side and a low side-and there were a number of steps leading to the porch. When you entered the house, there was a long hallway leading to the kitchen in the back. There were two rooms along the left of the hall with sliding wooden doors at their hall entrances.

The front room was a living room, although I think it housed a dining room set. I remember the upholstered chairs that served as a bed when my sister had pneumonia, but more memorable was the table with eight legs that seemed massive to a small child crawling amongst them.

I can only imagine that my Mother must have treasured that set, because it was the only furniture that I remember moving with us to the next house.

The middle room may have been intended as a dining room, but was used as a bedroom. There was a large bed that I slept in with my Mother and Father, and a "hospital" bed, with cranks to raise and lower the foot and head, that my brother, who was diagnosed as having rheumatic fever, slept in.

The big bed I slept in had a single long pillow stretching across the width of the bed that we called a "bolster". I've never heard that word used by anyone outside the family or at anytime since. I don't know if it was a correct English word, or some corruption due to my parent's heavy Yiddish accents, or a Western Pennsylvanian colloquialism.

Whatever it is properly called, I loved the smell of my Father that permeated the end he slept on.

My Mother's mother, my Mother's divorced sister, and the two daughters of another of my Mother's sisters, who had died several years before, lived on the second floor. There was a separate kitchen on the second floor, but there was only one bathroom in the house to serve the eleven people that lived there. That included my oldest two brothers who shared a bedroom on the third floor, and my sister, who slept in another room on the third floor.

As strange as it seems to me now, I have no memory of playing with anyone outside of my family, nor playing outside, except on the front porch, and once crawling into an igloo that my brothers dug into a snowdrift in the backyard. But there was a radio on the table next to the bed and that radio provided endless entertainment.

In the morning there was a show called "The Breakfast Club" with Don McNeil, from Chicago. From mid-morning to mid-afternoon there was a string of melodramatic serials- "Stella Dallas", "Back Stage Wife", one whose name I've forgotten but that was introduced by an announcer intoning that this show "asked the question whether a girl from a small town could find happiness with a rich and titled Englishman"- that I guess my Mother listened to, although she never actually sat down. These shows, of course, were called soap operas, I think because they were all sponsored by soap companies.

In the evenings there were shows of all kinds-Eddie Cantor's show with Fannie Brice playing a character called Baby Snooks, Red Skeleton, Burns and Allen, Jack Benny, Fred Allen, Bob Hope, mystery shows like "Mr. Keene, Tracer of Lost Persons", "Mr. District Attorney", "Bulldog Drummond"; a weekly show that dramatized a kind of Reader's Digest version of popular movies call "Lux Radio Theatre", hosted by Cecil B. DeMille, a show called "Inner Sanctum" that could genuinely scare me-and on Saturday morning, a wonderful show called "Let's Pretend" in which fairy tales were dramatized.

My beginnings as a sports fan started with that radio. Since the cities with Major League baseball teams were all in the same time zone, with the single exception of St. Louis, and almost all baseball games were played during the day, the broadcasts of all the Pirate games were available to me. At that time Pittsburgh's baseball announcer, Rosie Rosewell, recreated the games from the information he received on ticker tape. It sounds silly now, but since radio required the listener's imagination anyway, this arrangement didn't diminish the excitement one iota.

Like all baseball announcers, then and now, Rosie Rosewell had a signature way of announcing a home run.

If it was a Pirate home run he'd yell 'Open the window Aunt Minnie, here it comes", which would be followed by the sound of breaking glass, and Rosie saying ruefully, "She never made it. She never made it."

Of course the whole family was drawn to the radio, and people would sprawl across the bed to listen. One time my Father had fallen asleep while listening-Dad was frequently either at work or sleeping the sleep of the very tired- when I dropped a toy gun that I was playing with onto his forehead. It was metal, and it

drew blood. Although I can't recall my feelings at that instant, the memory of the event is disturbingly vivid.

The real center of activity in the house was the kitchen, with a table covered by heavy oil cloth. The light seemed to be on in the kitchen even when it was dark in the rest of the house.

Once I was peddling my kiddie car-a small tricycle that my brother had bought me from his earnings as a newspaper boy-down the long dark hall, when shadows from the trees blowing in the wind moved across the front door. I quickly turned the kiddie car around and headed for the safety of the lighted kitchen.

We ate simply. Fresh black bread with butter was, and still is, delicious, and eaten with a cup of coffee, would serve as breakfast or an evening snack. Dusting sugar on the butter converted the buttered bread to dessert.

I remember very well my Mother making toast in the oven, and scraping the blackened surfaces into the sink. The joke in the family was that dinner was ready when you could smell something burning, although the old gas stove didn't make cooking easy.

Nevertheless, she made some distinctive dishes that I dearly wish I could taste now. She did wonderful things with potatoes and lima beans, which I now realize were great selections, because they are cheap but healthful.

Once in a while, maybe for one of the holidays, Mother also pickled herring in a specially designated clay pitcher, that wasn't, and probably couldn't have been, used for anything else. I loved the smell of the vinegar and onions and spices that permeated the kitchen when that dish was prepared.

On special occasions, my Mother would make a coffee cake. She would wrap the dough in towels, and put it up somewhere out of the way, and I would look up at it longingly, waiting for it to rise. She also made a layered strudel that included raisins and lemons, that was covered with crumbles of sweet dough. My aunt and sister have tried to recreate that strudel, but with no success. All of these treats were very carefully parceled out, frequently with the admonition to save some for Daddy.

On Fridays we had chicken. I remember once going with my Mother to the store where live chickens were kept in wooden crates. She chose one-I have no idea what criteria she used-and the man behind the counter disappeared with the crate and then reappeared with the chicken, butchered and plucked. There was still some cleaning to be done, and I well remember the acrid smell of chicken feathers being burned off at the stove. While not very pleasant, it foretold the good meal that was to come.

One chicken, serving six or seven people, was very carefully served and divided, including the parts that are now usually packaged and thrown away. The liver was certainly a delicacy, but another organ that I really can't identify, was not sought after too eagerly. A lot of good meat can be sucked out of a chicken's neck, and there were times that the neck was my portion. But the best treat of all was when we discovered an egg yolk, which was carefully divided among the youngest.

There wasn't enough to overeat. We were all thin- my eldest brother went on a crash diet of bananas, trying, unsuccessfully, to gain enough weight to qualify for a special Navy program- but I don't remember leaving the table hungry. I do remember being cold.

The rooms on the third floor were heated only by little gas stoves. The rest of the house drew heat from radiators, which are, essentially, coils of metal that filled with hot water. They got hot enough to burn if touched, and gave heat to the atmosphere strictly through radiation. They were three to four feet tall, six to eight inches deep, and varied in length according to the size of the room and the available wall space.

The source of heat was a coal burning furnace, a device that even today, seems to me to have required an enormous amount of physical energy as well as coal. Coal was ordered in quantities of tons, and delivered on a walkway along the side of the house. My Father, and I guess my brothers, shoveled it through the coal chute, which was covered by the slanted doors that marked many houses in Pittsburgh, into the coal bin in the cellar.

Each winter morning, and maybe throughout the day, full shovels of coal were thrown into the furnace. A handle on the side of the furnace, as tall as a small child, controlled the grate, and periodically it had to be shaken to allow the ashes to fall to the bottom. These had to be shoveled out, although I can't remember how or where they were disposed of.

At night the furnace was "banked", a far cry from turning down the thermostat. If heat was to be available when everyone arose in the morning, somebody had to get up in the virtually unheated house and feed the furnace its first meal of the day. When Dad was home I'm sure that he did that. But I'm sure that sometimes my Mother, who stood just over 5 feet tall and was slight, must have done it, because my Dad left Pittsburgh for several years to find work elsewhere, and my eldest brother went into the Army soon after the start of World War II.

On cold winter nights we slept under not only blankets, but robes and coats. Even after the fire in the furnace was started in the morning, it could still be very cold when I had to get up. I remember my Mother warming my clothes in the gas oven in the

kitchen, which she had to light with a match, and bringing them to me, so that I could get dressed under the covers.

The notion that parents endured extra hardship so that they could make things easier for the children was a natural part of our lives, and no complaints were heard and no expressions of gratitude were given, or, I suspect, expected. I'm sure that all five of the children carried on that pattern in their own child rearing, although none of us faced the kind of obstacles that my parents overcame.

Many years later my Father explained to some admiring fellow retirees how his four boys could start from such a lowly position on the economic ladder, and all obtain college degrees and achieve some modicum of economic success. "We were like horses", he said, "hooked to the yoke and all pulling in the same direction". I think that's all my parents ever expected—that we all pulled in the same direction.

The notion that the parents shielded the children had another face to it. One afternoon, when I was about four, and the house had more people in it than usual, I was herded to the kitchen, which was in the back of the house. I don't remember by whom, nor do I remember what they were saying to me, but something made me realize what was happening. I broke away and ran to the porch just in time to see my Father driving away in a car with several other men. I was in tears.

Later, I don't know when, I came to realize that Dad, who was working as a paperhanger, went to Washington D.C. to live and work, because the Federal Government was burgeoning at that time. But on the afternoon that he left I had no idea what was going on, and I never had a chance to say goodbye. All I saw was that he was leaving me.

## Chapter 2

We moved to Mt. Vernon St. when I was three or four and remained there until I finished second grade, which meant that I was about eight when we moved. My Father didn't return until after we moved to another house. However, my family did expand.

While we were living there my eldest brother and my sister brought home the people that they were to marry. My first meeting with my future sister-in-law is fixed in my memory. My Mother was bathing me in the kitchen, perhaps because of the high demand on the bathroom, but more likely because she could warm the kitchen by using the gas oven. It was at night. Suddenly my brother Ed, accompanied by Ruth, entered the lighted kitchen from the dark hallway. I don't know if I really sensed my Mother's

embarrassment, or if I later heard that my Mother was embarrassed, but I am sure that her shame exceeded mine. I guess she thought the scene somehow reflected badly on her.

At about the same time my sister brought her future husband to the house, but I don't remember the first time I saw him. I do know that when I became aware of him, he seemed to me to be the most accomplished, or exciting, or glamorous-although that concept had no meaning to me then-person I had ever met.

At over six feet he was taller than anyone in my family. He seemed huge to me then, although pictures show that he was thin.

The uniform he wore-he was a member of the National Guard-added to his glamour. But most memorably, he was boisterous in a family of basically quiet people.

My sense is that conversation in the house was always in hushed tones, although I don't know why that would have been so. My eldest brother was in college at the time, and working at the A&P in the evenings, and he was either not at home, or reading. Maybe there was always someone sick, or sleeping, or studying, and that's why I recall a sense of quiet.

Whatever the reason, it didn't apply to Saul, who seemed to galvanize everyone around him to a level of fun and excitement. He laughed easily and loudly, and made others laugh. And he sang! Anyone who knows my family can attest that a good singing voice was not a skill I was likely to have witnessed before. He made a record of "Begin the Beguine", as, I suppose, an audition record. He must also have sung

On the road to Mandalay,  
where the flying fishes play,  
and the sun comes up like thunder  
out of China cross the bay.

or why else would thinking about Saul trigger a recollection of this stanza from a song that I can't have heard for 50 years.

He seemed to know the most fascinating things. He could decorate a cake by squeezing icing out of paper that he had twisted into a cone! This was as close to a Houdini-like trick that a pre-television child, who may have seen two or three movies at the time, had ever seen.

He introduced the family to shrimp, a food I had never heard of, let alone tasted. For a picnic, he put salami into the hand-operated grinder that could be fastened to the edge of the table, and made a delicious sandwich spread, another marvelous feat.

Then Saul drove us to the park in the back of the panel truck that he used during the week to deliver orders from his brother's

store. My Father had owned a car only briefly during my lifetime, and there were never other cars in the family, so it was a treat to ride in any vehicle, but even more special to ride in a truck.

He was also at my bed side twice. Once he diagnosed my measles, and later, when I couldn't catch my breath after a coughing spell, he administered a technique much like the CPR of today.

In short, Saul was painted in vivid primary colors, while the rest of us were in black, white, and grays.

I think Saul's National Guard unit was mobilized before Pearl Harbor, and in the summer of 1941 Saul and my sister Eleanor were married. On the day of the wedding I was dressed in a white suit with short pants. I wasn't to wear a suit again until my Mother's funeral. But on that day I sat on the porch in my finery, trying to stay clean and waiting for the adults.

Later that year Pearl Harbor was bombed. When the news was broadcast, my eldest brother Ed and I were alone in the living room, in my only memory of spending time with Ed when I was a child. I had never heard of Pearl Harbor, but I did know what bombing meant, and I started to cry.

My knowledge of the war that had been going on in Europe for almost two years, and in China for even longer, came from a strange source. At that time there were cards, just like baseball cards, that depicted scenes of war in the most lurid detail. One that sticks in my memory, showed Japanese soldiers throwing a Chinese baby in the air, while one soldier held his rifle in position to impale the baby on his fixed bayonet. This was supposed to have been a scene from what is called the Rape of Nanking, and, indeed, it may have been accurate. I have no idea where these cards came from. Could such cards have come in packages of chewing gum?

The bombing of Pearl Harbor triggered other weddings. I didn't attend my brother Ed's wedding. I don't know why. But soon after the wedding, Ed went into the Army. After the war, Ed and his wife Ruth lived briefly in East Pittsburgh, one of the many dingy towns that surround Pittsburgh, and then moved to Buffalo. I really didn't see much of Ed from the beginning of the war to several years after the end of the war.

While my brother Ed was on the periphery of my world, Saul and Eleanor were at the center, since Eleanor lived at home for much of the war, and when Saul returned, we all lived in the same house for about eight years after the war. Saul seemed to be involved in most of the important events in my life. Just as he had correctly diagnosed my case of measles when I was a child, he diagnosed my appendicitis when I was a teenager. He gave me a

job when I graduated high school and paid me \$50 per week, at a time when tuition at Carnegie Tech was \$600 per year. He would take ties from his collection when I dressed for a date. He gave me his raincoat to wear on a rainy night, although my sister had to pin the sleeves and hem. He drove me to the airport when I left for my abbreviated service in the Navy. He served as a witness in the legal charade that was required for my divorce. He was the one to whom I turned for advice when I met the young woman who became my second wife, and he hosted the lunch that served as a reception at my second marriage.

### **Chapter 3**

We left Mt. Vernon St. in 1942, moving all the way across the city to a typical Pittsburgh neighborhood. There were houses on only one side of the street with a deep, wooded, gully across the street, at the bottom of which one could see the foot of another street that climbed the other side. Our street was at the low point of our side of the gully, and at either end rose steep, narrow, cobble-stoned streets, providing a way out.

There was one other way out. A dirt path that started across from our house wound down through unkempt trees and bushes to the head of a wooden stairway. That stairway, clinging to the side of the hill, went to a level even lower than the end of the street across the gully, and ended at a busy junction of many street-car routes. That junction was at the South end of a tunnel, used exclusively by the street-cars, that at its other end was at the level of downtown Pittsburgh, just across the Monongahela river.

There was another, and more exciting, way to travel that same vertical distance that separated our house from Downtown—the Incline, that is now one of the symbols of the Pittsburgh that tourists are invited to see. An incline is a cable-car conveyance running on a track bed inclined about 30 degrees from the vertical. The passenger compartment is on a triangular base so that the compartment is horizontal as the unit moves up and down the tracks. In 1942 there were at least four inclines that served the neighborhoods at the top of the hills overlooking the point at which the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers join to form the Ohio. At that time they were all used just to get up and down the hills, and not as a way to see the skyline.

It was from one of these inclines, the one that could carry cars as well as people, although there were precious few cars operating in the neighborhood to use it, that I remember walking through our new neighborhood to our next home holding my

Mother's hand, with my brother Dave holding her other hand. This was the neighborhood in which I would begin to expand beyond the house and my family, and in many ways it was a great neighborhood and a great time to do it.

My Grandmother, aunt, and cousins, who shared our house on Mt. Vernon St., moved somewhere else, and my sister was living in Louisiana, near the camp at which my brother-in-law was stationed. My Father had not yet returned from Washington D.C.. Only my Mother, my brothers Arnold and Dave, and I moved into 105 Westwood St..

It was a relatively nice house-the front room was a living room, and the treasured dining room set was in the middle room. At the back of the house, the kitchen area was divided in two, with the kitchen table in what we might now call the dinette area, and the sink, stove and icebox-yes, icebox- in the other, smaller portion.

Just a note about iceboxes. They are just like furnaces, pets, and infants- you have to feed them, and then take care of their waste products. Unlike these other items, however, the input, ice, was delivered directly to the icebox. There was a square card, with a large number along each side; I think 25, 50, 75, and 100, each representing the pounds of ice that were required. That card would be placed in the front window in a manner that would have the number of pounds you wanted displayed right-side-up. The ice man would come to the back door, holding a block of ice with an ice handle made of three sharply pointed prongs, and resting the ice on the shoulder covered by a heavy rag. Standing in front of the ice box, he would take the ice from his shoulder and put it into the proper compartment with one motion. But every night, just as some families might let in the cat, the pan under the icebox had to be emptied.

The second floor had five bedrooms, although two of them were so small that it was impossible to have doors swing into them, so curtains were hung in each doorway to give some privacy. The living arrangements changed so many times in the years that we lived there, it is impossible to think of any of those bedrooms as mine.

Our house was only two doors away from one end of our street, and at the top of the cobble-stoned street at that near end, there was a classic old corner store, owned and run by the woman who lived over the store. As I grew older and made friends with the other boys in the neighborhood, the store became the perfect place to buy bottles of pop, as soda is called in Pittsburgh, and the steps to the store were a perfect place to drink them.

Across the street from the store was the local high-school, with an attached field. That field, which was so rocky that the high school football team didn't practice there, was nonetheless the perfect spot for boys to gather and organize the pick-up games that went on every day after school and all day on the weekends.

We never considered using the phone, either to establish a time for assembling, or to make sure that someone who owned a ball would be there. We would just show up at the field, or if older boys were using the field, at the unusually level street at the foot of the field. With the wartime rationing of gasoline and rubber, there were rarely cars on that street to interrupt our play.

On occasion, and especially when I was still among the youngest group of boys, we would play marbles on the grounds of the airshafts that provided air to the street-car tunnel below. Even more rarely, we would play mumblety-peg, a game that involved positioning the point of an open pocket knife on your finger tip, and twirling it to stick upright in the ground. That game scared me, since I had been warned at home, that knives, like so many things in life, were dangerous, and were to be avoided.

While Dave and I would occasionally have a baseball we would pitch to each other in the alley behind the house, I never took a ball to the field. If no one brought a ball by the time a group large enough to play a game had assembled, we would discuss who owned a useable ball-and we were not discriminating, even a ball with no cover on it would do-and who was likely to be free to come out, and then we would call on him-literally. We would stand outside the boy's house and yell "Oy on ----" filling in the name. I have no idea where that expression came from, nor how widely it was used. But in our little corner of the world, it was the only way to get in touch with a playmate.

Because of our limited supply of balls, any ball that went into the storm drain had to be retrieved. We would pry off the grate, and lower some brave soul into the drain by holding his ankles. I never allowed myself to be the retriever.

We never entered each other's houses. We didn't know anyone's parents, nor did they know ours. I didn't go to school with any of the boys in the group because most of the kids in the neighborhood attended the Catholic schools. With the exception of occasionally accompanying one of the boys on his paper route, which also involved folding the newspapers so that they could be tossed, a skill I never really mastered, I don't recall ever joining with that group of boys in any activity other than playing ball or talking sports.

Of course, our group was entirely male. It surprises me now, however, to realize that I don't remember any comparable group of girls. There just seemed to be none in the neighborhood, except of course, for Joan Weaver, who was a pretty blond with sturdy, smooth legs, whom we ogled for the several summer months during which she wore shorts. Other than those brief interludes, she seems to have made no appearances outdoors, and I have no recollections of any other girls in the areas in which we played.

The summer months were marked by more than Joan Weaver's appearance. The high school field was turned into a playground, equipped by the City, and supervised by a high-school Phys. Ed. teacher.

The field had two backstops, and during the summer both were in almost constant use, with the bats and balls that were part of the playground's equipment. Across one side of the field about six small tennis courts were lined off, shortening the already short left field that served one backstop, and the right field serving the other backstop. Because of the size of the courts, we didn't use rackets: instead we used paddles, shaped like ping-pong paddles, but with perhaps twice the surface area, that also were part of the playground's equipment. Despite the miniaturization of the game, the rules and scoring were the same as tennis, and it was a great opportunity for poor kids to learn a rich man's game.

Horseshoe pits were also part of the playground's activities, and again, this provided an activity that most urban poor did not, nor do they now, have access to.

The attraction of the equipped playground brought boys from another neighborhood-actually just about two blocks away. The most notable fact about that group was that it included Johnny Unitas, who lived on an unpaved street that ran perpendicular to, and under, the incline.

During the period that the playground was open, the high school pool was available. However, these were the days of polio, and somehow there was a notion that public swimming pools were places with a high risk of contracting that disease.

Actually, not being allowed to go to the pool was a good cover for the fact that I was scared of the water, and always quite squeamish about being in a group of half naked bodies. These were also the days of the Saturday night bath, and those bodies, including mine, coming directly from playground activities, were not likely to be clean. In fact, when swimming became part of the Physical Education curriculum in junior high, we were all required to take a shower before we entered the pool, and the Gym

teacher, a woman, would check our ankles as we left the shower to make sure we had used the soap. Regardless, I particularly hated walking barefoot on the slimy, slippery, tiles around an indoor pool.

Of course, when we first moved to Westwood Street, I was seven, and not yet ready to participate in any of the joys of the neighborhood. My whole life to that point had been spent under the care of one member of my family or another. At that time I attended the same grade school as my brother Dave, who is four years older than I. One day, soon after we had moved in, as Dave and I walked to school, I complained that I felt sick. Dave told me to go back home.

Walking alone for the first time, I followed the alley that ran behind our house, looking for the garage that was only one or two houses before ours. I saw the garage that I thought was my landmark, but to my horror our house didn't appear. I was lost! I stopped and began to cry. No one came to me. I ran, crying, between the houses onto the street in front. Finally, a woman came to my side, asking me where I lived. As before, our address had been burned into my mind, and somehow I made her understand. She walked with me to my house.

The first time I was on my own, and I became lost only three or four doors from my house.

## Chapter 4

My sister Eleanor came back to live with us, either because she was pregnant, or because her husband, Saul, had been reassigned to the Air Corps, which in those days was not a separate branch of the military, and she could no longer accompany him.

In my family no references were ever made to any bodily function, nor did anyone ever appear less than fully dressed. I don't remember anyone ever walking barefoot, and even when my Mother wore slippers, she also wore stockings. In that environment, I had little knowledge of pregnancies, but I knew that it was her pregnancy that kept my sister in the house. As a result she became a playmate for Dave and me.

Usually we played cards, I think Hearts, or Monopoly. Eleanor generally beat us at cards, so to even the competition, Dave and I would rearrange everyone's cards when my sister was in the bathroom. She would acknowledge some suspicion, but let us get away with our cheating. During one particularly memorable session of Monopoly, Eleanor kept insisting that we continue to play,

even though Dave and I wanted to go to bed. In between her turns, she got up and walked around the table.

I think it was the next morning that Arnold told us that Eleanor and Mother were at the hospital. It was Dec. 27, 1942, and Arnold, Dave and I were all huddled in one bed, keeping warm, when we got the news that Eleanor had given birth to a boy. We were all now uncles, and I was five months shy of nine years old.

The birth of my nephew Doug cut short my tenure as the youngest, but actually it elevated my position in the family rather than diminished it. Dave's illness had focused attention on him. My Mother was so fearful of his condition that she hit me when she found us tussling, the only time either of my parents ever hit me. The war, with a son, son-in-law, and nephews going to war also captured my Mother's attention, even as Dave left his sickbed.

I was always just one half of the "kids", as everyone in my family called Dave and me. My sense is that I was an observer, and observing through the glass darkly, because I never fully understood what was going on around me.

I think my sense of isolation was heightened by the fact that I couldn't properly pronounce the sounds of "r", "l", "s" or "sh". Often people would turn to Dave to interpret what I was saying. My eldest cousin, who is about one year older than my eldest brother, would, on the rare occasions that I saw him, offer to give me a quarter, if I would say "quarter". I didn't like the attention that that challenge would bring.

When Doug was born, I anointed myself as the designated babysitter. When he was an infant, I would rock the bassinet with all the patience necessary to make sure he was sleeping. I would do whatever I was permitted to do to keep him from crying. I was especially good at making him laugh. I remember a routine I picked up from an Abbott and Costello movie; speaking in the deepest voice I could muster, I would intone, very slowly, "slowly I turn, step by step, closer and closer" as I approached Doug. He never failed to squeal with delight.

When Doug talks about those days, he refers to the difficulty he caused my brother and me, because we could not find a place that was safe from him to store a half-finished jigsaw puzzle or model airplane. But when I think of those days, I think of a blue-eyed little boy that somehow changed the way I fit into the family structure. He was like a gift, for which I was partial recipient.

## Chapter 5

My Father returned and began to work for the Pennsylvania Railroad, at first in the baggage room, and later in the car repair yards. I remember, with much discomfort, that upon his return he was telling Eleanor that he found a job making \$35 a week, and I, who generally watched and listened but didn't participate, spoke up to say "that's not very much, is it?".

My sister rejoined her husband, and while she was away, gave birth to a daughter, Ann. Eleanor returned with both children, and soon after, my brother-in-law joined them. At that point a major rearrangement was made to establish a two-family house.

One of the tiny bedrooms was turned into a kitchen. That is, a refrigerator, stove, and floor and wall cabinets, were put into that room. The only running water on that floor was in the bathroom, which then had to serve double duty. A small table, perhaps a card table, provided a place to eat in the hall amongst the bedrooms. My brother Dave and I moved to the other tiny bedroom, which was at the top of the stairs. We shared a bed, and the only convenient way into the bed was over the footboard.

Living arrangements continued to evolve, prompted by my Mother's illness. Mother went to the hospital for an operation. I must have been 13 or 14. I was allowed to visit her, although I think only once, perhaps because of rules prohibiting children on the floors with the patients. I certainly remember sitting in the lobby many times, while there was a rotation among the members of the family between staying with us, and disappearing into the elevators that carried visitors upstairs.

Mother seemingly recovered, and returned home. One day at school we were given a card listing "Cancer's Seven Danger Signals". I had seen blood in the toilet once after my Mother had used the bathroom. I brought that card home and solemnly gave it to my Sister, telling her about the blood. Her face changed. She looked as if she would cry. I don't remember the words, but I know the message. She told me that Mother had cancer. Again, I had been protected by not being told.

In the summer after I completed ninth grade, I had a hernia operation. It had been discovered the previous spring, during an examination of the Junior High soccer team, in my one and only opportunity to play organized sports. I waited until summer vacation for the operation, since at that time, there was an associated seven days in the hospital, and several weeks recuperation. My Mother was unable to visit me, because she was already virtually confined to her bed.

By that time my sister and her family had moved downstairs. The middle room downstairs must have become the children's bedroom, because I well remember Ann and Doug peeking through the curtains on the sort-of-French doors ( I don't remember those doors being there before this) separating the two rooms, while, I, as their babysitter, watched television in the front room.

I don't know what happened to my Mother's prized dining room set. As the roles of the two families switched, first my sister's family living with us, and then we living with my sister, I had changed my focus within the family toward my Sister, brother-in law, and niece and nephew. I have neither the skill, nor the courage, to analyze this shift, but I know it occurred.

Saul always had a car. Many times Saul and Eleanor would go for a ride, and even then I knew that they wanted to be alone. But I would still ask if I could go along. On occasion my sister would say no, but more often I would get in the backseat, squeeze against the window, and try to be as invisible as possible.

Living with Saul created opportunities that I would never had enjoyed otherwise. Saul bought a dog, a Collie, that was in the house for only a short time, because no one in the house was sufficiently comfortable with dogs to properly train it. But it was fun while it lasted. Saul also bought Dave and me a BB gun, a Red Ryder model. No one but Saul would have been able to introduce a gun into the house. Dave and I used that gun to shoot out of the back window at the rats from the gully across the street, when they came to eat at the garbage cans. I don't think we damaged any rats, but it made for very entertaining target practice.

At some point in this transition between the two families, I got in the habit of talking to my sister immediately after school. I would sit on the floor of whatever room she was in and talk about whatever adolescents like to talk about. I never had those kind of talks with anyone else.

The routine of the house revolved around care for my Mother, and the mood in the house deteriorated as Mother's condition worsened. The medical profession had abandoned her. I don't know whether there was radiation treatment for cancer at that time, or chemotherapy, or if it was just too late for those treatments. If it was, I don't know why the condition was discovered so late. Paying for medical care had always been a problem. As a small child, my Mother would take me to a clinic, where, despite the fact that we tried to get there early in the morning, we would sit for hours waiting for our turn, not knowing which doctor we would see. I know my Mother went to a particular doctor for her

own medical care, but maybe she put off going until it was too late.

Because we lived on the South side of the river, away from the neighborhoods that most Jewish doctors were familiar with, my Mother's doctor refused to come to see her. Somebody showed my Father and sister how to administer morphine, and that constituted the bulk of the medical care she received.

On November 11, which was still called Armistice Day and was a school holiday, I awoke early with a severe abdominal pain. No one else was awake. I lay in bed until, hearing Saul, I called out to him. He came to my bedside, and after asking a few questions, told me that I had appendicitis. We were both reluctant to wake anyone else, and he was leaving for work. When my sister awakened, she and I took a streetcar to the doctor's office, and just as Saul said, the blood test indicated appendicitis. That afternoon, just three months after my hernia surgery, I was in the hospital again. The surgeon was the same, and he was kind enough not to charge for this second operation.

Thanksgiving that year was the worst ever. I don't know why we went through the motions.

I never dealt with what was happening. When my sister finally told me that Mother had cancer, I don't think I asked if she would live, or how long she would live. I didn't start thinking of what life would be like after she died. I just put it out of my mind.

I remember once saying to my Father and sister, as they checked the clock to see when they could administer the next shot, that I was afraid my Mother would become addicted to the drug. When people would ask, "How's your Mother", I would answer, as though there were still doubt about the outcome, "Oh, she felt better yesterday", or "She had a bad day". One Saturday night, I was working in the drugstore owned by a family friend, where Arnold had worked when he was in college, and where Dave was still working, and I gave just such an answer to the owner, Joe Spiegelman. I got home after mid-night. I was awakened by screaming and wailing. Mother was dead. Dad said her last words were calling for her Mother. I threw myself back into bed and fell asleep. I was dimly aware, sometime later, that someone had backed into that room at the top of the stairs, the one with no door. I guess they had to, to turn the corner as they took the body out of the house.

That morning, Arnold took me to the area where the Kosher stores operated, the only retail stores that were allowed to be open on Sunday in that era of so-called Blue Laws. There was a men's

clothing store, Morgan & Kaufmann, and Arnold picked out a blue suit. That suit, supplemented by a dark maroon jacket that I bought several years later, comprised my Saturday night date wardrobe throughout high-school. On the day we bought the suit, we went across the street for coffee, while the suit was altered.

We went to the funeral home, with me in my brand new blue suit. I was still operating as though in a fog; perhaps one that I created for myself. As we entered, I could see Joe Spiegelman and his wife Ruth sitting against the wall on the right of the room. I smiled, somehow pleased to see Joe, whom I had seen only 12-15 hours before. Then I looked to the left, and over my left shoulder I could see the coffin.

The coffin was open. I don't know why, or by whose decision. The funeral was delayed, at least delayed compared to what I later learned was Jewish tradition. I think the delay arose because my brother Ed was living in Buffalo, and his wife had just given birth to their second child, a girl. I remember that the baby was not named until my Mother had died, because our family honored the Jewish tradition of only naming children after people who were dead.

Maybe it was the open coffin, but I think it was the actual burial that penetrated the fog. My Mother and her sisters had gone to the cemetery every year, I guess to visit the grave of their sister, but for all that I was told, they could have been committing the most unspeakable act. I believe that it was, ironically, the youngest of the living sisters, Aunt Sarah, who was the most superstitious, and I think it was she who felt that children should not be told anything about death. In any case I had never before been to a funeral, nor had I ever before been on cemetery grounds.

The funeral was in February. The following summer we moved to the East End, a community with a high proportion of Jews. I learned later that my Mother had told my sister that I should grow up in a Jewish neighborhood, so that I could date Jewish girls.

## **Chapter 6**

When I was in elementary school, there was an exercise in penmanship that required us to draw ovals with a continuous line. Each oval overlapped the immediately preceding oval, but each ended a little to the right, and in this fashion advanced across the page. And so it is with my telling of this story.

When we moved to Mt. Washington I was in 2A. Throughout my public

school career, each grade level was divided in half, with the "B" level preceding the "A" level. One semester was devoted to the "B" level and, if you passed at the end of the semester, you moved up to the "A" level. With this structure, a child could enter school either in February or September. I don't know when I started. I know I graduated in February, but I skipped a half-grade at least once. I know I never went to kindergarten, which I think is another indication that in my family, safety was to be found only in our house, and children weren't released to the world until they had to be. I don't know whether this was a long-held notion, or perhaps one that grew out of the experience of my brother's rheumatic fever, or just my Mother's view of the "baby", or maybe just my perception.

The elementary school, called Cargo, was a small yellow brick building that had been built before the turn of the century, and it seems to me that there is a century of difference between my elementary school education and my children's. At Cargo there was one room devoted to each grade level. That meant that the teacher alternated between teaching the "A" and "B" levels. While she, and there were no male teachers, was teaching one level, the other level students did assignments at their desks. I liked that, because I generally finished my assignments early, and I would listen to what was being taught to the other group.

The desks were like small drafting tables, with hinged tops that opened to the storage space underneath, and were slanted toward the student when they were closed. A small horizontal surface at the far end of the desk did not open. A glass inkwell was kept in a hole in the right corner of that surface. When we were being taught penmanship, those inkwells were filled from a large bottle that the teacher kept in the supply cabinet. I don't remember whether we took the inkwells to the teacher, or whether she, or a student would come to each desk. It seems to me now that either method was fraught with danger, but I don't remember any accidents. There was a pen holder, which was a little thicker than a pencil, shaped like an elongated classic Coca-Cola bottle, that was easy to grip. The wide end, the bottom of the bottle, had several slots at its perimeter, and into those slots one pushed the wide end of the metal pen point, or nibs. These nibs, which should have been washed before they were stored, were likely to be encrusted with ink. The writing point was designed to be split, with a very small clearance between the two halves. More likely, these two halves were spread further than the design called for, and in some cases the two tips were not even pointing in the same direction.

Writing with these pens was the only academic activity I ever

dreaded. I would strain to write neatly, but foretelling my troubles as a do-it-yourselfer, , I would spoil the job by depositing a drop of ink in some inappropriate place, or by smearing with the edge of my writing hand, an already completed, but not quite dry, word. I remember one assignment that the teacher told us we must finish before class was over, or else stay after school to complete. Even though I had learned to walk home by myself by then, I had the same unreasoned fear of being in the building after most of the people left, that I had experienced when I waited to be picked up by my brother from the deserted part of the first school I had attended. Fortunately, I did complete the assignment on time, despite an almost paralyzing anxiety.

It was about a 10 to 15 minute walk to the school. Since there was no eating facility in the school building, everyone went home for lunch. The additional trips to and from school were a treat. In the winter the morning walk to school was in the dark. Daylight Savings time was maintained throughout the year, it was called War Time, and there was a pall that hung over Pittsburgh, from the coal burning in private homes, from the coal burning locomotives that were always present on the railroad tracks that outlined all of the City's river banks, and from the exhaust of the iron making and steel making facilities that sprawled no more than 2 miles from downtown Pittsburgh, as well as in a virtual ring around the City. On many days there was a visible rain of soot that collected on everything. Falling snow became gray almost immediately upon landing. No Pittsburgh native I ever met used compass directions as a guide to negotiating the City. I'm sure this was partially due to the irregularity of the streets imposed by the rivers, but I'm equally sure that it was also due to the scarcity of sightings of the sun.

The school building had no auditorium. During an assembly, the students sat on the steps of the two stairways that went up from the first floor, and the center of the first floor, in front of the principal's office, became the stage. The toilets were located in the basement. When a student needed to go to the toilet, the request for the hall pass was generally phrased as "may I go to the basement"? Cargo was closed when I was in 5th grade. I well remember the first time I wanted to go to the "toilet after moving to the new school. I raised my hand and asked, " May I go to the basement"? The teacher, unfamiliar with that euphemism asked, "Why? Do you want to check the furnace"? The class roared, and I was mortified.

When the School District decided to sell Cargo School to the Catholic School System, there was no notification to the parents

of the Cargo students. There were none of the meetings that today's parents would require, with explanations of the decision, and discussion of the hazards of the additional blocks that were added to the walk to school, or discussions of adjustments in starting time for the students who might otherwise have to get up earlier. Instead it was like an employer telling the workers that the plant was being moved. At the end of the last semester in Cargo, the announcement was made, that, beginning in September, we were all to report to Prospect Elementary school.

## **Chapter 7**

Prospect School was an Elementary and Junior High School, linked by a long corridor. It was a modern building, with a cafeteria, an auditorium, a gymnasium that seemed to me to be huge, and a swimming pool. The kids who had already been attending Prospect were from a somewhat different neighborhood. The Cargo kids were ethnic, Catholic, and mostly Italian. The Prospect kids were Protestant and, as my Father used to say, American. Of course my brother, who had already been attending the Junior High, and I, were the only Jews. We didn't encounter another Jewish student until high-school. It was sometime during this period that I discovered that there was some animosity between Catholics and Protestants. I had always thought that the world was divided between Jews and Gentiles, and this further subdivision was completely incomprehensible to me.

When, years later, the school prayer issue became a controversy, I realized how closely the public school system was to a *de facto* Protestant parochial school. Every day we read from the King James version of the Bible and recited the Lord's Prayer. Christmas and Easter were unabashedly celebrated in every class in which it was possible, and with no curb on the religiosity of pageants mounted in the auditorium. Invariably, the Easter pageant stirred comments about "the Christ killers". Most of the time, however, Anti-Semitism was not overt, but, as I came to understand as I grew older, acted out more through exclusion.

I competed to be at the top of the class, and a few of these Prospect kids gave me some competition. I also competed to avoid being the shortest boy in class, a position assigned at the first Gym class each semester. This competition was strictly among three Cargo boys, Ed Boehm, Joe Massucci, and me.

Another ritual at the beginning of each semester was the music teacher's assignment of seats. The assignment was intended to establish a choir-like organization, and was based on one's

singing voice. This required each student to stand by the piano, and sing the scales. Since I could never reproduce the sound of the first note that the teacher struck, I was always given the seat closest to the piano, either in hope that I might absorb some skill through osmosis, or to minimize my contamination of any other section of the class.

With the exception of Gym and Music classes, school was my natural milieu. I read a lot, and usually above my grade level. I liked sea stories and I learned early to choose books by the author. I read all of C.S. Forrester's "Captain Hornblower" series, and books by Nordhoff and Hall, as well as "Two Years Before The Mast", and "Mutiny on the Bounty". I even read an abridged version of "Moby Dick", which I later reread in the full version, including all of Melville's naturalist's descriptions of whales.

I also read sports stories. I remember one called "The Rookie"; another was a biography of Paul Robeson, who, playing for either Princeton or Dartmouth, was, I believe, the first black All-American football player. Robeson was a great singer, singing "Ol' Man River" in the original production of "Showboat", but later was virtually exiled because of his alledged Communist views. I also indulged my love of sports stories by reading the paper-bound magazines that were available in my early teens, that contained short stories all devoted to the same subject; detective or cowboy or sports stories. I guess those magazines were referred to as Pulp Fiction. I even wrote short stories about sports heroes, an experience I never had, so my writings were just replays of what I read.

The greatest help to my performance in school was my reading of the books my brother's brought home as part of their school assignments. I remember a very hot summer day, lying in a pool of sweat (remember there was no air-conditioning), on what I can only describe as the plastic covered cushions of the front porch glider, with no shirt on, but wearing shoes and socks, because stripping to the waist was as far as we went to find relief from the heat, trying to keep track of all of the Russian characters, each with two names, in "Crime and Punishment". I know I started and finished the book when I was an adult, so I suspect I didn't finish it as an adolescent. I had more success reading "A Tale of Two Cities" when it was Dave's assignment. I remember well that when my class was studying the book, I had to adjust my answers to reflect only the material that the whole class had read.

I also had a natural affinity for math, which, when I was in high school, did not progress to calculus. I remember that in 5th

grade, Mrs. Dixon, who had taught my brother Ed during my family's previous cycle through that neighborhood, and who would look right at me and call me Edgar, conducted an exercise in arithmetic that I loved. She would announce a number-say four-and then, in effect, dictate a series of arithmetic operations. We had to keep up with her, doing all of the arithmetic in our head. After maybe six operations she would ask what the number was now. I loved to shoot my hand up as soon as she finished, because I had the right answer almost every time.

My performance in school took me beyond the group that played at the field. There was an effeminate boy, Carl Polk, that most kids stayed away from. To me he was rich. His father owned one of the two neighborhood movie theaters, and sometimes, on a Friday night, he would invite me to attend the movie for nothing. We would then hang around the theater until closing time, when his Father and Mother would drive me home. I remember well the basement of that theater, full of those small billboards that were hung on the walls outside the theater advertising the movies being shown inside.

On occasion I would go to Carl's house. He owned a great collection of metal miniatures of tanks, artillery pieces, and soldiers. I think they were made in England, and the details of the reproduction, and the moving parts on many of the models, made the toy soldiers I owned seem quite inadequate. Sometimes I would join the group in that neighborhood and play war games in the woods behind his house. I didn't realize it at the time, but I guess the neighborhood Jew, and the neighborhood sissy made a natural pair. I don't know whether I was teased for playing with Carl, but after awhile I just stopped going to his house; unfortunately not before his Mother gave me some hand-me-down that I accepted and brought home. My Dad was furious. He made it clear that we didn't accept charity. I don't know what happened to that article of clothing, but I'm sure I never wore it.

## **Chapter 8**

In Junior High I was introduced to girls and to the world of work. I accumulated considerably more experience and expertise in the world of work.

There were dances held at the Junior High on Friday nights throughout the year. I would spend a lot of time combing my hair before I went to those dances. I combed my hair about the way I do now, although I gave less emphasis to a pompadour than I did

by the time I reached high school. I remember putting pomade on my hair, especially to control a cowlick. This was before I ever heard of "a little dab will do ya", and the pomade darkened my hair, which had turned brown from the blond hair visible in early pictures.

All of this primping seems unnecessary to me now, since I remember dancing only once. I had a severe crush on Shirley Street. As Philip Roth suggests, every Jewish boy is attracted to blond Gentile girls, and since there weren't any dark Jewish girls in my world, my fate was never in doubt. All I remember about that dance, is holding Shirley, very awkwardly, with each of my limbs tingling as though my heart had stopped pumping blood, clomping around the dance floor, stiff-legged, in my best impression of the box step, which my sister had very recently shown me.

Most of my time at these dances was spent playing a game with the other boys, which involved slapping the backs of your opponent's hands. Maybe other boys got lipstick stains or hickeys; all I came away with were the backs of my hands red, and occasionally, puffy.

I once gave Shirley a gift, although she never knew it. I purchased a pin, with colored glass, from the drugstore at which I worked. I walked to Shirley's house with the intention of presenting it to her. However, after ringing the bell, my fright overcame my good intentions, and I ran away. Strangely, I don't remember whether I put the wrapped Christmas gift on the porch, flung it into the bushes, or just held on to it as I ran. Shirley's family moved away soon after, so I had no further opportunities to display my feelings.

My brother Arnold made sure I got more experience working. Arnold, ten years older than I, was always a strong influence on me. My brother Ed uses a sort of Socratic method to help you determine what action may be appropriate. In contrast, Arnold's way of giving advice was to tell you what to do. Arnold didn't talk so much as he barked; short sentences with no wasted words. While I don't remember Arnold spending much time in the house, our interaction is very vivid.

Once, before we moved from Mt. Vernon Street, Arnold was playing football, against Dave and me. We were playing in the middle room downstairs, and the field was limited by the beds. The game stopped abruptly when I hit my forehead against the corner of the big bed. Arnold told me not to tell Mother, because we weren't supposed to be playing. However the next morning the big knot on my forehead made it impossible to keep the secret. Another time,

after we moved, we were in a snowball fight-again Arnold against Dave and me. We were playing in the field up the street from our house; actually a place where I think the people on the street dumped ashes. In any case there were snow covered mounds behind which we could hide. Dave and I were crouched behind one of those mounds, when a snowball, thrown by Arnold in a mortar-like trajectory, came down and knocked the snowball I was holding out of my hand. That was a throw worthy of Tom Mix or Hopalong Cassidy, who regularly shot the gun out of the bad guy's hand.

Arnold also liked to pitch. He actually had the temerity to go to a Pirate try-out camp, wearing glasses, and carrying one hundred thirty pounds on his five feet six inch frame. He was especially proud of his curveball, and insisted that Dave or I "stay in there" even when the pitch seemed , and indeed sometimes was, headed straight for us. During one of those games, I apparently got too close when Arnold was hitting Dave's pitches, because I was knocked out by Arnold's follow through.

Arnold and I also had our own game. He would carry me on his back, my arms around his neck, my legs around his waist, up the hill to the corner store. Along the way was a row of thorny bushes, that we called "jaggers". Of course, he would back me into those bushes. I knew that he would do this, and yet never turned down an invitation to go to the store with him.

Arnold was always after me to get a job. He wanted me to get a paper route, as he had done, probably when he was ten. But the need to knock on stranger's doors to collect, and the chances of encountering stray dogs, were too frightening to me, so I kept putting it off. I'm sure that I didn't tell Arnold of my fears, because he would not have been sympathetic.

I remember the time he and I were watching a tackle football game between the boys in my neighborhood, and the boys from several blocks away- the group that included Johnny Unitas. The game was being played on the rocky field on which we played all of our touch football games. Most, but not all, of the participants had helmets, and a few had shoulder pads. I doubt if any had football cleats. Arnold asked me why I wasn't playing. I tried to hide behind the fact that I had none of the equipment, but Arnold dismissed that as an excuse and, rightly, accused me of being scared of being hurt.

Somehow, though, I avoided the paper route. Finally, Arnold said that he could get me a job in the drugstore that he had worked in when he was in college, and where my brother Dave was then working. I had no defense, so at the age of thirteen or fourteen, I started working behind the soda fountain, on Friday and Saturday evenings.

## Chapter 9

The drugstore was located on a corner in the middle of an Italian neighborhood. In the summer, the front door was kept open and all evening one could hear the men on the corner yelling "one, two three" in Italian, as they played Odds and Evens. The store was crowded with any kind of merchandise that the owner, Joe Spiegleman, thought might sell. There were three or four stools at the soda fountain, and three wooden booths in the back, for customers to enjoy the goodies from the soda fountain. At the end of the soda fountain nearer the door was a cigar case full of open boxes of cigars, including a small, very black, tightly rolled variety of Italian cigar, called pirogi (not to be confused with a Polish food), favored by the older men in the neighborhood. These pirogis had a very strong, distinctive odor, that was carried by regular users of the product, so that when these men approached the counter, you knew what they were going to buy before they said anything.

The cash register was on the top of the cigar case. The keys on the register were arranged in rows, with the \$10, \$1, 10c, and 1c keys on the lowest row, and the \$90, \$9, 90c, and 9c keys on the top row. I was short, so that I really couldn't see the top row of keys, but, of course I knew the pattern, and was able to ring up any sale. I was also young looking, even younger than my age, and I remember people muttering about the young kid behind the counter. One fellow from the neighborhood, trying to point up how young I was, asked me for a package of Trojans. Of course he knew that one bought that product at the prescription counter in the back corner of the store, in a mumbled conversation with the pharmacist, out of hearing of any female, and with a surreptitious transfer from hand to hand. But he guessed that I didn't know that. In fact, not only did I not know how the sale was to be conducted, or where the product was kept, I didn't even know what the product was. My complete confusion was this fellow's reward.

But I persevered, and, subject to some physical limitations, became good at my job. We sold bottles of pop from the cooler behind the counter, as well as the soda fountain drinks made from soda water and syrup flavorings, but I was never strong enough to carry a case of pop up from the basement. I could manage to wrestle a single drum of ice cream from the freezer in the basement, but, in the early days, serving the ice cream from a drum fresh from the freezer, was often impossible. Fortunately, a big, strong kid, named Tony Rafeale, was often working with me, and I called on him when I had to.

Joe had a television on a rack near the ceiling in the back corner of the store. Television was new at the time. In Pittsburgh there was one channel, on the Dumont network, that started broadcasting at 6PM each weekday, and went off the air at midnight. Saul bought a set for the house, but I'm not sure which came first in my experience, the set at home or the set at the store. Regardless, the television added a great deal to the quality of the job.

After work, Tony and I would often get a fish sandwich at Tamburino's, the bar across the street. They would let us walk to the door of the kitchen at the end of the bar and order our sandwiches, but we had to go outside to eat them. It didn't matter. I have been looking for a fish sandwich as good as that for the last 45 years, and have never found one. There was also a place to get hamburgers along the way. It was a tiny place, and you sat at a counter no more than four feet from the grille. The coffee was served in incredibly thick cups, that appeared unbreakable. The big decision, that I wavered about until the counter-man asked "What'll you have", was whether to spend the extra nickel for a cheeseburger.

Sometimes Tony wasn't working on the same evenings as I, or wasn't available to share a snack. On those evenings I walked home alone, but fearfully. On one particularly frightening walk home, the wind was making the street lamps move, shifting the shadows back and forth. I had seen the movie version of The Picture of Dorian Grey, and at the denouement, when the audience got their first sight of the portrait, and then the suddenly changed face of Dorian Grey, the overhead light in the attic in which the picture was kept was moving and casting shadows in the same way as the street lamps.

Not all of the walks home were so scary. Once, I took a cigar from the case, not a Pirogi, but a better quality cigar, and took a long way home, so that I could smoke the whole cigar. When I got home, Dad and Mother were at the kitchen table. Dad worked all shifts at the railroad, and it was not unusual for him to be eating after mid-night. This time I didn't join him for a cup of coffee. My Mother asked me if I was sick, and of course I lied. Fortunately, I didn't throw up, so I never was caught. Unfortunately I didn't learn my lesson, and later started a smoking habit that I maintained for almost 20 years.

I enjoyed working. I don't know what I spent the money on; the wages were something in the vicinity of 25-35 cents per hour. I do know I saved some from each week's pay, even though I had no particular purchase I was saving for. I know I once accompanied

my Mother to a bank, which I believe was, of all places, the Mellon bank in the center of the Downtown district. That bank was the center of the world of wealth, and an intimidating cathedral-like place that was clearly not intended for people like my Mother, with her Yiddish accent, and her slightly built son. For us, a big day in town involved going to a lunch-counter located on the balcony floor of a 5 and 10 cent store, where we each ordered cherry Cokes, and shared a package of Lance peanut butter sandwiches on crackers.

I don't know whether I opened an account. But if I did, it was surely to save for college, because, like salmon swimming upstream to spawn, going to college was part of our nature.

I also remember accompanying my Mother to the Board of Education building to get working papers. I may have needed these before I started to work at the drugstore, but whenever it was, the noteworthy aspect of the occasion was that I learned that my name was Jacob, not Jack. I guess the truth came out because it was necessary to produce my birth certificate. As my Mother explained, the name legally assigned to me had not been kept a secret. It was just that she had always intended that I be named Jack, in honor of a relative who had been called Jack; a somewhat distant relative, since closer relatives had already been recognized through the naming of my four older siblings. However, after giving birth to me, a nurse told my Mother that "Jack" was a nickname, and couldn't be used as a "real" name. So Jacob appears on my birth certificate. I don't know whether the relative for whom I am named was actually named Jacob, or whether someone backtracked from Jack.

My original Social Security card, which I still carry, was made out to Jack Belkin, and it is signed that way. I shifted to signing my name as Jacob as I grew older, and was called upon to sign legally binding documents. Some years later, when I was a candidate for Borough Council, I used Jacob exclusively, although Jack would have been politically expedient. I guess I didn't want to win as "Jack", if I would have lost as "Jacob". Actually, the election results showed that, as a Democrat, I couldn't have won if I had used the name Jesus Christ, but more about that later.

Work became an intrusion when, in ninth grade, George McBee stopped to get cigarettes on his way to picking up Lois Beet for a Saturday night date. Lois was the blue-eyed, blond, Christian girl, who had replaced Shirley Street in my affections. I realized then that there was a world of activity that I was missing. In fact, I would have been excluded from that world even if I had not been otherwise occupied. Lois's older sister had been in my brother Dave's grade, and he too was taken with the

blond, All-American look that ran through the family. When Dave asked the sister out on a date, she told him that she would not be allowed to go out with him. I'm sure that Lois would have answered the same way if I had ever had the nerve to ask her out. After all, the parents of my classmates were no more willing to see their children date a Jew, than my Mother was to see me date a Gentile.

Prospect Junior High included the ninth grade. That year, my nephew Doug attended first grade at Prospect Elementary school. One winter morning, after a substantial snowfall, Saul, presumably concerned about Doug walking to school, told me to wait, so that he could drive both of us. For some reason Saul was slow about getting ready, and I grew more frantic at the prospect of being late. Although I was absent a number of days each year, including those days on which significant Jewish holidays fell, I had never been late, and I dreaded the attention that I would get if I had to walk alone into the classroom after the rest of the class was seated. Finally Saul determined that he would not be able to get the car moving in time, so it was clear that I should head out for school, as I had always intended. What I hadn't counted on was the hardiness of my nephew, who insisted on coming with me. I had to hurry to be on time, but Doug, wrapped in winter clothing so that he was almost as wide as he was tall, was having trouble keeping up. I would get a half block ahead of him, but when I turned I would see his little figure plodding along like a loyal, but disobedient dog. I alternately yelled at him to go back, and waited for him to catch up. At times I picked him up, but I couldn't carry him far. I don't remember arriving at school. We must have been on time, because I'm sure that I would have remembered being late. But I will never forget that little boy, determined to get to school, lifting his feet high to negotiate the snow, and my mixed feelings of wanting to care for him, and yet angry at the burden.

## **Chapter 10**

Mother died as I entered 10th grade. At that point I was attending South Hills High School, which was the school located one short block behind our house. I left for school through the backyard, crossed the alley, ran up the steps between two garages, then between two houses, and crossed the street into the school. I hardly got wet on a rainy day. My home room teacher was the school newspaper advisor, and she knew Dave from his tenure on the paper. In fact, I think he was Sports Editor. I didn't join the newspaper, or anything else in high school.

That summer we moved to Heberton St. in the East End.

A lot was involved in that move. Mother was gone. Dad and Dave and I were clearly living with Saul and Eleanor. I had been taken from schoolmates, some of whom I had known since second grade, and put in a neighborhood in which I knew no one. But the big change was in my head.

Somehow, I became a different person. I felt alone, but with a strength that I had never felt before. Knowing I needed a new job, I walked along Highland Avenue toward the business district called East Liberty, stopping in every drugstore along the way to ask if they needed a soda-jerk. That walk was like a bridge between two stages of my life. From then on I dealt with any fears I had and mastered whatever situation I encountered with little or no help.

I found a job on the far side of the main business district, at the Alder Pharmacy, owned by Mr. Stein and his arrogant son. On my first day, the son showed me how to use the cash register, and gave me a warning that I had better not try to steal, because they had a system that would catch me right away. Typical of my new attitude, my reaction was that if I wanted to steal, I had enough experience, and was smart enough to do it without being caught, and I wasn't even anxious about making an honest error. I even had the courage to quit that job, when, without notice, I was paid only 35 cents per hour during school evenings, instead of the 45 cents per hour I was paid during summer days.

After we moved I entered Peabody high-school. The first day in a new school, particularly entering at an age that can be difficult socially, should have been a difficult time, but I don't even remember it. I do remember the "counselor", who was really the bookkeeping teacher, who, for some reason, said that I had to take some classes with the group half a year ahead of me. This dislocation actually worked to my advantage, because I got to meet more people, and, I met some who knew my brother Dave through the Jewish social network.

The scheduling difficulty also provided me the opportunity to take an extra elective in my Senior year. I chose to take typing, since I was sure my bad handwriting would be a problem in college. I don't recall whether there were any other boys in the class, but wearing my armor of indifference, I didn't care.

The teacher emphasized sitting up straight, and the proper positioning of the hands, and taught how to set-up a business letter. For the girls, typing might be an essential career skill, and these matters were undoubtedly important, but they were not important to me. Moreover, I could never match the dexterity of

the girls. At the end of the semester, the teacher told me that she would give me a "B" if I promised not to take the second semester.

The unique schedule that I followed supported my feeling of being a loner, a feeling that I found comforting because it reduced the self-consciousness that is typical of teens; I chose not to be part of the group, so I didn't care how I was viewed. As I learned later, this attitude was actually attractive to some of the girls, but at the time, I was oblivious to any impression I was creating. In a way, I may have willfully recreated the atmosphere of my early years, during which I seemed to have no role in the things that went on around me.

I no longer felt a need to compete for scholastic honors. After years of successful competition, I knew my skills. At that time I hadn't heard that Jewish kids were usually the smartest, so I had no reason to believe that this new competition might have been greater than my earlier experience. In any case, I kept pretty much to myself, participated in no extra-curricular activities, finished my homework in study hall, and rarely carried any books home. I finished tenth in a class of about 75, which really wasn't very good, but it didn't bother me, because I was never trying.

Soon after we moved to the East End, I attended a basketball game with my old school, South Hills, opposing Peabody. I rooted for South Hills. For some reason my brother Arnold was there- Arnold was always interested in high school athletics, particularly involving his Alma Mater, Westinghouse, and this game may have been for a championship - and he told me to stop rooting for South Hills, "you go to Peabody now". This feeling of loyalty to the place I came from may explain why, after 20 years, I still think of myself as a Pittsburgher, living in Philadelphia.

## **Chapter 11**

I quit my job at Alder Pharmacy soon after school began, and of course I had to find another job. I think my brother Dave heard about Schiller's pharmacy in Shadyside, about a dozen blocks further from my house than the Alder Pharmacy, because Joe Spiegleman, for whom we all worked in Mt. Washington, was an acquaintance of Mr. Schiller. I applied for a job there, using Joe as a reference, frightened that Mr. Schiller would find out that I had briefly held another job that I had quit. Fortunately, Mr. Schiller was not attuned to the fact that I expected to be working all the time, and so never asked me where I worked during the just completed summer. I got the job. As it turned out, it

was also fortunate that he didn't ask me if I could ride a bike.

On my first day Mr. Schiller gave me an order to be delivered in the neighborhood. As I left he called out, "The bike is outside". I saw the bike, parked against the store window on the left of the entry way, but I had never ridden a two-wheeler in my life. No one in my family ever owned a bike, and I never even wanted one. I walked past the bike, and at a slow trot, that I think of as "coolie trot", from the movies showing Chinese peasants at work, I delivered the order. When I returned, Mr. Schiller called me, quite sternly, to the prescription room, which was in the back of the store, and one step up, providing a clear view of the entire store to Mr. Schiller, or the pharmacist on duty.

Mr. Schiller was about fifty; slim, with a full head of black hair, always wearing a freshly laundered, starched white shirt and a tie. Reflecting the owner's demeanor, the store, although it included a soda fountain with perhaps six stools, had a professional look, unlike Joe Spiegelman's country store atmosphere, and it was kept spotless. This was not the kind of store I was used to, and the sense of being out of place added to my dread as I walked back to Mr. Schiller.

"Why didn't you take the bike"? he asked. I told him I didn't know how to ride it, and I assured him that I could deliver on foot without being away from the store too long. He told me that there were customers too far from the store for me to walk, but, in what was the first of the kindnesses he was to show me, he said, "Take the bike out and practice whenever the store isn't busy."

Up one block from the store, along side the Seventh Day Adventist church, there is a reasonably level spot that I used as my practice area. I would go up there, get on the bike, start peddling, and ride until I fell. Generally that was not more than a few feet. One time, after falling, a little girl, perhaps eight, approached me and asked if she could help. I told her, perhaps too brusquely, that I didn't need her help.

I don't know how many such practice sessions I needed before I was ready to use the bike on a delivery, nor do I remember the first time I used it, but I do know that I became fairly accomplished and used that bike in traffic throughout the neighborhood and on major thoroughfares. One time I delivered to the Schenley Hotel, which is situated in the center of the University of Pittsburgh campus, and is now a University building, but then was an expensive hotel. This required riding down Fifth Avenue into the heart of Oakland, and parking the bike

in the grand circular driveway among the taxis and fancy cars. Home deliveries could be exciting even if they didn't require long rides in heavy traffic. At one delivery the voice of an old woman called out, "Up here". I stepped into a dark hall and walked up the stairs toward the voice. The room at the head of the stairs was lit dimly only by sunlight that seemed filtered by all the dust in the air, and as I entered, I realized that there were newspapers piled almost as high as my head, like stalagmites, throughout the room. A Mrs. Haversham-like woman, shorter than many of the newspaper piles, approached me. By this time I could feel my heart beating. I handed her the package and bolted down the stairs. I heard her voice calling "Wait". Now I was certain I was in danger, but I turned and went back. She handed me the money that I hadn't waited for at the first encounter, and despite the fact that she made no threatening gestures, I ran back down the stairs and out into the sunlight as fast as I could go.

Dogs also added to the excitement. After I rang the doorbell I always stepped back, trying to be ready in case I was greeted by an angry dog. On more than one occasion I faced a growling, leaping dog, behind only a screen door, while someone, apparently oblivious to the dog's behavior, called "Don't worry, he won't bite". Once, I had completed the delivery and was mounting the bike when I heard the yapping typical of a small dog. Unconcerned, I didn't bother to turn around. When the yapping was joined by a deep bark I didn't waste time turning around, but peddled away as fast as I could.

Working at Schiller's was like looking through a peephole into another world. Now, the business district of which Schiller's Pharmacy is a part, seems to serve the Yuppies. In the Sixties the neighborhood, with bars and coffee houses in about equal proportions, seemed to serve the Hippies. But in 1951 Shadyside was the local shopping district in a neighborhood in which a lot of families who had considerable wealth for more than one generation lived. One of our regular customers, after picking up pictures that he left to be developed, said, with pride, "Look at our new ship" as he extended one of the pictures to me. The vessel in the picture was designed for carrying iron ore on the Great Lakes-his family owned a steel company.

Once I delivered to a very large house, with instructions to use the rear entrance. The door was opened by a woman in a maid's uniform, a maroon dress with a white apron and white cap, and through the partially opened door, I could see this enormous kitchen, stainless steel gleaming in the center and walls tiled to the high ceiling. On Sunday mornings, about 6 uniformed

chauffeurs would come to the store while their employers were at the nearby Presbyterian church. Several of them would order quarts of hand-packed ice cream, presumably for Sunday dinner dessert. It was at Schiller's that I first saw a man wearing what I learned to refer to as Bermuda shorts.

Even though this was an entirely different clientele than I had ever met before, my sense of being out-of-place quickly disappeared.

The bulk of our customers were regulars, and many of them had a charge account at the store. This provided me with an opportunity to learn their names, and I quickly learned to greet them as Mr. or Mrs. So and So, and often got a pleasant response in return. This helped me to build self-confidence, and Mr. Schiller and other of the store's managers gained confidence in me as well. Soon I covered the drug counter, if the pharmacist was busy, as well as the soda fountain. Of course I was still responsible for mopping the floor and sweeping the sidewalk on any day that I came to work when the store opened.

Mr. Schiller teased me about my pompadour, saying that it reminded him of a character in a comic strip of the day called "Freckles and his Friends", but it was a good-natured teasing. Once he invited me to join his wife and him at dinner. I know Mrs. Schiller didn't like it, since she was noticeably unfriendly to the "help" whenever she came into the store. Nevertheless we all three went to a restaurant called Cappy's, which no longer exists. I had not eaten in restaurants very often at that stage of my life, and that dinner sticks in my mind. Most memorable was Mr. Schiller saying, as the waiter handed us menus, "Order from the left side of the menu", meaning "Don't worry about the price".

I could only have worked at Schiller's for about a year and one-half since I started working full time for my brother-in-law, Saul, when I graduated high-school. But I learned so much at Schiller's- how to give service, how to be polite, how to be friendly with people I didn't know- and I experienced so much there, that in my memory it seems that I was there much longer.

I left Pittsburgh in 1976, and on my first visit back I stopped at the store. I was saddened to learn that Mr. Schiller had died some years before, but pleased to see that, although ownership had passed from the Schiller family, the name "Schiller's Pharmacy" was enough of an institution that it was retained, and it remains the name to this day.

## Chapter 12

While I was a loner in school, my membership in AZA provided the basis of my social life. AZA is the organization sponsored by B'nai B'rith for teen age Jewish boys. Before we had moved from Mt. Washington, Arnold had arranged for his brother-in-laws, twins about two years older than I, to take me to meetings of the AZA chapter to which they belonged. The chapter to which the Solomon twins belonged was in Squirrel Hill, a neighborhood with an even higher proportion of Jews than the East End.

It was while we still lived in Mt. Washington that I had my first "boys night out", attending a stag party at the house of one of the AZA boys. They showed old-fashioned 8 mm. "stag films", silent movies in which the male participants wore Lone Ranger-style masks, and kept their black socks on. I was out later than I had ever been, and when I got home, every one was asleep. I don't know if I didn't have keys, or was afraid to use them, but I went around to the back of the house, and made the easy climb from the back yard, which sloped sharply up from the house, to the back roof. The window of the bedroom that I shared with my brother Dave faced on to the roof (it was the room that my Mother had occupied when she died, so I guess we occupied it because it was relatively large). Dave's bed was on the far side of the room. As I crawled through the window, Dave sat up in bed, then turned away and lay back down. Realizing that he had survived that scare, I decided that Dave's heart was fine and the diagnosis of rheumatic fever had been a mistake.

In addition to the chapter to which I belonged, there were two or three AZA chapters in the East End, and one in Oakland. There were also two or three chapters of BBG, the girls equivalent to AZA. One AZA or BBG chapter hosted a social event each week, usually a dance. It wasn't necessary to own a car to attend any of these dances, and these events became the core of my social life.

Not having access to a car seemed, nevertheless, to be a burden. Even before we left Mt. Washington I started to examine the ads for used cars. The first of the only two arguments that I ever had with my Dad was over my expressed desire to buy a used car. (The other was about the arrangements for my first wedding.) After all, I was making money. Of course I had no concept of how to fix anything in a car, since we had never had one, and I had no idea of operating costs. I also had no idea of how to drive, but I don't remember that problem even occurring to me. Dad's uncharacteristically angry response squashed that idea, and I didn't buy my first car, nor learn how to drive, until I was a

senior in college and married.

When, later on, I complained that not having a car hampered my social life, Saul pointed out that at least I could be sure that when a girl agreed to go out with me, she was attracted to me, and not my car.

There were a few boys who had access to a car, and it was customary, when cars were needed, that arrangements were made to provide everyone a ride. At that time, 1950-52, there were several great places for teen-agers to go. There was one place, I think on Rte. 19 South, called Pine Valley, that had a large dance floor, a 4 or 5 piece band, and featured huge ice cream dishes, in addition to the hamburgers and fries. There was also a smaller place, I think in Oakmont, that had only a juke-box, but with a small dance floor with the obligatory rotating multi-faceted silver ball. It too was a great place to go after the official dance was over.

Whenever I went out in the evening, I would stop on the first floor and tell either Saul or Eleanor that I was leaving and where I was going. I initiated this routine myself. Prior to that time I don't recall that, a matter of habit, I told anyone where I was going, nor do I remember anyone being insistent on knowing. Maybe I stopped to get a sartorial okay. In those days people got dressed up to go to a dance or out on a date, and I wore a jacket, either my maroon jacket with the blue pants from my suit, or the full blue suit, with a tie, often a snap-on bow tie, which was not as nerdy then as it sounds now. If Saul didn't like the tie I was wearing, he would loan me one of his.

Of course I walked to my first destination, either one of the local synagogues, at which the dances were held, or to my date's house, or to the street car stop, and once, when it was teeming rain, Saul loaned me his raincoat. Since he is about one-half foot taller than I, Eleanor had to pin up the sleeves and the bottom. I don't recall whether the pinning survived the evening.

It was as a member of AZA that I went to Wheeling, West Virginia, to attend a Regional meeting. I think it was in 1951. I had my first taste of pizza there, a delicacy that I may have heard of, but which to my knowledge hadn't yet been commercially introduced in Pittsburgh. A group of us ordered pizza by the slice in a shop which, I realize now, was a prototype of pizza parlors everywhere, but which seemed strange to the uninitiated. Here was an eating place with no grille for hamburgers, no French fries, a high counter with no stools, and large yawning ovens! I think I liked the pizza; I'm sure I said I did.

It was at this same convention that I started a fire in the hotel. It was about 1 or 2 in the morning, and a group of us were in one room with no intention of going to bed. I was sitting in an overstuffed chair, which I think was common furniture in hotels in those days, smoking one of my first cigarettes.

The common view of smoking, at least among teens, and I believe supported by such health authorities as gym teachers, was that while smoking would stunt your growth, it represented no health hazard after you were fully grown,. My Father always smoked. Lucky Strike was his brand-LS, pause, MFT, Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco; my uncle, Uncle Sig, who cut our hair when my brother Dave and I were small, and who died from emphysema, smoked Camels; Saul smoked, and Eleanor followed suit. Just as switching from short to long pants was a change that occurred just through the passing of years, so the smoking habit was merely awaiting the appropriate age.

On that night in Wheeling, someone suggested that we go out and look at the town. A group of us went walking along the street on which the hotel was located. Nothing was happening at that hour, but none of us was uneasy on the deserted street. In a few minutes a fire engine approached , going in the direction opposite from the direction we were walking. With no competition for our attention, we turned to follow the fire engine. This is the only time I ever followed a fire engine. It stopped in front of our hotel. We began to run. While we all felt that our group must be involved, and each of us had our candidate for the person responsible, none of us exhibited any fear for the safety of our friends.

When we got to the hotel, the firemen were in the lobby. We ran up the steps-we were staying on the 2nd or 3rd floor-and there was a crowd in the hall outside of the room I was staying in. The overstuffed chair had been smoldering and the room was full of smoke.

I admitted I was responsible. Somehow the adult advisor to our chapter made arrangements to handle the damages without involving me. Of course, the story spread throughout the convention, and I soon learned the meaning of "pyromaniac". Given the teenage mentality, such a stunt endeared me to the group.

Maybe my growth in social skill was just a natural part of maturing, but I think that it was immeasurably supported by my membership in AZA. In addition, however, I have always felt that when we moved to the East End, I willed myself into a new personality that had growth capability that my former personality

could not have achieved.

### **Chapter 13**

AZA not only provided me a social life, but gave me my first opportunity to be socially/politically active. At that time the B'Nai B'rith in Pittsburgh was part of a coalition of adult organizations that sponsored something called The Intercultural Youth Council. This Council was made up of representatives of a variety of youth organizations, like the Boy Scouts, girl Scouts, DeMolay, CYO, and BBG and AZA. This brought together Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic boys and girls, and Negroes, as the more sophisticated whites said in those days, and whites. When I heard that AZA needed a representative to participate, I volunteered.

To explain why I was interested, I have to explain the environment, or in a more descriptive phrase that I heard in college, coined, I think, by Carl Sandburg, the "climate of opinion", in my family. When I was little we had a choosing rhyme that started-Eenie, Meeney, Miney, Moe, catch a tiger by the toe... Everyone else said "...catch a nigger by the toe". We weren't allowed to use that term, nor did my parents use the derogatory Yiddish term. My sense is that my Father set this tone. He told us, in a shocked tone of voice, how black people, I think he called them "colored", which was the politically correct term of that day, were made to ride in the back of the buses in Washington D.C.. We may have been the only white family in Pittsburgh rooting for Joe Louis to keep his heavy weight title against Billy Conn, who was white, and a native Pittsburgher, and the brother of one of Saul's Army buddies. Joe Louis was always a hero in our house, and Dad, using the lexicon of the day, would say, "He's a credit to his race". It's a sign of how skewed racial attitudes were, that none of us saw the racism of this well-intentioned comment.

My Father was always for the underdog. He had early experience with Socialist organizations, perhaps through his brother Ben, and probably because in the teens and twenties of this century, there was a strong Socialist bent in Jewish immigrant organizations like The Workman's Circle, and I think in the Zionist movement. He was a strong supporter of labor unions, and spoke of working for the railroad, years before I was born, when only the highly skilled workers, such as the Engineers and the Brakemen were organized, and one had to put money in the pocket of the jacket that the foreman would hang on a nail, if you wanted to get work that day. He always spoke of the philanthropy

of Andrew Carnegie as "guilt money", and he thought of the National Guard as a strike-breaking organization.

I don't know whether all of this lore interested my brothers and sister as much as it interested me, but Philip Murray, of the United Steel Workers, and Walter Reuther, of the United Auto Workers, and John L. Lewis, of the United Mine Workers, David Dubinsky of the Ladies Garment Workers, were all as familiar to me, and as above reproach, as any of the Pittsburgh sports stars. I understood the difference between the craft unions of the AF of L and the industrial unions of the CIO when I was in high school, and I think well before that. I knew that when Dad worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad, he was a member of the TWU, Transportation Workers of America, headed by Pat Quill, who spoke with an Irish brogue.

I remember well, that in 1948, at the Democratic National Convention, Hubert Humphrey, who was then mayor of Minneapolis, tried to get a Civil Rights plank into the platform, and that Strom Thurmond, who was then a Democrat, bolted the party to run at the head of the Dixiecrat ticket.

With all of this as part of my outlook on life, it was natural for me to want to be part of an Intercultural Youth Council.

The activities of this group of teen-agers is more interesting as a sign of the times than for their inherent value. We put on programs at meetings of the organizations that were represented at the council. In this program we would demonstrate the distortions of rumors by having people successively whisper a story to their neighbor, and then compare what the last person heard to what the first person thought they had transmitted. We tried to show the nature of racial stereotypes by flashing a picture of a pickpocket at work on a crowded bus, and then asking the audience to describe what they saw. The major effort, for which I was one of the organizers, was our sponsoring an inter-racial square dance. A square dance! What a bizarre notion. Can you imagine getting any of today's teenagers, white or black, to come to a square dance? The notion sprang from our view of the world: that kids would come only if their parents allowed them, and that no parents would allow their children to be part of a mixed race couple sharing the one-on-one intimacy of dancing..

But the more important aspect of our world view and perhaps the more old-fashioned aspect, seemingly shared by the few black participants in our group, was that there were no real differences between black and white cultures, and that blacks wanted an equal opportunity to participate in all aspects of American life. This was before the civil rights movements of the sixties, before Voting Rights Acts, before Equal Opportunity in

Housing and in Employment. This was only a couple of years after Jackie Robinson entered major league baseball, when people openly said that fans would not pay to see "niggers running around".

But were the times really so different from now, or were we just naive? I don't know. What I do know is that these activities were the beginning of my dabbling in social and political activities.

It was at this time that I had my first contact with what came to be known as the McCarthy Era.

The President of the Intercultural Youth council was a young black man headed to Swarthmore College. In the last semester of his Senior year in high school, which was the first semester of my Senior year, he was accused of attending a meeting of a Communist, or Communist affiliated, organization. To avoid controversy, the adult sponsors of our organization required him to leave. The rest of us learned only afterwards what happened. In effect he just disappeared.

The McCarthy Era had a powerful effect on me, perhaps because it occurred when I was a teenager. Surely it was my age that gave me the certainty to be vociferous in my opposition to the ideas espoused by Senator McCarthy, and by many other politicians, including Richard Nixon, and by a surprisingly large number of people I met. This loudly held position, along with my equally open views on race, mixed with my Jewish heritage, put me out of step in many of the circles in which I found myself throughout my life, and ultimately my views affected my job choices.

## **Chapter 14**

Among the strongest motives for putting this information on paper was to give my children a link with my parents. The chapter on my parents should, logically, be the first chapter, but I put off writing it because I have never been able to speak of my parents without a rush of emotion that I would rather avoid. Even now my already limited keyboard skills are further hampered by the tears in my eyes. I really don't understand why I haven't come to terms with their deaths; after all, my Mother died 45 years ago, and my Father died over 25 years ago. Regardless of my emotions though, I will try to forge the link.

Perhaps no one can complete a picture of themselves without at least a sketch of their parents. I don't know. I do know that in my case it is absolutely essential that I write about my Father, because I'm sure that when I am at my best, I am striving to be like my Father, and, I suspect, some of my worst may also reflect my Father.

Unfortunately I have little information about my parents' origins. I am reasonably certain that my Mother was born in Kiev, in the Ukraine. She was only a few months younger than my Father, who, in a letter my sister had the foresight to keep, said he was born in 1897. She came to this country in about 1909, with her Mother and three younger sisters. I think they settled in Pittsburgh right away, maybe because my Grandfather had come over earlier and was in Pittsburgh. I don't know; no one talked about my Grandfather. I know my Grandmother was married twice, but I'm not sure whether my Mother was the child of the first or second husband. I have a feeling that my Grandfather deserted my Grandmother.

I have no idea with whom this family of females lived, or how they supported themselves. I know my Mother worked in a cigar factory in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, which I gather was like the Lower East Side in New York. Did she start at age 12 when she arrived in this country?

I know just a little more about Dad's background, but indirectly though researching his older brother Ben, who was a sufficiently well-known writer to have material published about him. Uncle Ben was apparently 4 years older. Biographical material says he was born in Lithuania, in a town(?) called Pumpany. According to a story he wrote, he lived there with his grandparents, while his parents lived in Posvol, another Lithuanian town. Why they lived apart, and where my Father lived, I don't know.

According to an item on the history of Posvol that I collected in my research, about 400 Jewish families lived in this town, which contained a Jewish school with 150 students. But, perhaps that group did not include my father and Uncle. My Grandfather, Chaim-Isaac Bialostotsky, was called the "Posvoler Maggid", which I gather was an itinerant preacher, and perhaps his traveling caused the family to be split. Apparently he was famous. In the Encyclopedia Judaica, Uncle Ben is referred to as the son of "the famed Posvoler Maggid", and in Uncle Ben's story he says that his Father was "one of the last of his kind and had great influence over the poorer masses". In that story Uncle Ben talks of visiting his parents to celebrate Passover, and finding that because of the swollen Posvolka river, his father, who had been on the road, could not get home for the Seder. Ben wrote "My Mother was left alone for the Seder. She asked me to sit at the head of the table and lead the Seder, but how could I when my eyes and my Mother's were full of tears". Apparently, then, none of the other children, including my Dad, was there.

According to the historical note on Posvol, on April 28, 1915, all of the Jews there were given 8 hours notice before being deported to the

interior of Russia. I guess the ending of "Fiddler on the Roof" was more real than fiction.

Before this event, it seems that my Father's family had moved. In the story of that lonely Passover, Ben says that his Father died in 1940 in Grodna, which I think is in Poland. And, again from the naturalization papers, Grodna was given as my Father's home.

As I said, neither of my parents talked about their childhood, and we all were too dumb to ask. I do remember Dad saying that the road in his town ( which town?) was so narrow, a horse and buggy had to go out of town to turn around. A joke? He also said that horseradish, which I know only in a bottle, grew outside of town. I also remember Dad saying that he wore one pair of boots all of the time. On every day except the Sabbath, he tucked his trousers into his boots, and on the Sabbath he let the trousers fall to the shoe tops. He once mentioned carrying furniture upstairs for the soldiers. But, according to his naturalization papers he came to America in 1909, which would have been at age 12, so what was he doing carrying furniture? Didn't he go to school? I have so few pieces of the puzzle.

However, one memory that Dad shared with me is insightful. He recalled that as a child in Europe, " he pressed himself against the wall" whenever he heard someone speaking Polish. A fear of the world outside seems to me to have been a part of my whole childhood, and perhaps beyond. I remember my Dad and Mother pulling down the shades on all of the windows in the kitchen, as they sat at the table apportioning the too few dollars among envelopes, each envelope designated for one of the too many expenses. Safety was inside the house, and security came when every member of the family was where they belonged.

A biographical note on my Uncle says that as a young man he studied at a Yeshiva, was active in the Zionist movement, published a poem in 1909; all before he emigrated to Germany in 1910, and to America in 1911. If these dates are accurate, then Ben came to this country two years after my Father, not, as I had somehow come to believe, before my Father. Is it possible that my Uncle as the oldest, displaying talent, was sent from a little town in Lithuania to a Yeshiva, while his younger siblings remained in Posvol? When Ben says " My Mother was left alone for the Seder", maybe he means only that she was separated from her husband.

My cousin Mimi, Ben's younger daughter, who seemingly was unknown to us until I started trying to learn more about my Grandfather, has mentioned that the youngest of our Fathers' brothers was a rabbi. So at least the oldest and youngest were educated, while my Father, somewhere in the middle of the group, seemed to have had no education,

and was sent to America at the age of 12. When Ben came to this country, already educated and published, at the age of 18, did he even come to Pittsburgh to see his 14 year old brother, or did he immediately settle in the Yiddish literary community in New York, and begin his studies at CCNY? I suspect that is what happened. My father never spoke of his family; and reflecting on the fact that Mimi was no more aware of her cousins in Pittsburgh than we were of her existence in New York, Ben must not have spoken frequently, if at all, about the only of his brothers that escaped Europe. I wonder if there was an arrogance of learning that permeated my Grandfather's family, and maybe for generations before, because certainly I see indications of it in my generation, that turned my Father out, and left him a solitary cipher that was easily forgotten.

There is something consistent between that picture and my Father's behavior and personality. The irony of that scenario is the incredible impact Dad had on anyone who knew him.

I have no idea of the source the name "Belkin", which I'm told means "squirrel" in Russian or when my Father took began to use it. Mimi tells me that "Belkin" was the name used in their family, and biographical material says that Ben published under both Bialosotski and Belkin. What source of this name was common to these two brothers, following such different paths, and, seemingly, not in touch with each other?

There is a snippet, vague, that I remember, about Dad coming first to some small mining town in Western Pennsylvania to live with a distant cousin, or perhaps just with earlier emigres from the same village. Whether or not Pittsburgh was his first stop in America, for reasons that I don't know, he settled there. The odds are that Pittsburgh, which provided an opportunity for a hard life to thousands of uneducated immigrants, was the place in which Dad could find work.

On April 4, 1917, when each was 20, my Father and Mother were married.

I have early memories of my Mother; I have early memories of my Father; but until my Father was called upon to care for my Mother, I have virtually no memories of the two of them together.

Work dominated their lives. I saw my Mother work. What I didn't see, or even sense, was the struggle, the anxiety, that must have plagued them both, but which both Mother and Dad kept from us, or at least from me.

Mother, or as I use to call her, Mum or Mummie, was always busy; I can picture her, sweeping cobwebs from the corners and from the ceiling

with some kind of cloth wrapped around her head to protect her hair.

Monday was wash day. At some point there was a washer in the cellar with a wringer. The clothes were washed in a circular tub, I'm not sure how, and the wet clothes were put between two rollers, much like the rolling mills I would see roll steel ingots into flat sheets many years later, and as a handle was turned the clothes would be pulled between the rollers squeezing the water out. The damp clothes were hung on a clothes line, fastened by wooden clothes pins, and then the laden clothes line raised into the breeze with long wooden staffs, notched at one end to support the line. When clothes weren't being washed they were being ironed; sometimes Mother let me iron the handkerchiefs.

At another time, our laundry was sent out. On more than one occasion during that period, I counted the number of each category of laundry- socks, towels, handkerchiefs, undershorts- while my mother recorded the count. This, of course was the record against which the returned clothes were checked. Like my Father, my Mother had no education in English, and perhaps no education at all, so she did not spell or write well. But I think she did the recording instead of the counting, because the clothes were spread in little piles around the room, and it was easier for me to crawl around. My skills were called upon when we checked the bill for the groceries that were delivered. It's strange that poor people were getting groceries delivered, but remember that few people had cars, and during the war, fewer still had gasoline, and there were no supermarkets to offer lower prices than the neighborhood stores that delivered. Beyond these joint tasks, and times when I would thread a needle or look-up a number in the phone book, I remember being connected with my Mother only when I was sick, and somehow I don't think I ever knew much about her.

Other than during trips to a doctor or to the clinic, the only times I remember being alone with Mother, I had come home from school at lunch time. I don't know where everyone else could have been, nor exactly when these moments occurred, but I was young enough for these to be the most tender moments I ever spent with her.

Despite, what I view now as an incredible workload, she spoiled us, or at least Dave and me. I didn't like cheese, so when she made blintzes she made a few without cheese for me, and when she served leftover mashed potatoes in green peppers, she would give me just a mound of potatoes because I didn't like peppers. I had no regular chores to do, nor, do I think, did Dave. I guess if you were old enough, you worked, and were thus excused from helping her, and if were too young to work, you were to be taken care of.

Late in the evening , after Dad got home, Mother would be standing near the kitchen table, standing, always standing, it seems I never saw her sitting down, pouring coffee from the percolator that was always on the stove with coffee to be warmed.

In today's terms, she was an enabler, a facilitator, who stayed in the background but made it possible for everyone else to do whatever each of us had to do. When I was 10 or 11 I started Hebrew School, which required my taking two streetcars, since there was no synagogue in our part of the City. In the winter, it was dark when I got home, and I was afraid of the dark walk up the wooden steps, and the dirt path, all bounded by unkempt bushes and trees, that linked the streetcar tracks to our neighborhood. So I would call from the well-lit, busy streetcar junction, and somebody, often my Mother, would be waiting at the top of the steps.

She was soft spoken, not boisterous and gregarious like her sister Eva. She was gentle; but she wasn't affectionate. She once introduced me to somebody as her baby, and she seemed pleased with the idea, but I don't remember that she ever kissed me. She was small; according to her naturalization papers, she was 5'1", and 102 lbs. at age 46. She wore what I guess was typical for women of at that time, in our economic strata, the proverbial house dress. I well remember helping her learn the material that people seeking to become naturalized American citizens were told they had to learn-What are the three branches of Government? Who was the first president?- and how nervous she was.

As with all of us, her pleasures were small. Once in a while she would send us to the store for ice cream; she liked Neapolitan, a three-layered block, one chocolate, one vanilla and one strawberry. It's amazing how far one quart of ice-cream could go. On occasion there would be a box of chocolates. There was one flavor Mother liked-I don't remember what it was, but I do remember she would sample pieces, offering the pieces she didn't like to us to finish.

When my brother Arnold was in the navy, he sent Mother a little lapel pin, I think depicting the Navy goat, in contrast to the Army mule, symbols that seemingly make their appearance only in the weeks prior to the Army-Navy football game. Mother wore it proudly on her black coat, though I suspect she had no notion of the symbolism.

I know of three trips she took. Once Dave and I traveled with her to Washington D.C. to visit my Father. We traveled by train. It was shortly before or shortly after the start of World War II, and the train was full of men in uniform. In fact full doesn't describe the

conditions. The phrase "take an excursion" comes to mind, which may have referred to a specially priced train, for which I think ticket sales were limited only by demand, not by capacity. The trip took about 8 hours, and I think we traveled all night. In any case my vague memory is of people draped over all the seats and in the aisles, trying to sleep. I find it strange that I don't remember using the toilet, considering that using public toilets has always been something I try to avoid, and using one on a crowded, moving train on my first train trip should have been memorable. When I was about 15, I took a train, by myself, to Buffalo, New York to visit my brother Ed, and I never left my seat during the entire trip.

We did some sightseeing in Washington, the most memorable part of which was the George Washington Monument. We were standing at a viewing spot, which may have been at the top, or perhaps at some intermediate point, and I was straining to see over the window ledge, when I felt myself being picked up. I remember the instantaneous paralyzing fear, but I don't remember crying out, although I must have, because the stranger who had picked me up put me down, saying something to my Mother about just trying to help me look out.

Mother went to Washington one other time, to see President Roosevelt's inauguration, probably in 1941, since Dad would have been there at that time.

The most extravagant thing my Mother ever did, I suspect, was to accompany Aunt Eva to some mineral water spa in Ohio or Michigan. I can only believe that this was the influence of Aunt Eva, an influence I don't think Dad appreciated.

Other than these "excursions", my Mother didn't go out very much, with or without my Father. I do remember going to the movies with both of them at least twice; once to a Marx Brother's film, which I later concluded was probably the "Big Store" and, I am quite certain, to "A Cabin in the Sky", an all black cast movie with Ethel Waters, Lena Horn, and the actor who portrayed Rochester, Jack Benny's valet, that dealt with dying, and the struggle between good and evil that determined whether Heaven or Hell would be one's eternal resting place.

That theme, or variations of it, such as in "It's a Wonderful Life" was very popular in movies in the late thirties into the late forties. I would love to read some of the essays that undoubtedly have been written about the correlation between social conditions and movie themes.

More interesting is that these two immigrants, with their Yiddish

accents, would spend their limited time, and even more limited money, to go to a black-cast movie, the only kind of movie that showed blacks as anything other than loyal maids, or frightened, wide-eyed, "boys" to be laughed at.

They did have "company" over occasionally; my parents, probably through Aunt Eva, were part of a group, referred to as the "Crowd", but not at all like Mary McCarthy's "Group", and these couples were their friends as long as I can remember. There was a tailor, a man that owned a bodyshop, and I suppose the rest were also small business people. Dad always referred to them by their last names- Forman, Kholis- I don't remember the others, and I think they called my parents Becky and Moishe. I remember once hearing my Father arguing with them, because for some reason at least some of them were siding with Russia when that country invaded Finland, and Dad didn't agree. I feel certain about that memory, but I don't know how I would have known, because they used a lot of Yiddish when they talked, and I never learned the language.

For a number of years, at least until I was 10 or 11, Dad wasn't around very much, and yet his presence dominated the house. He was always out there somewhere, WORKING, and somehow I knew that he was working for us. Or maybe it was just the sense of concern for him that permeated the atmosphere. I have these memories that gave me only a glimpse of his struggle.

Once, while we still lived in the Mt. Vernon Street house, I was lying in the big bed where my Mother and Father slept, watching my Mother pacing in front of the front windows, pushing the curtains aside to peer out, waiting for my Father to come home, and I knew he should have been home a long time ago, and I knew my Mother was worried, and I felt afraid.

Work. Work was essential and that's what Dad did. When I was a kid, people with certain infectious diseases were still quarantined. If someone in the house had measles, or perhaps even chicken pox, a sign was hung on the outside of your front door announcing the presence of the disease inside. No one was supposed to enter or leave. I don't know who had what disease, but once our house was quarantined. Dad sneaked out of the house to go to work.

When the trolley drivers were on strike, Dad walked through the trolley tunnel; he may have carried a flashlight, because the tunnel, which was used exclusively for trolleys, was not well lit, and he continued from the other side of the tunnel to walk the rest of the way to work-I don't know how many miles.

They once brought Dad home from work. He had been hurt. There was a knock at the door, and I think there were two men helping Dad. He hardly looked like himself, he was in greasy, filthy clothes, and he was covered with grease. Normally he cleaned up before he came home, but this time we could see him in the condition in which he worked.

I know how tiring his work was. More than once I was sent to wake him for the meal he ate before leaving, often to work two consecutive 8 hour shifts, when, during the War, labor was in short supply. The picture is vivid in my mind- Dad, on his back, snoring, wearing long underwear, so in need of rest.

This is the lesson Dad taught, so eloquently, but only through example: you meet your responsibilities; you do what you have to do. When a rat crawled out of the bread drawer in the bedroom-turned-kitchen for my Sister and her family, Dad, who was squeamish and gentle, somehow shooed the rat into the bathroom, and, as I looked on, threw a rug over him and, in a kind of a rage, beat him to death with a broom, and then dealt with the remains. You do what you have to do. While clearly, my Mother lived that same principal, I learned that lesson, and many others from my Father; maybe it is as simple as a matter of gender, but for whatever reason, it was always his behavior that I wanted to emulate.

## **Chapter 14**

I wrote about my Dad first when I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, for an assignment on The Most Unforgettable Person I Know, or The Person I Most Admire or some such thing. Then I focused on what he had achieved. Now that I've lived almost as long as he did, it is the way his being is like a light that continues to reflect from so many people that is so remarkable. His grandson, Doug, remembered him in a book dedication; his second wife's son-in-law, John, at a family gathering, started a sentence "As Morris used to say..."; when someone was complaining about the tax bite on their stock profits, I told them "my Father would call that 'Crying with bread under your arm'": in our family Dad is quoted more than any of the great poets; these are the measures of the quality of the man.

There is something else, which I think is a manifestation of his influence, that may be more important, but harder to describe and to attribute. I think he created a sense of community in his family that binds his children in a way that, as I've grown older, I have come to realize is rare. This sense of community seems devoid of jealousy, full of compassion, with a depth of tolerance that eliminates the need

for forgiveness. These are the qualities that Dad taught by example.

This sense of community is also supported by a capacity for disdain toward others not in the group, which I think Dad also displayed.

Dad was about 5'5in., 145 pounds when he was working, maybe 160 pounds after a few years of retirement. He had a ruddy complexion, gray hair for as long as I can remember, combed straight back, with a pattern of baldness that I see reflected in the mirror each day. He had one "wandering" eye, I think the left one, that was always to his left of the direction of his gaze. Sometimes it was hard to tell in which direction he was looking. He had false teeth for a long time, and at least a bridge before that, and his top teeth seemed sometimes to stretch his upper lip.

He was gentle and considerate. As I exhibit some small courtesy to a stranger, or try to be helpful, I often think I am doing what Dad would do. He followed the rules, and didn't like the courtesy or rule-breaking that he observed. He was always telling anecdotes about someone who didn't wait for their "next" as he called taking one's turn, or about ladies fighting over bargain goods. He was honest. We always compared him to "Honest" Abe who, according to stories, walked miles to return a penny.

He had strongly held opinions, that he was not afraid to express, although he seemed to mellow in his later years. I well remember when I was about 12, listening to him argue against the existence of God, saying that Moses was a great leader who invoked the concept of God to add grandeur to the rules he devised to command a large, unruly, mob. And yet after he retired, he would go to the synagogue on a weekday if they needed a tenth man. I never asked him whether he had changed his mind, was hedging his bet, or as I suspect, was simply doing what needed to be done.

I don't think he ever wavered in his view that the world was divided into the powerful and the weak. He always identified with the weak, and felt that the powerful had no scruples in doing whatever was necessary to retain their power. He studied the newspapers, and kept informed on political issues. He never hesitated to ask about words or references he didn't understand, if learning those words or references would help him to better understand the larger issue. That is, he never hesitated to ask people with whom he was secure, such as his children. Our conversations frequently involved discussions about politics, and he would often ask me to explain something he had read. But he was also very sensitive about his lack of learning, and with people with whom he was not secure, he was alert to any sign that he interpreted as a lack of respect. When he spoke, he expected you to

look at him, and did not like any sign that you weren't paying attention.

My ex father-in-law was a college professor, and not always socially adept. For example, if he wanted to talk with his wife who, along with the rest of us, were eating Friday night dinner next door at my wife's grandmother's, my father-in-law would knock on the door, but refuse to come in. He never showed an ability nor an interest in making my Father feel comfortable, and this caused a lot of tension in my house as my wedding was being planned.

Dad once took me to a baseball game in Forbes Field, when I was at the age when tracking the position of the various vendors was more important than following the action on the field. In general, though, Dad didn't follow sports very closely. He grew skeptical when teams would trade victories, figuring that the better team should always win. In fact he believed that the World Series would run to seven games because each additional game meant more money to the owners. This skepticism did not keep him from watching professional wrestling, which was a staple of TV in the fifties.

Dad would sit on the couch, at the edge of the seat, leaning forward, legs spread, both arms partially raised, shifting from side to side, as the wrestlers on TV punished each other. But maybe his involvement didn't mean that he accepted the action as part of a legitimate athletic event. After all, people get involved in the physical action in a movie when they know it has all been staged. No, I think Dad was drawn to the struggle between the good guy and the bad guy that was the subtext of wrestling in the early TV days, and he couldn't stay uninvolved. At least in this arena, the triumphs of the bad guy were only temporary, and no one knew better than Dad, that in real life, that was not the rule.

The most remarkable feature of Dad's character was that he was non-judgemental about people's decisions and behavior, within the parameters of his strongly held sense of right and wrong. This was not a man anticipating the sixties, with the sense that there were no rules, no responsibilities, no authority; quite the contrary, and yet this was no Old Testament figure so rigid that no deviation from his set of values could be tolerated. He would say that no one can live another person's life; that is, no one can impose their value system as a template for measuring someone else's decisions. He extended this notion even further, when he would argue, and I heard this more than once, that if you decided to loan someone money, you had no right to judge how that person spent it. Your decision was to make the loan; how it was spent was their decision.

I don't know how he came to such a rare combination of attitudes. My first wife and I, looking for some group that held liberal religious views, spent some time with the Unitarians, and later with a group calling themselves Humanists. These people held values we could embrace, without any reference to God, to Heaven or to Hell. All of them seemed so pleased with themselves for having grown beyond the teachings of the sects into which they were born. Alone among them, I viewed myself as a second generation Humanist. I had learned all they could teach by observing and listening to a short, gray-haired, uneducated immigrant, with a Yiddish accent.

As my life has unfolded, and I have met and talked with many people of different backgrounds and different childhood experiences, I marvel at what they say about their relationships with their parents, or with their siblings. I can't relate to their anger, or their jealousies, or their sense of burden with family obligations. When I tell them that it has never been so with me, I'm sure that many feel I'm living in some kind of golden haze, supported by selective memory: but it isn't so. If my parents were alive today, I would rush to their sides as often as I could, and I always regret when my visits with my siblings come to an end. I am convinced that this my parents' legacy.