

sorry and that they would do better next time. But I said, No, Mr. Merrill, there will be no next time. No one in Skowhegan will ever put a finger on any of my property. You had it under your nose, but now you can go out and hunt for good properties to invest in. -- Again, I was the victor and I took a great deal of pleasure in getting even with the whole bunch of them. So this incident closed.

Now I want to backtrack a little and tell you how we happened to move to Boston.

CHAPTER X

It was at the time when Joseph was at Dartmouth and Rebecca at Wheaton. During that winter, there was a terrible plague of fires in college dormitories. At Colby, twelve boys were suffocated one tragic night. We were really worried about our children, and when a letter failed to appear, we were frightened to death. And there were the younger kids to consider; we felt that they needed a Jewish environment. We would gladly have moved to Waterville, but Uncle Louis refused to take over in the Skowhegan store.

Quite by chance, a Mr. Farmer walked into the store and asserted that he had heard that I wanted to sell it. To this, I replied that there were two things that I would never sell; one was my word of honor and the second, my family. The rest of it was for sale. Believe it or not, in less time than it takes me to write it, he gave me a deposit. When I went home in the middle of the afternoon and told Ma that I had sold the store, she could not believe it. But it was so. I cannot say that I regretted it. I had plans to live among Jews and give the children a taste of Jewish life. My only mistake was in not pursuing my own line of business in the city. Some of the blame for this is due to Mr. Nemser (one of my wholesalers in Boston), who pictured me as not the right type for the city. He portrayed the Boston jewelers as crooks, fakers, and cheats. For all I care they could have been like that, and I could have maintained

my own personal standards of honesty as I had in Skowhegan.

But I did feel that perhaps this was my opportunity to get divorced from the bench. I would see what I could do to earn a living as so many others did, not always cooped indoors and chained to the bench. So we rented a first floor flat at 73 Greenwood Street, Dorchester, Massachusetts, drove down from Maine on October 31, 1925, and got settled in our new quarters. The children entered nearby schools at the exact level they had reached in Skowhegan. Ma was happy. She could go into a market and buy meat, fresh bread, and so on just as she wanted and not be at the mercy of some butcher in Portland or Bangor who sent whatever he couldn't get rid of. But for me, life soon began to be hell, especially during the day. It went against my nature to be idle; I found myself choked here. I had never been one to drink or play cards and didn't like day-time movies. And could a person go every day? Certainly not I.

I looked at this and that type of business. My attention found a focus on apartment houses. Just about anyone seemed able to build, rent, sell, and build again. So why shouldn't I? These were my thoughts when I was on the outside looking in. I never dreamed of how much fraud was tied up in this kind of business. The people you dealt with were double-crossers all the way along the line. Even the bankers and financiers were part of this crowd. They were a poker-faced bunch, but not being a poker player, I was not wise to their masks. If the general economy had not changed so soon after I started, however, I still

could have done well despite all the obstacles.

When I had finished two buildings, I decided that if I had still another one, it would occupy my leisure time. The Elm Hill Avenue project did turn out to be a good living. In fact, I could have turned over at a profit every lot I bought. But for some crazy reason I wanted to build. After a while, I bought a house on Winthrop Road, Brookline. On my five hundred dollar deposit, I could have made five thousand, offered by a wealthy builder. But no. I wanted to have another building to kill time. Instead, it killed my resources and many years of hope and hard work. It brought endless hardship.

When the 1929 crash came, the foundations fell out from under all kinds of businesses. Multi-millionaires became paupers; financiers jumped to their death from skyscrapers; insurance companies refused to write policies with clauses that covered inability to be active. I tried to carry on in the midst of this turmoil and chaos. Had it not been for the Shylocks, Ginsburg and Goodman, who held mortgages on my property, things might have come out different. I don't know.

As I sit here and write, February 16, 1949, I cannot help wondering if perhaps it wasn't a good thing that all this did happen. After all, I am well situated here. The business is good; not only has it done well for the past ten years, but will continue to do well for Archie after me. But Ginsburg and Goodman hastened my complete losses in 1938. The twelve years in Boston had not been wasted: The children had had a chance to attend Hebrew School, to be with other Jewish young people; they had been able to attend good

colleges while living at home. Joe, Beck, and Lake were married, Ida was working, Abe in medical school, Archie in school, Phil already a Bar Mitzvah. Ma had managed to go to Paris twice. But now I found myself stripped. What was I to do? commit suicide? Was there enough insurance to provide for the family? I decided to face the music. A live mouse is better off than a dead lion.

By a fortunate coincidence, my former store was about to be vacated, and so I grabbed at the chance to return to my jewelry business and my bench. I realized full well that in the fourteen years that I had been away the type of work had changed; now the very small watches were fashionable. Business methods were different, with sales based on fifty cents down and fifty cents a week. There was no money, no bank, no credit. Many houses were bankrupt. And yet you had to sell a hundred dollars' worth of merchandise to put two or three dollars into the cash register. The Skowhegan people were glad to have me back, and after staying alone here for eight months, I was joined by Ma and Archie and Philip. My business began to show that we could have anything we desired on the table and not fear that what we ate was not rightfully ours.

If only Ma were well! She took the loss of the buildings very much to heart. She worried about us all and particularly about Archie, who was not well at the time. Nor did it add to her happiness that I had to be alone in Skowhegan. As a family, we were always very close-knit, and Ma and I had been together since the day we married. Next to climbing out of chaos, I wanted to see Ma well and happy. I did whatever I

could; I don't know what else I could have done to prolong her life. If, through some unheard-of combination of circumstances her life could have been lengthened through some crime, she would rather have died ten times over than to have seen one wrong. And again I say that while she was alive, she must have had beautiful thoughts. I know that she derived pleasure from me and the children. The very way she passed from this life was an indication of her purity, her nobleness, and her loyalty. She was a person who never had an enemy, and never got mixed up in other people's business. Again, honor to her, my life's beloved, forever and ever.

* * * * *

It is sometimes hard for the younger generation to realize that we of the older generation were once young, too. Among all the hardships that surrounded us, we managed to have some fun. We had some disappointments, too, not things like failing to receive a weekly allowance or a penny for chewing gum or money for Saturday movies and popcorn, but real ones, nonetheless. Our greatest desire was to be grownup so that we could help ease the burden of getting a daily livelihood. We did not complain that we had been brought into the world and that someone owed us a living. We hastened not only in the process of growing up but in everything we did. We had to rush to keep up with the business of everyday existence.

In my youth, I had to learn Hebrew, Jewish, and Russian. When I left Starodub at the age of thirteen, I had these down pat. I also had three years of

watchmaking behind me. As you know, I left without consulting anyone and without any farewells. From that point on, everything moved fast. I grew rapidly, encountered new people and environments, chose friends, and read a great deal. Tolstoi, Gorky, Lermontov, Chekhov, Pushkin, Guy de Maupassant, Gogol, Dostoevski, and many others, besides innumerable Jewish books. I met Ma, finished with Ekaterinaslav, settled in Debaltzevo, worked there, opened a shop, did well, decided to emigrate to America, picked myself up and departed. Once here, I got a job. Another environment. Two dollars a week. Not adequate even in rubles, never mind dollars. Advanced by home study; if I am in America, I should know English. Got married. News of the coming event. The incident with Harry Edelman. Skowhegan came into our lives. And our life here.

Sandwiched in among all this, we did find a little time to play post-office, sing, dance, discuss things, and we even knew the forfeit games with their redeeming punishments.

But now, having settled in Skowhegan, I was a business man, had a few trinkets to sell, a sign with my name, S. Russakoff, Jeweler, and high hopes and a willingness to work and render good service for small pay. With the baby on the way, there was no time to waste. I picked up whatever work came in. If someone had an old clock, not worth a tinker's dam, that had been in the family for seventy-five years or a hundred years, I went out to fix it. Thomas Lamont, the multi-millionaire, once stated that money is the greatest evil. Well, we needed that evil in order to keep body and soul together and to pay the rent.

My first clock-fixing job in a private home in Maine came one day not long after I had set up my business. It was out at a place called Neil's Hill. In principle, I was a good businessman and didn't go out on such calls until after store hours. Even though I may not have taken in one cent, the show had to go on and the store stay open. All outside activities took place in the evening. This was a bitter cold night, and, as I trudged up the hill, the snow lay deep. It occurred to me that the fierce cold and heavy snow were meant as a punishment to me; I had no overshoes, warm overcoat, or mittens. But who cared about punishment? There were my wife and baby to consider.

I finally found myself in an old-fashioned house, warm, clean, and full of antiques. I was greeted by Mrs. Howard Neil, a little old lady. It turned out, in the several visits that I had to make to fix the two old clocks, that she was a confirmed Spiritualist. Having had to do the work in installments because I may not have had the right tools with me or couldn't do the job at one time, I heard a great deal from Mrs. Neil about the certainty of Spiritualism. She swore that she talked with her husband, received his signals, and sensed his presence. Even with strangers in the house, she communicated with him, and he always guided her in what to say and do.

Under the circumstances, I had to be polite, and I had to weigh my words so as to make myself understood by a born Yankee. Even now, after forty-four years in this country, I know that my vocabulary is limited. Imagine, then, my difficulty at a moment when I had been here only twenty-eight months! But I

didn't want to hurt her feelings; I would not want to do that to anyone except a Nazi today. There were no Nazis then, but there were plenty of Jew-baiters. But there was a difference. In any case, this Mrs. Neil tried to make a Spiritualist out of me. I suppose it was part of her thirteen thousand good deeds before she departed from this life. She even persuaded me to accompany her to Lakewood, where the Spiritualists conducted several weeks of meetings every summer. They received messages from the dead, made tables move, produced mysterious tappings, and all that sort of thing. But I was not converted.

Of religious arguments I have had many, for I was among the first Jews to come to this community able to provide conclusive proof of what the Jew stands for. I had been able to show that not all Jews are junk dealers, nor are they money-grabbers. I had to go into the subject this deeply in order to explain why Jews are not generally engaged in industry and agriculture; Russia and many other European countries had prevented Jews from owning a piece of land outside the ghetto, to say nothing of beyond city limits. It was frequently necessary to resort to bribes and cunning in order just to stay alive.

In connection with my present talking about religion, I should like to tell you about my relationship with Father Renauld, the Catholic priest here in town. Perhaps you recall my experience in Starodub with the two spinsters who tried to convert me to their faith. In Russia, if a person could claim twenty converts, the Holy Synod bestowed a gold medal on him, an honor not to be sneezed at. The strongest attraction

for the Jew was that, once converted, he became a free man; he could live wherever he wished, do what he pleased; there were no more restrictions. If he was of school age, then all high schools and colleges opened their gates. In America, too, in a different manner, the clergy tries to enrich its fold. Many Protestant ministers used to come into the store to talk religion with me, part of their daily duties, I suppose. Just as though they had cleansed their house but found mine messy!

The Catholic priest in town, Father Renauld, was a friendly man, who, before entering this profession had been a window-trimmer for Jordan Marsh Company in Boston. He was always pleasant and smiling and had a nice how-do-you-do whenever he met you, more like a regular fellow than a priest. He often came into my store. We transacted very little business, but I have never measured things or people by the cold yardstick of dollars and cents. I did like dollars; I had to have them for existing. But I also befriended people, without thought of monetary gain. If a person didn't trade with me, I never asked why.

So Father Renauld would come in with a broad good morning and stuff about whether I had done a good deed. To this, I replied that if you call a good deed taking care of the kids, seeing that they had their breakfast, and leaving the house happy, yes, I had. From this point, a discussion developed, not to a high pitch. But there was frank, open conversation on my part. What else could I do right here to prove to people that we Jews were as good as anyone around us?

One question he raised was why the Jews had been foresaken by God and left to the mercy of punishment itself. He said that it was because we denied the holiness of Christ and would not accept truth; not until we joined the Christian fold would we be saved. This, he said, was the wish of God. At this point, I rose to my feet and asked him if this was just a friendly call. If so, I wanted to be sure that whatever I said would not cause offense. Not being a scholar, I could not use fancy words, but I would try to be clear. I wanted to cause no hard feelings because, after all, I was a businessman.

He urged me to be frank, as he wanted to know the real reason for our stubbornness; why we withstood all the hardships and continued to deny what he considered an accepted fact. We still await the Messiah; they have him. I asked him if he believed in the Bible, not excluding the Old Testament. I looked straight at him and, pointing my finger at his eyes, said, -- I can see the Devil in your eyes. He, not you, is trying to change me. He offers the olive branch of peace but with poison attached. I don't know what kind of delicacies have been offered in the attempt to convert the Jew. But history tells us all about the Spanish Inquisition with all its horrors. Perhaps I am descended from one of those early Spanish Jews.

You need not, I continued, worry about my soul. When the time comes for me to meet my Maker, let the Devil take me into the Lord's court and accuse me of having been a sinner. And, after he, like all the Jew-baiters throughout history, has denounced my failure to carry out God's commands while I lived, and has

demanded that my soul be sentenced to a million years of hell and punishment, I would ask God Almighty if I may defend myself. -- Tenderly, He will say, Yes, my son, you may.

On the pedestal is a book. Pointing to it, I will ask whether it is the Holy Bible. It is. Turning to the Ten Commandments, I would ask Him if He is listening carefully to how I interpret, as some words have various meanings. So do I understand the meaning of the First Commandment: There shall be no other God than Me, God Almighty. We have withstood all the punishment of hell, millions of us have been humiliated, massacred, destroyed, and murdered because we guarded the sacred place where Your command is written. Among all who accuse and persecute us, is there any nation that has sacrificed so much for Your Torah? who have tried to live by its teachings, charity, kindness, devotion to family, extending a helping hand to neighbors? It is they who carried Your Book in one hand and a weapon in the other, trying to persuade me to change to some other ideas. If I did wrong, then someone must have made a mistake in putting down Your First Commandment. We have stood by Your word and Your command through all hardships; we have seen mothers and children murdered, men tortured and killed, the homes destroyed for generations, for centuries. Is this the reward? God, I stand humbly before You, asking only for justice.

Now, Father Renauld, I asked, what do you think the verdict will be? -- Sam, he said, You are a God-fearing man. God bless you. -- And he walked out. He never came into the store again, but we always greeted

each other in the friendliest way when we met on the street.

* * * * *

And so now I come to conclusions and try to sort out from the past the outstanding events which overshadow the others. Was it when, just out of Hebrew School, I began to learn watchmaking? Or was it when, without warning, I left home? Or was it the boat-ride on the Dnieper? Or my arrival in Dniepropetrovsk? Or my first job there? Or meeting Ma and her family on that Purim night? I do think that was the turning-point. I began to feel like a mature young man, especially when I realized that she liked my company. The progress from the place where, for two years, I slept in a dark room behind a barber shop and earned one and a half rubles a week to the place where I earned ten rubles in beautiful surroundings and received such lovely letters from my sweetheart was important. But important also was the time that my friend Alter forced me to open my own shop. But how about my decision to go to America, with all the thrills of the journey? the exciting border-crossing, the disappointment in Liverpool, the kindness of the Bolotins when they discovered that I was from Starodub, then my medical treatment and my voyage?

I guess the greatest joy of all was when Ma finally arrived on April 1, 1906. We knew then that we could see each other every day, be together always, and plan our lives together.

Important, too, was the incident in which I advanced Edelman the twenty-five dollar loan which enabled him to go back to Skowhegan. That was how he

could then send me a watch for repair, which started the events leading to our coming here to settle. A milestone was our renting the store and the upstairs flat.

I have not mentioned our wedding, because it was a sober occasion. Neither of us had folks here at the time. But since we both were in devoted love, there was no fear or hesitation. There had been no promises and no engagement before; we took each other's loyalty for granted.

An especially exciting moment was when I returned to New York and told Ma that we were going to settle in Maine. Particularly with Joseph on the way, our purchases and the hustle and bustle of packing were all the more full of anticipation. Then, when we were installed in our new surroundings, we had to wait--for our baby and for business. And with our waiting there was fear. Finally came the birth of our first son and a break in the slack tide of business on that day. After this, the gradual developments: moving to a better store and a better house, arrival of members of the family from Europe, and then on to a still better store and house, and another baby and still another.

By this time, we had Joe, Beck, Lake, and Ida, when I moved into my present store, first as a tenant and later as owner of the property. Abe was born on Mt. Pleasant Avenue. This was a great event. The purchase of our very own home was a wonderful moment. Nor must we forget our new Overland. This was not bought on time-payments. How all of you children enjoyed the rides, picnics, and trips we took in that

Overland! Archie was the baby of the family then. He sat on my lap all the time when I drove to New York. You kids liked to keep count of the overnight places along the highway. Joseph sat beside me with the guidebook. He would read when to take the right hand of the fork, when to bear left, and he watched for the rings painted on the posts, which were the road-signs on the primitive roads of those days.

The Waterville store was a big step forward. Philip's birth completed our family happily. The purchase of the Oxford Hotel property stands out in the chain of events. So does the signing of the Woolworth lease.

We must not forget the big day when Joseph left for Dartmouth, in September 1923 and the one in 1925, when Beck went off to Wheaton. All along the line, in school and in college, Joseph was inclined to make the gloomy prediction that he would flunk and be expelled; then, as in his first year in high school, he would receive highest grades and honors.

Our moving to Boston forms a part of the pattern, but how to fit it in is a mystery. In spite of all my efforts, it was a time of insecurity and hesitation, and never very pleasant. And you know how it ended.

At no time will I forget that Ma's two visits to Paris were a source of jealous joy to me, because I so much wanted to travel with her and see her people. But things were against me, and I overlooked my own feelings so long as she could be with them.

Our return to Skowhegan was an outstanding event, for I was accepted by old friends as well as the younger folks. And so our destiny brought us back to the starting point.

Very few people can recall the things I have seen and lived through. As I go back to the first of the 1900's, I remember seeing such things in everyday life: The way to illuminate a room was to have a chimney with a hole in it; in this would burn two or three pieces of fine kindling wood. Then, I have seen the tallow candle used; then the wick in a glass of oil; later, the kerosene lamp; then, gas. Electric light bulbs, which came along next, were not what they are now: They were globes which contained carbon points that had to be replaced regularly. I have seen oxen harnessed to draw carts. I have traveled in covered wagons. I have seen horses wading knee-deep in mud. Such was the state of transportation in those days. And what drudgery it was to keep the house warm during the winter! What effort and hard labor were involved in cutting the wood, hauling it out of the woods, bringing it into the yard, sawing it, splitting it, piling it to dry, taking it in under cover, and then bringing it upstairs to feed the stoves! Nowadays, all you need is a tankful of oil; the thermostat will take care of the rest of the job. Insulation, metal windows, and other improvements make the task even simpler.

And the automobile is quite an improvement over the covered wagon mode of transportation. I remember how wolves used to attack the horses and the passengers in Russia, and how people froze to death in such conveyances. Today you travel in a car with heater and radio, and some even have telephones, to say nothing of two-way radio. You can be in the middle of the wilderness and by the flick of a finger learn every detail of what is happening in the farthest corners of the world.

And what about matches? I can remember when people carried a small bit of iron, a cotton and wick, and, when they wanted to light a cigarette or pipe, struck the iron on a handy rock. This produced a spark with which they ignited the wick. To build a fire, they gathered dry moss, placed kindling wood on top, used the iron-wick-rock method to get it started, and then blew to increase the flame. I also remember the stinking sulphur matches, which looked like a comb. You broke one off and scratched it across the seat of your pants. This left a shiny streak on the cloth. Incidentally, that is how luminous dials and hands for watches were discovered. When you struck, the match would sizzle and fume, with an odor that caused your nostrils to curl in protest. Today, your cigarette lighter does the job in a jiffy and safety matches are an old story.

All of the electrical appliances are products of this century. They certainly have improved the life of the housewife. She puts the laundry into an automatic washer and presses a button. The electric dryer cuts out the back-break of hanging the clothes. The mangle does the ironing. The deep-freeze makes shopping and keeping food easy. Stoves are now equipped with dials that regulate the heat and turn themselves off and on to suit the needs of the housewife. The most elaborate of meals can be prepared in a matter of minutes with the use of frozen foods, prepared mixes, and modern equipment. Compare this to the drudgery Grandmother endured--the time she spent getting the stove hot enough to perform, the hours she had to hover over it to see that the precious food didn't burn.

What future generations will discover is a question. It will be bigger yet when man develops atomic power not to kill and destroy but for human betterment. There is no end to its possibilities. It is no dream that future generations will find a way to cure sickness and prevent diseases for which there are no cures known today. Tuberculosis, polio, arthritis, rheumatism, and heart disease. Just think of the power that atomic energy contains to turn the wheels of industry and supply domestic needs! It is no dream that some of you will see trains driven by this power and ships running by it. Houses will be heated by it, perhaps in the form and size of an aspirin tablet that will hold enough power to keep an ordinary house heated during a winter that averages thirty below.

But I was around when householding was still quite primitive. I look back on those days when life was hard, particularly for the woman of the house. Not only did she have to do all the chores the hard way, bear and rear her children without benefit of pediatrician and psychiatrist, but even weave the cloth she used. Just think how many nights of work it took to produce enough cloth for a set of underwear! And then I saw a hand-loom at work; later, the kind where one weaver ran two looms. Now one man runs eight or ten and produces in one hour more than a whole family could show for a year's labor.

There is progress along material lines. But still there is much to be done before the peoples and nations of the earth can come to an understanding and live in peace. Nations are always arguing, finding fault, competing. The fancy words that come out of the

conferences are very appealing, but what is the outcome? Behind the assurances that each desires peace, there is backstage diplomacy, where each nation jockeys to gain points to suit its own ends, concessions on this, control of that. The oil rights, for example, are a plum of the greatest importance.

There are many, many points that must be settled, so we look to the United Nations. How much hope have people all over the world directed toward that organization! After every war, the so-called diplomats habitually talk in high-sounding terms about how war does not pay, how millions of lives have been needlessly sacrificed, how uncounted billions of dollars have been wasted in property lost, production stalled, and so on. What about the slogan, Their lives were not spent in vain? -- What about the parents who lost their sons and the wives who lost their husbands? and the children who never knew their father? Can all this suffering be calculated in terms of money? of gold? of possessions?

We read in history books that war is a destructive instrument for attaining peace. And yet, wars continue to be fought, and again we hear a repetition of the speeches, the oratorical finery inserting into the new generation's mind renewed hope that their lives were not laid down in vain. And so it goes on. After every war, some few emerge with millions and millions of dollars in profit. They still repeat the fact that Rome was destroyed, that Alexander did not accomplish his dream of empire; they point out Napoleon and his great strategy, find loopholes in his campaign to conquer Russia, and improve on his techniques.

Bismarck's diplomacy is set up as a model of greatness.

If all the wealth squandered on war and destruction that we have seen since the beginning of this century alone had been used for the betterment of mankind, try to picture the results: Is it a crazy dream to imagine every corner of the world free from misery? that each family would have adequate housing and even own its own home? that highways would be fool-proof and safe and maybe even beautiful? that a retirement system would pay every retired worker two hundred dollars a month when he reached a certain age? why doesn't some statistician work out a figure on a per capita basis?

Many statistical analyses are of little interest to you and me. What do we care about the percentage of stock that is bought and sold on any given day, week, or century and how it is related to sun, moon, or tide? or how many gallons of water flow over Niagara Falls and why? or how many individual blades there are in a ton of hay? What good did the professor accomplish who worked for twenty years and came up with the fact that we have been living on false time, either fast or slow by two seconds? The only person I can think of who might welcome the two seconds on the slow side is the fellow who stays in night clubs until closing time.

But statistics on money spent on destruction would be quite another matter. You would even clip the item about it from the newspaper and refer to it again and again. You would call it to the attention of your friends, and public interest might bring it to the ears

of those very personages who control the seats where a lasting peace can be arranged. A real one that will really last. If we were humane enough as a nation to send fifty to sixty thousand dollars to help bring up a tiny girl who got caught in a shaft and about whom all the newspapers and radios carried minute-by-minute bulletins, we certainly should possess enough social responsibility to help bring about world peace, and thereby save millions of human beings.

If we are not prepared to do this and carry out an intelligent program to insure lasting peace, we must give a thought to the destructive implements being perfected for use in the next war. It is reported that not so much as a blade of grass will grow for years on a spot affected by one of these missiles. And these projectiles can cover vast distances. I don't know how big one of these things is, whether it weighs one pound, five pounds, or is the size of a pea, but I have read reports of their power. When one of them explodes, its rays are far too bright for the human eye, and it is not healthy to approach the place for months after the explosion unless you are wearing special protective clothes. Otherwise, you will be affected by radio-activity, which will eventually destroy you. Perhaps you will stop to survey your surroundings before you turn to meet your Maker, if you dare view the spectacle. You won't see Rockefeller Center with its magnificent buildings, nor the Hercules that stands in front of 630 Fifth Avenue, New York City. He was not strong enough to withstand the blast. Never will he be seen any more, nor will there be anyone left to replace him even though he was sculptured by man.

I know that you shudder at such thoughts; so do I. I worked hard, deprived myself in order that my children should have a better world in which to live. I do not object to paying my share of the taxes. It only disturbs me that one cannot attain peace of mind. One begins to wonder. I dare say that I am inclined to agree with the writer who suggested that a quick way to peace was to send all the present diplomats back home to their golf games and replace them in equal number by soldiers from each nation, preferably amputees, cripples, invalids, all veterans of wars. I am sure that such a group would talk a language that could be understood without the help of a corporation lawyer!

The highest hope I have is that before I leave this world a real, lasting peace may exist among all nations and peoples. Then will I know that good was accomplished for future generations. Then I will know that no longer will one hear newlyweds talk about children as fodder for wars; wars take youth, and there are no records to show how many Edisons and Einsteins and other brilliant minds were snatched away before they even reached maturity.

Let us hope that there will be Peace. Just one word, but it will sound beautiful in music or spoken, regardless of what arrangement is used or what major concerto it is played in. Will it be soon? Will the present United Nations be immortalized as the body that achieved that peace--or failure? Time will tell.

Would you think that I am a man of exceptional wisdom? I can hardly be considered that, for recall that all my classes and schooling would not add up to

junior high school level. But with this meager bit, in spite of all the hardships of my youth, I was always interested in world affairs. I will never forget how eagerly I read every detail of the Dreyfus affair and the trial, how upset I was when he was found guilty, stripped of all military honors, and sentenced to Devil's Island. Another high point in my youthful memory was when Dr. Herzl started the idea of Palestine as a homeland for the Jews. How wonderful it was to think that if such a miracle could take place, all the downtrodden Jews and I, too, could leave Russia! We could be a nation of our own, with nothing to fear from the drunken, grafting Pogromschikes. Free from a land where from one day to the next you could not be sure what the Jew-haters had planned against you. Free, too, from the terrifying knowledge that you were completely defenseless. The worst of it all was, I think, that the destruction brought on by the hoodlums was sanctioned by the so-called government. This environment certainly produced no peace of mind.

Your thoughts were many and your heart heavy. Here, you lived among people who regarded you as something degraded, merely to be destroyed. Why? -- because you are a Jew. You have denied the "Saviour." Your teachings are no good, so it is best to do away with you. And yet, you wonder, what kind of belief do your persecutors have? If, by the teachings of their church, they turn into murderers of an innocent people, then how good is such a faith? In spite of their so-called superiority they run to us for advice, using our brains to develop industry and commerce. And in the next moment they trample all over us, with

whatever insults are in vogue. Was this the thought of the Maker? On whose side is the Heavenly Father?

Let us study the parallel of two peoples: One is armed with guns and has the government administration on its side. The other is a defenseless people, whose sole protection is the Torah and faith. By looking up to heaven, the latter group lets himself be destroyed. The first is cruel by one religion; the other withstands all the horrors by having its religion. Even the latter has shown how much kindlier its message is, how many millions of its people Israel have been lost in the process?

Will the people of the world ever come to their senses? Must there always be new and more terrifying ideologies? Or will there be just one, the aim of which will be to help all peoples live in happiness and comfort, and the big Howitzers can be used as bulldozers for building homes, clearing wild territory, and making happy playgrounds for generations to come? Or do the diplomats plan to use atomic energy for destruction?

It really is not my intention to go into world affairs. Who am I to say how things should be done? I just want to leave this note to you, my dear children, and to your children, so that at some time you will have insight into the lives and thoughts of your parents. Perhaps the world would call us ignoramuses, knowing little about great books and never having received diplomas from learned places. We picked what we could out of the air, sifted it through our brain, and followed the ways which to us looked clean and honorable. Further than that, our capacity for expression ceases. Take whatever good you find in it and use it for the

betterment of mankind.

I do not think that you will go very far wrong if you follow the path that Ma and I traveled. Many children have little information about their parents' background. I have tried to demonstrate that one can go through a life of hell and yet succeed if one has presence of mind, a sincere willingness to work hard for one's existence, and none of the world-owes-me-a-living attitude. It may take a long time. But you'll get there so long as you have the determination and will.

I sometimes wonder, now that I can draw from so many experiences that I have had during my life, what I would do if I could start from the beginning. What things would I do again and which would I eliminate? First and foremost is something I would not do: I would not tie myself up with financiers, which to me is a fancy term. I would much prefer to be with people on the ground floor and take my chances. Of course, there are exceptions. So is the two-dollar ticket you buy on a horse race. The umpteenth one might win.

So be careful in all your endeavors. Use good, sound judgment. Remember that the person who talks softest to you is not necessarily an angel, that there are those who will try hard to undo your purse-strings. You must be the master of your own purse-string.

If I have not mentioned it before, I should now like to say that my greatest joy would have been if my folks had come to this country before I was born so that I could have had the benefits of at least an elementary education. I am sure that I and all the members of my family would have appreciated the

opportunity to peddle papers just so as to have had schooling.

As I come close to the end of my chronicle, I must not forget that even amidst the poverty, misery, sickness, blindness, prostitution, thievery, and murder in Russia (and I have seen all of them), it is a wonder how the civic planners laid out their cities. Not one was without its beautiful park, not a wild hodge-podge, but a carefully landscaped place with shrubs, trees, and flowers. There were benches conveniently located, lovers' lanes, and music stands for open air band and even symphony concerts. Some cities had more than one such park.

The buildings, not only those used by the government, but also the commercial ones, were highly decorative. They actually looked like museums. And the market centers gave a chance to farmers from miles around to display and sell their products. Of course, today in America there is no such thing as a dirt farmer. A modern farmer doesn't raise his own food; he buys it from the grocery store just like you and me. Although potatoes are raised in the millions of bushels, and so are wheat, corn, barley, oats, and the rest, all these are in the hands of the big money. But it was different in my day.

In my travels here, I have seen cities with business districts and residential areas, but I have never seen squares such as were always at the center of the Russian towns. Try to imagine a square extending as far as the eye can see. If you follow along and turn left, as on an L, you will see an extension. On the sides are stores, mostly arranged by kinds of

merchandise--yardgoods, china, hats and caps, shoes, feed, and so on. Then, there were merchants, usually girls and women, who sold small things right out on the street. The cardboard boxes containing their wares were removed every night by a husky fellow who threw a rope over the pile of them, heaved them up on his shoulder, and carried them to a place where, for a nominal fee, they were kept under cover over night. Surprisingly enough, the fellow would put the boxes in the right place the next morning; he knew where and to whom they belonged. In these movable stores such items as beads, hairpins, and soap were sold.

Then there were places where a farm woman could bring whatever surplus she had to sell, a few beets, a dozen or so eggs, carrots, onions, potatoes, or even a container holding a quart or two of milk. You would come into the open market and buy whatever you wanted. Here, too, there was plenty of bargaining. So you kept going from one to another. Perhaps you bought eggs from one, carrots and potatoes from another, a rooster from a third.

There was always a section where horses, up for sale, were tied to the railing provided for them. The buyer would select the horse that he considered best. If the seller snapped his whip and scared the animal, this was a bad sign, for it indicated that the horse didn't have ability, alertness, and spirit of his own and had to be frightened into a show of life. This usually lost the sale.

And what about the farmer who has a load of hay or straw to sell and the one who has cut down one pine log, ten, twelve, or twenty feet long? Yes, he has his

section. And the industrious fellow who has stove wood all ready for use; and the one who has firewood in four-foot lengths, too. Then there is the alley where all the butchers are to be found. There is the department where women sell apples by the measure or the piece. And you should see the cherries tied onto a stick and sold at a penny a stick. Numberless items were sold on this square. Monday and Friday were market days.

At the head of this square stood the city scales. These were not at all similar to the kind you see now, the platform type which you drive onto. The ones I am telling about were the old-fashioned kind: If it was bags of wheat you were weighing, you piled them on one side of the scale, put weights on the other until the indicator was in the exact center. Then, you computed the weight--ten pood and twelve and one-half pounds. That was official, city weight.

You may wonder what kind of life these people led. It may surprise you to know that at times life was gay and full of laughter. Dances were often held in a corner of the square in front of police headquarters. The girls would be decked out in native costume. Their hair was worn with long braids wound around on top of their heads and decorated with fancy, Spanish-style combs. Their collars would be lavishly trimmed with beads and embroidery. Altogether, it may not have amounted to twenty kopeks, but it did the trick. The dancers would form a circle and go around and around, performing certain steps, not just hopping. The singing was superb. Occasionally, a dancer or two would step inside the circle and execute some specialty. It was not of the type one would see under the super-

instruction of a ballet dancer, but a spontaneous, homespun variety. The acrobatic dances were very exciting, much like what you may have seen the Don Cossacks do in their recitals. When a lady is the partner in the dance, it changes somewhat. Each group tries to outdo the other. As part of the audience, you got a lot of amusement from watching these shows.

Do you know what the favorite delicacy was in my youth? Here in America ice cream tops the list. But you must eat ice cream soon after it is served. There was ice cream in Russia, too: A man carrying a tall tub on his head walked around calling, Sacharnoye morozhenye! When he saw that you were interested, down would come the refrigerator-tub packed with ice and he would spoon out into your glass two or three colors of ice cream for five or ten kopeks. But far more popular than ice cream were Semetchkehs, or sunflower seeds. Over there, it was almost an industry. Everyone grew them, acres of them. You had to put up scarecrows because the birds, too, liked to pick the seeds when they were ripe. You remove the seeds from the pods, dry them in the oven; when they are done, they have a toasted, nutlike flavor. Pockets are made to hold the seeds. If you haven't a supply at home, you'll find plenty of Semetchkeh sellers everywhere. For one or two kopeks you can fill your pocket and then you are set.

You are all dressed up. You even have new shoes. And shoes over there are very special; they sing, scromche, scromche, as you walk. You take a few Semetchkehs from your pocket, choose one with your other hand, place the pointed end between your front

teeth, and out pops the seed into your mouth. The shell is dropped just anywhere. Consequently, wherever you go, you see shells strewn inches high. Since we are on the subject of seeds, we must give credit to the sellers, who had a special way of roasting them. They tasted much better when bought from certain vendors who had the peculiar know-how, and you had your favorites among them. These were usually women. All this only goes to prove that the best is appreciated even if the purchase amounts to only a kopek.

And, while talking about seeds, we must not overlook pumpkin seeds. Here, you buy pumpkins as a vegetable or for use in pies, but over there, the flesh was used for cattlefeed. It was the seeds that were all-important. While you could purchase these seeds for one kopek, too, the measure would be only about one-third as much as the sunflower seeds.

You often found groups of people sitting around singing folk songs in harmony. It was pleasant to hear them. When they were young, the Russian people drowned their hardships in song, and when older, in vodka. Their end was known at the beginning of their lives. Even with no education (for there was no such thing as compulsory schooling), they began to realize that something was wrong with the kind of government that kept them down. If they hadn't had those wicked agitators, sponsored by the government, who blamed the Jews for their deprivation, they might have protested and demanded improvement. But, innocent as they were and under the influence of Krushevan and others who spread the evil gospel that their enemy was the Jew, and fired with a few drinks of vodka supplied by such an agitator,

they ran to stage a pogrom on the Jews.

But I lived in Russia long enough to see the time come when they began to doubt that story. Although hatred against the Jew continued, they began to attack the landowners, mostly those with titles of count, duke, and prince. I remember that near Starodub there was a huge tract of land owned by one such high muck-a-muck. He let it out in portions in such a way that although the Muzhiks, their wives, and their children worked all season, they couldn't earn enough for a pair of shoes. So they attacked the mansion and burned it to the ground. He appealed to the governor, who was his brother, for help, but got no cooperation; sending in the militia might have stirred up a real revolt.

Life in Ekaterinaslav was altogether different. Here, people dressed better; there was industry. Those logs which floated down the Dnieper, which I described earlier, reached their destination here. The banks of the river were crowded with sawmills, where the timber was cut up for building purposes. For miles and miles you could see piles of stacked-up lumber. It was here that the river drivers received their pay for the full trip, during which they had not once left their floating rafts. Naturally, they went to town! In short order, certain shady characters would strike up an acquaintance with them, and, after a few stops at Tractires (drinking places), these fellows would find themselves lying on the waterfront, stripped of money and belongings, and suffering from a hangover. The lumber owner would have to advance them fare money so that they could return on the riverboat and get another raft job. It was mostly this kind of passenger

on the boat that caused the far from delicate perfumes I described earlier.

It is interesting to note that the Dnieper continues to Odessa and flows into the Black Sea. Ekaterinaslav, which the Communists have re-christened Dniepropetrovsk, is the place where American engineers built for the Russians their Boulder Dam. Where this dam now stands there was in earlier times an obstacle so great that no boat nor even a raft of logs could pass. The obstruction came from underwater rocks which almost divided the river into separate divisions. So great was the impact of the rushing waters before they flowed on into the Black Sea that if a raft of timber reached this point, it would have been smashed into splinters. Bringing the lumber all the way to Odessa, however, meant a much better price. And what won't people do for money? Some of the experienced drivers actually took the chance of navigating the cargo through this danger. Familiar with the winds and channels, they would anchor the raft within several hundred feet of the worst point. The water rushed in huge waves. Their trick was to start from the place of anchor with a certain wave and keep going with it. If their calculations were correct, the raft would sail over the rocks without a scratch and the expedition was a success. If it struck, then the crew had to fight for their lives. Some were never seen again. But men took the chance.

But let us return to Ekaterinaslav. I think I told you earlier that Catherine the Great was responsible for that city. Potemkin, probably her seventy-ninth lover, lived there. It was on his lake that Ma and I

enjoyed so many hours together. The city was a beautiful place, nicely laid out. Off the Prospekt, there were large stores of all kinds. The width of the Prospekt was twice that of Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, with tramways down the center, a lovers' lane on each side. The public sidewalk was four times as wide as those in Boston, with trees, shrubs, and benches on either side. Here, too, the art of Semetchkeh eating was much in evidence. There was a traffic lane and the sidewalks ran alongside the buildings. Off the Prospekt were the opera, the library with its theatre, and also the city park, which was really very beautiful and restful. Then, there was another park where admission was free during the day but where in the evening tickets were required for the open air theatre. Chansonettes, dancers, acrobats, and comedians performed. I often attended, frequently as the guest of my Turkish friend, Idris Boris Albanets. Later, he included Ma in the invitation. It was good entertainment. Every week the program changed; it was composed of short, peppy vaudeville acts.

Here I learned what my mother never told me. Only, in this skit, it was the father (Papenka). The girl was a student of Mathematica and Grammatica and her father warned her to be wary with Muschin (men) for some kind of reason (Prichin). But what the Prichin was he refused to explain, saying that when she got married, the Prichin would become evident. So now she longs to grow older fast so as to find out that pesky Prichin, but Mathematica and Grammatica don't reveal the answer to the puzzle.

This, then, was the type of amusement that brought people in at a nominal fee. The inside of the park was so pleasant that before the stage performance began, you strolled with your girlfriend, stopped at the refreshment stand, partook of a cold drink of Boozah and enjoyed the delicacies that went with it. Boozah is chalvah-kishmish-rachatlacum, of Turkish origin, and very tasty for those who had enough money for a treat.

In the winter time, there were regular operas. And there were the Ermitage and other such places with fancy names in operation upstairs. They were not off somewhere on back streets but right on the main drag. There were electric lights all around the canopies hung over their entrances. The only people who could enter were those who could use a one-hundred ruble note for cigarette-paper. Yes, there were people who indulged in such extravagance!--I still remember an engine boiler that kept pop-popping to produce the electricity for the building.

Also, there were Jewish performances. By taking on the name of German theatre, this became legal. I always enjoyed the shows and in time saw them bring forth actors and actresses who were outstanding. I can say that in my span of life I have seen the beginnings of the Purim play for children. The father of the Jewish theatre, Goldfaden, played it with his troupe in Starodub. He also produced such plays as Shulamith, Bar Kochba, and Acades Itschak (Sacrifice of Isaac). When I got to New York, the Jewish theatre was in its hey-day, but it is now rapidly disappearing. No one is to blame. Perhaps this is the way of progress. The emigrants became Americanized and moved

uptown, away from their old haunts and old culture. Along with many amateur players, I saw such great stars as Jacob Adler, David Kessler, Boris Magulesco, and Madame Lilpzin. Now they are part of a by-gone time. I don't know what amuses the present generation. They certainly don't derive the joy we got from our rare one-kopek stick of candy. New shoes and other wearing apparel, which meant so much to us, are nothing nowadays. For the most part, we wore ragged clothing and, of course, always went barefoot during the summer. Who had stockings?

No. You live better, much better. You are trying to make a better world to live in because your parents did their best to give you things that they could never have hoped for, things that were the privilege of only the upper class. You, my dear children, were kept warm, well fed, decently shod and clothed. Perhaps you didn't get the first silk stockings manufactured, but you had all the education you desired, and music, too. So you have attained during my lifetime that which any person desires--to be a man among men. According to my definition, this is good living, and I have no fear that as the future is for all young folks to look forward to and to enjoy, it will be worthwhile. You will attain it sooner than I did.

It is now January 1, 1953. A miracle has occurred: For the first time, Marcia, one of my grand-daughters, has agreed to have breakfast with me. You, reading this perhaps a hundred years hence, may wonder what this is all about. You see, Philip, my youngest son, and his wife, Barbara, occupy the apartment downstairs. Marcia, their five and one-half year old, is a bright little

girl who is being brought up very nicely. Because she is afflicted with an allergic condition, her parents have to be very careful about her food. I usually like to spend Sundays and holidays writing letters and articles which come to my mind. So as not to disturb others, I close the door and quietly go about my business bookkeeping, letters to the children, my brothers, and friends, and then this pad of writing.

On this particular day, I heard at my door a faint knock. No. it was hardly that--more like the gentle tap of a toothpick. Only a person with my watchmaker's keen sense of hearing would notice it. But I heard the little tap-tap. Here was Marcia. Usually she requests pencil and paper and I dictate a letter. She writes to someone; her favorite is Aunt Beck. When I suggested breakfast to her, I expected the customary reply, No thank you. But when she asked me what kind of big letter I was writing on this pad, I explained that it was my life's history and said that if she agreed to have breakfast with me, I would put it down in this record. Then, when she got to the second grade and learned to read, she would see for herself that on this day, for the first time, she had breakfast with Grandpa.

At first, she said nothing. But soon she went downstairs, where Phil and Barbara were still asleep. She whispered to Barbara that I had invited her to breakfast and could she accept. She soon returned and reported happily that she could eat with me. Now, she said, you sure will put my name in your history book if I have breakfast with you.

So we had a lovely breakfast and Barbara said

afterward that it was a better one than she usually eats at home. And I am incorporating this account in this memory book for future reference. It is the important event for the very first day of 1953. May it be a happy year for all mankind and let there be no more wars fought among humans.

