

CHAPTER IX

No brass bands greeted us when we reached Skowhegan. Perhaps the Edelmans and Goldbergs welcomed our coming so that they would have someone to play cards with. But we did nothing of the kind. We had work ahead and plenty of it. Believe me, it was difficult getting started with so little with which to work. I don't know who got the shortest end--I in the store downstairs or Ma upstairs in the house. But it didn't matter, for we were together. We always had the comforting thought to fall back on that Mr. Eypel had assured me of my job if this new venture did not succeed.

Ma was ahead of me in that she could prepare the meal more easily than I could provide the few cents for its cost. There were no lines of customers waiting to enter my store. The few things I had in stock were paltry and made no kind of showing compared to the two flourishing jewelry stores on the upper side of the same street. But my concern was not about them. It was about us. And the little things that came in were very much appreciated. What kind of work was brought in?--Mostly worn-out clocks that no one else wanted to bother with; but the owners were sentimental, or at least they were forty-two years ago.

It was on January 12, 1907 that I opened my own store. (This is being written January 3, 1949.) In those days, people liked to keep the old clock or antiquated key-wind watch. Such was the work that came

to my hand. But there was not much of that, and there were idle moments, with the earnings short even for our modest existence. But, critical though the period was, it was my job to pull through somehow. Just at this time, the worsted mills were on strike, and that was an excuse for the hardship. That by no means cut my earnings by one hundred dollars a day or even a week. If I could take in twenty-five dollars a week, that would be a blessing. Anyway, some excuse was better than none, and I kept on plugging. The baby was due to arrive in July, and every day brought us one day closer to the event. Many things were needed. Our living quarters were cold, but we didn't complain any more than did the pioneers of old when they encountered hardship in their quest for a new way of life. Besides, there was no one to whom we could complain. There were, as I have mentioned, several other Jewish families in Skowhegan and some in towns nearby. Harry Cohen, who later became a good friend, was a young lad of about thirteen or fourteen when we first met him. He and his family had come to a B'rith at the Goldbergs and had had to spend the night because a heavy snowstorm prevented them from returning to Pittsfield, where they lived at the time. Mrs. Goldberg was a pleasant, warm-hearted, and hospitable woman; she liked us, Ma especially, and we often visited them of an evening or on Sunday.

As to the higher aspects of life, there was little here for us. Socially, it was dead; there was no one with whom to exchange an intelligent word. There was nothing but to establish ourselves in a living business. Certainly, I was never interested in junk-dealing, which

was the occupation of our local acquaintances; all we could do was play an occasional game of whist. Business was dismally bad. Even the coming of spring brought no improvement. I was disappointed by not earning at least half what my wages had been. The rent, while not exorbitant, was twenty-five dollars, coal amounted to seven or eight, and wood for upstairs came to eight dollars a cord. It was lucky I had a little money to fall back on. But what would happen when it was spent? Would Edelman lend me a few dollars? Did he have any to lend?

I had fixed up a signal bell so that when I was upstairs for my meals or just keeping Ma company I could hear anyone entering the store and would rush downstairs. Unfortunately, I was not molested by such disturbances often enough. But I kept on insisting that things would come out all right. Customers were satisfied with my work even though they were afraid to try to pronounce Russakoff. You might think that the big stores would have ignored me, but they didn't. They told people that I would pull the jewels out of their watches and replace them with brass. Apparently, however, my explanation that such an operation would cost five times as much as the value of the jewel was more convincing than this foolish prejudice, but it took time. And time was running short.

On July 26, 1907, a lovely summer day, Joseph was born. On that day, I did the biggest business so far. It was also on that day that I gave my son his first bath. No, we had no nurse, for we couldn't afford such luxuries. Dr. Stinchfield delivered him, a fine, blonde, six-pound boy. We worked hand in hand, and Ma

was a brave little lady. More work began to come in, and I spent as much time as possible at the bench and then did whatever I could to help Ma with the baby. We invited a few friends in and Cantor Shenson, then of Waterville, performed the B'rith, an operation that gave the poor baby a bad time for a while. Then we were busy washing and feeding the baby and tending to the jobs which were coming in steadily. People were no longer afraid to leave their work for me to do, and so our future looked brighter and my financial worries eased up a bit, but not for long.

I do not recall which members of my family came to America first, but they began to come right about then. Uncle Jack, just a young boy, came to live with us, but after exposing us to his growing pains, left for New York. Then, with the first money I ever borrowed from a bank, I sent for Uncle Louis. After that, came Uncle Samuel and Aunt Annie. Even if my outlay amounted to only a few dollars, it loomed large when I had so few and none to spare. We needed some money to develop the business, but we were human, too, and wanted to help. So we bought a new bed for them, hung up a sheet as a partition so that they could have a private bedroom, and worked to repay the loan to the bank.

All these things developed one after the other. Within a short while, Ma informed me that we were on the way to having another baby. Well, if we could support one, we would also manage for another. After all, hadn't a miracle taken place in the store on Joe's birthday? Other miracles could occur. We could see progress, slow and steady. The outlook was good.

I began to get in better merchandise, and people were kind enough to wait for me to order the things they wanted. The future looked bright, and I was willing to work toward improvement.

I will never forget the day when I bought the sewing machine. How glad Ma was! Soon after, we bought a dining table and six chairs. It was not like nowadays when people with a room and a half have to have matched dinette sets. Such folks begin to shrink before they even get started in life and want to work short hours with as little effort as possible. Not that I believe that people should have to labor as hard as their forefathers did and still not have anything. But even at today's high level of wages, if you do not have a plan for the future, you cannot succeed. There is too much competition with the way of life set by the Joneses, with not enough regard for how close to the bottom of the barrel you have to dip in order to obtain a car, fur coat, drinks, or gay living. This merry dance not only fails to provide a future for oneself but also for one's children. And so what do we find?-- Marriage is no longer a fuse for life; parenthood is shunted to institutions; the courts are full of problems created by the new disease, juvenile delinquency.

In my day, way back, it bothered me not at all to see the Poolers, Ordways, and Philbricks with their big Cadillacs. It was said at the time that the cost of the car was near or over one dollar a pound. When the day came, in 1914, when I, too, was in the market for an automobile, I did not try to outdo the other fellow even though, mind you, I had seen hundreds around me driving cars long before I bought our

Overland. But I carried a big life insurance policy for the protection of my wife and children. I strived to have a home with plenty of space for them. We always had enough to eat, and I was not afraid to face the future when my children would be ready for college.

On October 12, 1908, Rebecca was born. She was welcomed joyously even though, it is true, no one staged such affairs as baby showers in those days. But it was our own private party. The time had now come to seek better living quarters. It was then that we moved into the house on East Maple Street. What a thrill it was to get the house in order! Modestly though we furnished it, it still took money, and we did not operate on the budget plan, which was a new method to keep people in debt and mortgage their future. I bought what I could, and Ma was always pleased with what we had and could afford to have. Our lives flowed smoothly until suddenly I received a financial setback that I could never have foreseen. A wire from Canada informed me that unless I sent five hundred dollars at once, my father and mother would be detained by the immigration authorities. What a shock and surprise! I hadn't even known that my parents were on their way to America. But where could I possibly scoop up five hundred dollars? I went to that fine lawyer, A. K. Butler, and poured out my problem. He recommended that I try the bank. Edward Page was then president of the First National Bank of Skowhegan. When I told him what I was up against, he immediately arranged to transmit the funds directly to Canada. So you see, having repaid my first loan for Uncle Louis' passage without delay and without hardluck

stories about needing money for this or that (although that was certainly the truth), I had his confidence.

Within a very short time, my father and mother reached Skowhegan, under our protection and into our home. And home it was, with its welcoming hospitality; it was a much better place than my parents had provided for us children. They must have assumed that we were in the higher brackets of finance, for they were impressed with our home and store. Here, their son had been in business for only so short a time and yet was able to produce five hundred dollars in a flash! They didn't know about Indian givers and simply took for granted the idea that I had sent them the money to keep as their own. I was reluctant to ask them to return it and made arrangements to pay it off myself. We received the news that an uncle from New York was now in Buffalo and ill. Since my father had not seen his brother in some years, I encouraged him to go see him. You children have probably noticed that I am not the sort to wait for the other fellow to reach for his billfold first. In fact, I am not in the habit of carrying my money in a billfold, for I find that it is easier to reach when loose in my pocket. In this instance, I bought Father's ticket to Buffalo and he went.

During the few days that he was in Skowhegan, he kept telling me that he knew that I would do well; he recalled that some years back when he was in Novozibkov, Cousin Hirshe had told him that I was going to make a good watchmaker. So he had never worried about me, and I was glad that I had caused my parents no anxiety. My uncle did not live very long after Father's visit to him. The funeral was in New York, and Father went

there. Not long after, he wrote for Mother to join him, as they did not see what they could do in Skowhegan. This was probably a good decision, for they missed being near a synagogue and among people of their own age. In New York, there were many Jewish faces, and they could talk to someone in their own language. So Mother left to join him; both Uncle Jack and Uncle Louis were there.

My parents tried to find a way to earn a livelihood and settled on the idea of a small grocery store. Apparently, whatever they looked at involved much more money than they had. But there was always Zushkeh. I promptly received a letter in which my father asked that I help them get started. In the exchange of letters that followed there was a whole Megillah over the money. I will never forget it. He wrote that if he could buy a particular place that he had seen, he would be able to eat butter with bread. I wrote back that he had better look for a place that would give him bread and butter. It was not as though I had a million and had refused to provide a few dollars. In fact, it became necessary to reveal that the five hundred dollars I had sent to Canada was only to show the authorities and that I was now obliged to pay it back and that my business was not so tremendous that I could draw dollars out of it like a magician's hat. My father, having misjudged my financial status, was hurt because I failed to supply the money he asked for and because of the tone of my letter. He replied that if he could not have the store he wanted, I was to send him the second pair of Tefillim that he had left here, as he would return to Russia. I felt hurt, of course, but what

could I do? There were, I well knew, personal finance corporations which would take even babies as security. But I was already in debt to the bank, had to pay rent, keep my wife and children fed, and prepare for the third one on the way. All I needed was this kind of letter to add to my burdens.

I sat myself down and wrote my father a comprehensive Briefel (letter), in which I told him that if he would just look at the other side of the coin he would find that he was better off by far than thousands of others. He could still talk of going back while other men came here, worked hard, and supported entire families. The soil of America was worth a little suffering. I reminded him of Russia and of the pogroms and pointed out that here he had been free to travel wherever he wished--Buffalo, Maine, New York; no one had molested him except to ask him to show his ticket. However, having learned in this country that a man is privileged to make his own decisions, I said, I would not try to stop him if he preferred to go back. After all, he would not need much and possessed far more than I had had to start with. I hinted that he should have felt some pride in the accomplishments of one of his children.

This letter served to help him cool off, and it was not long before he and my mother found a small store on Grafton Street and went into business. Soon, Uncle Samuel, Aunt Annie, and their daughter Ida, who was born in Skowhegan, took off for New York. He had not fared as well here as he had expected. So we were alone again. I did not miss the relatives, for I had much work to do. I had moved the store from the

blacksmith shop across the street to a new location where the heat was better. There was always plenty to do at home, what with fires to tend, a little help with the washing and sweeping. I loved playing with the babies, bathing them, singing for them, and putting them to bed.

On July first, word came to me to get home as fast as I could. I ran, not walked. When I reached the house, Elisabeth was already born. Our neighbors, Mrs. Borden and others, were helpful, and Ma was comfortable. It made no difference to us whether our baby was a girl or boy; she was our child, and we were pleased with her. So now we had three children. Joe was not quite three years old and Beck, one and a half. Today, young couples might look upon a large family as a calamity, but it was not so with Ma and me. We loved each other; we created our family; we loved it; we worked for it and didn't find the work burdensome. Our time and money were not spent at hot dog stands, movies, or dances. But we had a symphony at home. So we bathed three children; we fed them. Who was tired? Who complained? Not Ma. Not I. We kept loving each other and our babies.

When Lake was five weeks old, Ma undertook a big project--her first trip back to New York--with all three children. She started out on the train at five o'clock in the morning without any help. The prospect of seeing my folks and our old friends made her very happy, and she did enjoy her visit. But she was also glad to come back. We were living much better than our friends. We were not crowded into small rooms, and our children flourished in plenty of good, fresh air and were not exposed to the danger of the streets.

Life went on smoothly. We decided to move a little nearer downtown and found a place on Middle Street. It was not a better rent, but Ma could get downstreet with greater ease. Our store changed location, too. One of my early acquaintances in Skowhegan was Clyde Smith (later U. S. Senator from Maine). He was a friendly man. Because he was somehow involved in a lease on the large store where Grant's is now located, he tried to persuade me to move in, even going so far as to promise to partition it at his own expense. But I was afraid of taking on such a big increase in rent. So he made me this proposition: If I did not do better over there than in my present store, I would pay him only what I paid at present. I took him up on it. Three months went by without even a visit from him. At the time, he was engaged in some kind of mail order publishing business. When I sought him out and handed him the check amounting to what he had asked for, he was pleased, not so much with the money as with the evidence that I was doing better, just as he had expected. Around then, I had joined the Odd Fellows, Eagles, and New England Order of Protection and attended occasional meetings. But most of my time was spent at the store, where I put in long hours.

Several matters of minor importance might be mentioned here. Uncle Morris had come to Skowhegan and was working for me. Father, who was not well, came for a visit. In the few weeks that he spent here, he gained weight and looked better. My hard work and round of activities continued. I got up in time to help with breakfast. We fed the children together. There was always a baby on my lap. Ida was coming, and that

was all right with us. We had done fairly well so far, and the fourth child would not starve. I increased my life insurance to protect my wife and children. We may not have indulged in finery and luxury, but simple clothing, food, and shelter we possessed in comfortable measure.

But no matter how decent a man's life is, some people are so poisonous that they will bring on hardship just to create heartaches. On some evenings, I used to go to private homes to fix clocks, particularly the grandfather clocks. It never occurred to me that anyone would feel called upon to spy on my movements. I knew that I was honorable and devoted to my family and home but also that I had to bring home the bread. Whenever I got the chance to earn an extra dollar, I did so, for there were many places to put them. It so happened that for three nights in a row I was not in the store. But what of it?

One evening, I was at Mr. Mitchell's, fixing his clock. On another, I worked until eight, dashed up to the Odd Fellows' meeting, where I had a cup of coffee, and then returned to the store again. The next night, I went to look at a house that was up for sale. When, elated, I rushed home to tell Ma that she must come see the house, I found her in tears. Silently, she set my supper before me, for I never ate away from home. After many questions, she burst out that she had been told that I was not in the store evenings and that for the past three had not been in the place and now, to top it all, I had come in so late. While she was tied up to housework and care of the children, I was gallivanting God-knows-where. I was terribly hurt. What had

I done to deserve such accusations? Was this the result of my efforts? Right then and there, we could have allowed the greatest rift to take place in our lives if I hadn't kept my head and been tactful. Opening the newspaper, I pretended to read it, although actually I didn't see a word of it. Every now and then, I made a comment....Mr. Mitchell had a fine clock. He made the case himself. He had gone through thousands of feet of mahogany to find pieces with just the grain he wanted. He had entrusted the repair of this precious clock to me. (Mrs. Mildred Weston, his niece, now owns it.) Then, I mentioned that the coffee I had drunk at the Odd Fellows Hall had been so strong that I couldn't have slept, so I had gone back to the store to work before closing up for the night. Tomorrow, I told her, I wanted her to look at the house I had just seen.

Over the top of my paper, I could see that she had become a different girl. Her anger had disappeared entirely, and she seemed rather ashamed. But I made nothing of it and assured her that whatever I did or wherever I went, I did it for us. At all times, the welfare of my family came first, and if she allowed outside influences to bring in such rubbish, nothing good would come out of it. No one can go forward fearing that some dirty neighbor will question his intentions. I guessed that the nosy troublemaker had been a woman who sometimes dropped in after Ma had given the children their supper and was waiting for me. The conversation must have gone something like this: Isn't Mr. Russakoff at supper? -- No. He eats when he gets home. -- These men! never home, making slaves of

their wives while they run around. I've passed the store several times and he wasn't there. You'd better see what's up. I wouldn't trust any man. -- Ma was an innocent and trusting young woman, and here spoke the Voice of Experience hinting that perhaps she had something to fear! That was how this had come about, but no such incident was ever repeated in our happy lives together.

On October 9, 1912, Ida was born. With her birth, I moved into the store where I am now--as a tenant then, however. And we moved into the little house on lower Mt. Pleasant Avenue, for we had discovered that the one on Middle Street was damp, and we were worried about the children's health.

Right about now, I must tell you about Mr. Sagarin. I won't try to cover the details about how he came to Skowhegan and brought his family here, however. His numerous and varied ways of making a living were certainly a puzzle; he was a hustler, but his efforts were not successful. He kept urging me to go into the business of buying potatoes with him and claimed that he knew all about it. The only thing I had to do was pay for them, while he loaded them and shipped them out on a bill-of-lading in my name. We were to share the profits fifty-fifty. He talked so convincingly that I decided to try it. Why not make a few dollars extra if I could? At that time, this part of the county produced lots of potatoes of the Green Mountain variety. Skowhegan had two potato houses and buyers. Their method was to sell fertilizer to the farmers, take a mortgage on the crop, and pay for the potatoes at prevailing prices. I will never forget the resentment

of the so-called buyers and the dirty slander they used to justify the way they bound the poor farmer to themselves by selling them fertilizer at their price and taking the potatoes at their established price.

The poor farmer didn't have a chance. We advertised that we would pay at the loading point in Skowhegan fifty cents per bushel, and the weighing would be done on the city scale. This was ten cents more on the bushel than what was quoted as the "prevailing price." While the difference was only a dime, it quickly added up to five dollars extra when a farmer brought in a fifty bushel load. This appealed to the growers, but not to the closed dealership. We loaded a car of about five or six hundred bushels to their four or five cars. If you multiply the bushels by ten cents extra and more, too, as we used to get the market price and sell our carload at that price, plus perhaps ten cents, it added up to the old story. I wonder just how old that story is--the G--d-----Jew; he will cheat you; he will short-weigh you. But how could he possibly have done any of those things if he paid the amount shown on the city scales slip? If anyone could have been accused of short-weight it was those very persons who made the false statements, for they used their own scales.

Some of our associations were with truly fine people, such as Mr. Sewell Smith, a gentleman of the highest type, and his daughter, Miss Margaret Smith. Certainly they would never have been involved in anything dishonest, such as entering into a conspiracy to give short-weight terms to strangers. It hurt me that I, the Jew, was singled out for criticism. So long as

our car stood by, the farmers pulled their load up to the old place, where they were paid our price. But the moment we had our car loaded, the price would be promptly dropped to the dealers' level. How innocent and ignorant can people be? Here was concrete proof that we dealt honestly; a group of farmers were being paid what their produce was actually worth. And yet, the effects of the Jew-poison set in. Little did these folks realize that it would have been to their benefit to give up a carload just to keep it on the track, so that they would get the extra price. But you have never seen such a rush for potatoes! The other dealers sent men out on every country road far outside the town limits to grab the crop from the farmers. I will say that there were a few intelligent enough to hang onto their load and state that it was for Mr. Russakoff. When asked at what price, some named it, only to be told that the potatoes were worth more. If that is true, said my farmers, we'll get paid more. -- What? by those Jews? Do you expect them to pay you more? -- Well, they made you raise your price, didn't they? Didn't they make you run out into the country to pick up loads? You're paying more simply because you are forced to.

This sort of conversation took place, I know from first hand, because I was once invited to ride with a farmer. He had picked me up and we rode in a sleigh loaded with spuds that were intended for me. While I sat there, the local dealer walked up alongside and asked him how much he was getting. Just notice how vicious people can be and yet pretend to be intelligent! The dirty methods they used for years actually

succeeded in time in driving potato growing out of this territory, because the farmer was never given a chance to develop. And here, confronting me, was a competitor, asking the man how much he was getting for his crop. Sixty cents, he said. -- I pay sixty-two, said the dealer. -- Well, said I, if you can pay sixty-two, I'll pay sixty-five. Picture the situation: early on a winter morning, out on a back road, I am with the farmer on his sled loaded with potatoes. He has declared that the produce is sold to me. The dealer offers sixty-seven, I counter with sixty-nine. He goes to seventy-one, and I to seventy-three. He to seventy-five and I to seventy-eight. Finally, I bid up to ninety cents a bushel, and the dealer walks off with: You G--d----d Jews will pay plenty for your potatoes before you get them. I told him that he, too, would have to pay so that the farmers wouldn't be stripped from both sides. I warned him that he had better go to bed with his pants on, or else he would lose them someday.

In spite of our good intentions, however, the poison did have the desired effect. We went out to farms and bought potatoes in the cellar. Then, if we were short in loading a car, we could draw from our supplies. But our marketing was not going well. Mr. Sagarin had overestimated his knowhow and I foresaw that we were not only not going to make a profit, but would actually lose money. It didn't take me long to step into the selling side of our operation. I became connected with potato brokers, who informed one of the price, sold at one percent commission, and gave one instructions as to where to ship. We went on

this way until a particular wholesale produce man, who had received one of our cars, wired that if we could ship more spuds of the same quality, he would pay a premium of five cents per bushel. In response to our telegram saying that we had three cars, we were told to ship in the usual way. This was about the end of the season, and I waited to receive the money through the bank. It didn't come. Instead, I received a wire from the broker saying that the potatoes had been rejected as inferior to the quality expected. Since there were demurrage charges, he suggested that I release the bill-of-lading, and he would sell on the open market.

This happened on a Saturday. I immediately determined to go to New York, the potatoes having been sent to Harlem River. Sunday I started out and found myself early Monday morning in the Harlem railroad yard, searching for the produce house to which the potatoes had been shipped. I found it, but there was no one around for it was so very early. Since I had duplicate slips with the numbers of the cars and the names of the railroads that the cars belonged to, I knew what to look for. I spotted one of the cars right at this shed. Out on the track, where the full cars stood, out of hundreds, I found another, but could not locate the third. By the time I got back to the shed, there was a place open, and I spoke to the owner, a man named Cohen. Good morning, sir, I said. Are you the buyer? -- Yes, said he. -- What is the price of potatoes? -- What kind? How many? Which ones? -- I showed him the car. He climbed aboard, inspected the load, and, on the way back, made an offer which was twenty-five cents

per bushel more than I had previously sold them for, and the cars were heavily loaded with six or seven hundred bushels each. I handed him the duplicate bill-of-lading and together we went to the master of the yard, to whom I showed the wire with the rejection. This was proof of my right to sell. Mr. Cohen gave me his check and asked me to notify him whenever I had such spuds to sell, for he catered to hotels which were willing to pay the price for fine produce.

Next, I walked into the shed near which I had seen our car standing. I asked to see Mr. So-and-So. He was there. Meanwhile, I saw how they were putting the potatoes into one-hundred-pound bags. In fact, along the other side of the car were wagons into which they were loaded and sold to dealers. Again, the conversation went as it had with Mr. Cohen. I asked whether he was buying. He asked me what I had to sell. Green Mountains, I replied. -- Well, if you have stuff like this (indicating the car being bagged), I'd pay a good price. -- How much? -- He offered five cents less than what Mr. Cohen had paid, and so I told him that he was too low, for I had already sold a car at a better price. Well, said he, if they were here, I might pay that amount. Whereupon, I informed him that he had them right now and told him who I was!

A propos Jews, it takes people like the Bilbos, the Gerald K. Smiths, the Rankins, and the Coughlinites to spread poison against the Jews and overlook the underhandedness of their own kind. This fellow tried to bluff me, but it didn't take very loud talk for me to set him straight. I pointed out that according to the wire he had sent me, he had rejected the shipment

and, consequently, had no right even to open my car, to say nothing of selling my stuff. I told him that I had only to go to the yard-master with a report of what had transpired to have his privilege as a produce-dealer withdrawn. My advice to him was to make out a check based on the new price at the bill-of-lading weight and let me go back to Maine. Without so much as a word, he drew out his checkbook, wrote a check for the total amount due, and handed it to me. I didn't bother to say goodbye, but walked away with almost five hundred dollars extra in my pocket and a firm determination--no more potatoes. For this, I had three reasons: first, my own jewelry business would suffer from all the arguments and hard feelings, since I had to show up the ignorance of both farmers and dealers. Second, I didn't like being anyone's partner. Third, I did not choose to cope with dishonest people. Later, when I ran into other things not to my liking, I felt that I was well out of it. Returning from New York, I sat down with Mr. Sagarin and figured out where we stood. What profit had we made? For months after that we all loathed the sight of potatoes and had only a few dollars to show, for Mr. Sagarin had made us lose plenty on the cars which had been marketed according to the knowhow he claimed to have had.

On May 13, 1915, Abraham was born. He was very welcome, especially since he helped even up the numbers; we now had three girls and two boys in the family. It was no more of a burden to have five children than four, we felt. We named him after my father. It was shortly after his arrival that we purchased our own home at 105 Mt. Pleasant Avenue, some distance up the street

from where we were located. We might not have made the decision at just that time except that my mother kept harping on how bad the place we lived in was. Because it was situated at the edge of an embankment not too far from the Kennebec River, she was sure that a high wind would blow us right into it. The house at 105 Mt. Pleasant Avenue had been put up for auction for the benefit of several legatees who couldn't agree on the division of a big estate. Mr. A. K. Butler was the executor. Ma had no idea that I was even attending the sale. Actually, I knew very little about the place but thought that I would stop by to see how the bids were going and who was interested. As I looked through the house with its ten large, square rooms and no sloped-ceiling bedrooms, I decided that it was not bad, not bad at all. I liked the spaciousness, particularly for our five children and the stream of family that came regularly from New York for prolonged visits. There was a good-sized garden in the rear. The street was clean, quiet, and minus traffic. This home would provide my children with space for living and for play. So I dared put in my bid, and the place was knocked off to me!

That was nervy on my part, for not only did I not have nineteen hundred and sixty dollars in cash but not even enough for the necessary deposit. But Mr. Butler said that we would fix it up in his office. You should have seen how surprised Ma was when, on my way downstreet, I stopped by to tell her that we had a home of our very own. I only hope that you, my children, may thus surprise your families and that your spouses will be as filled with joy as your mother was!

I made arrangements with the bank, which made it possible for me to buy the house without a cent; the value and the purchase price having been considered so good that the full amount was advanced to me. But, before we moved in, we put almost a thousand dollars into improvements. Now we had conveniences such as we had never enjoyed before: a real bathroom, white kitchen sink, stone wash tubs, hot water heating system throughout the house, and a finished, cement-floored cellar. It was wonderful. But now I had a job to do, paying on the mortgage and for all these luxuries, so that we could really call this our own home. Ma was a careful and frugal housekeeper, sewed everything that she and the children wore, and saw to it that we all had plenty of good food without waste or extravagance. It didn't take long, by our combined efforts, to reach the point where we burned the mortgage. At just that time, Mr. Bisson wanted to sell the building our store is in now, and I knew that the price was fair and that the property was paying its expenses. So I bought it. Now we had both a home and a store of our own. Some people criticized the price I had paid, since they knew how much Mr. Bisson had paid for the three buildings (the two we own and Dr. Borden's), but that did not bother me. Naturally, I worked just as hard as I could, for I wanted to own the store outright, too. There were no specific time-payments; I simply paid as soon as I had the money.

Uncle Louis came to Skowhegan. He had been having trouble with his first wife and her parents and had left her several times. On one occasion, I had gone to New York and brought about a reconciliation; I had even

obtained fifteen hundred dollars for him from her folks. But the marriage did not last. He was largely to blame. He should never have married a cripple, even though she was the only daughter of a rich man. Unable to obtain a divorce under the laws of New York state, he came here to establish residence, three years being required for this. He worked in the store and, at home, assumed the role of a third parent. He didn't approve of the way I brought up my children and even asked that we let him take charge of Abraham's upbringing. The foolish nerve! In later years, when he had remarried and had a family of his own, he had a chance to discover that it is easy to criticize others. As for Ma and me, we loved our children; they never were a burden. I might just mention that they could be quite an expense, such as, for example when little feet could go through shoes like paper when playing hop scotch (Lake's favorite)! At about this time, I thought of opening a store in Waterville. I had a double purpose in mind: First, we did not like the authority that Uncle Louis had assumed over the children and his role in the store. Second, we considered quite seriously establishing a business in Waterville and then moving there to live. There were more Jewish activities, with the congregation fairly active. And besides, Colby College was located in the city. With you children in just the elementary grades or under, you would not think that a couple of ignorant immigrants would be concerned about college. But we were.

Uncle Louis did not have much say in this plan. He received a salary and a fifty-fifty share of the profit; not one cent of his went into the venture. I

had talked to the Green Brothers' Company and negotiated a lease to which Mr. Butler was strongly opposed on the ground that it was a "Shylock document." But I remodeled the place, which was little more than an old wooden shanty, ordered counters and wall-cases, and opened for business. The Green Brothers did not even have to make any repairs for the five years' lease I signed. The revenue from the other half of the store and the upstairs apartment was enough to pay the rent, which gave me my part of the store rent-free except for what the alterations had cost. And that, spread over the period of ten years, did not amount to much. So we stocked the store with merchandise and were all set; we had great hopes in the future of the place, but, in actuality, it worked out well only for Uncle Louis. All I got out of it was headaches. But we will come to this later.

Just a short while before, I had been considering major changes in our Skowhegan store. It also happened that a fellow by the name of Walter F. Robbins owned a very fine store in town. On Christmas Eve, 1907, my first year here, a great big fire occurred in the Oxford Hotel, bank, and other nearby buildings. Robbins' store was in one of them. Little did I realize that I would one day be the owner of the Hotel Oxford! After the fire, Robbins, who had been in business about thirty-five years, moved to where Raymond's is now and fixed up a beautiful store.

But he was a dirty, cheap, good-for-nothing and a Jew-hater. I never spoke to him but knew that he referred frequently to the d--n Jew. One of my customers, named Wheeler, reported that he had had a

fight with this Robbins over me. It seems that when Wheeler told him that he could get a better trade on a watch with me, Robbins used such shabby salesmanship as to suggest that I would give him a second-hand movement and a cheap case. This Wheeler was nobody's fool and a sharp buyer and promptly told him off. He said that he knew how watch movements came from the factory in sealed boxes with a number on the works as well as on the printed band. Furthermore, he knew that a Montauk or Crescent case was not made for Robbins or Russakoff alone. Finally, he stated that he believed that Robbins would be capable of doing this kind of thing first. And he came in to buy the watch from me. Of course, I even took two dollars off the price in appreciation for his having defended my reputation.

When this Robbins decided to go to California, Blyn Page came in to tell me that he thought I should buy Robbins' fixtures, as they would just fit my store. He also said that he knew where I could obtain the money, meaning, of course, his bank. But deep in my heart was a hatred of this Robbins. One day, he opened the door and asked why I hadn't bought his fixtures, for he knew that Page had spoken to me about them. I had spunk enough to tell him how nice his fixtures were, how perfectly they would fit into my store, how much money I could probably save by buying them, but that this G-d d----d Jew would rather pay a higher price for fixtures elsewhere than to have his staring me in the face! I told him to pack and send them wherever he was going, that I certainly wanted no part of them. You should have seen his face! I wonder if he ever fully understood my decision; I had more self-respect than he

ever knew existed in this world. I was willing to pay at least a thousand dollars so as to have nothing to do with him. Later I did put fixtures into my store, and I paid a good price for them, but I felt that I had a principle, higher than money, and that no one can ever pay me off for an insult.

After Father passed away, Mother used to come to Skowehegan from time to time. She always took it upon herself to bring with her some of the grandchildren from New York. This caused many difficulties. She was never satisfied with the way our children played with hers, i.e., the guests under her protection. Her main problem at the time was Aunt Eda. Mother kept weeping over her, the poor unfortunate, left all alone in Russia. Why, with what we threw away, she could stage a banquet over there, and such talk as that. Of course, Eda was our only sister, and so Uncle Louis and I put together enough money to bring her, her husband, and five children to New York. At the same time, Uncle Max was stranded in Paris and needed help.

It is for you, my dear children, to give some thought to how hard both Ma and I had to work in order to provide not only for ourselves and our children but also to assume responsibility for others in need. Even though the going was hard; we wanted to do right by you and had also to supply money for the newcomers. Even when the amounts were small, they took away any surplus we had been able to save. In this country were Morris and Jack, as well as Samuel and Lazar (Louis). None was particularly ambitious nor willing to accept responsibility beyond their own selfish concern, except for Uncle Louis, who helped out to some extent.

But my mother kept writing we need; we need; we need. Aunt Eda's husband, Polley, was a no-account guy even in Russia. But Aunt Eda was a midwife there and earned a little. On this and a paltry few rubles from him, they somehow mismanaged. When they came to America, however, he turned out to be worthless. With the few cents that he did earn, he bought food for himself alone to eat and refused to give a piece of his salami to his own children, who were tots at the time. When Aunt Eda complained, he suggested sneeringly that she ask her rich brothers for help. Upon this, she told him that if her brothers were to support his family, she did not need him and threw him out of the house.

But to go back a few years. After my mother had seen to the arrival of Aunt Eda and her brood, she began to make a to do about Max, poor Max, God only knows how he is. Max was never much of a letter-writer, but he did learn fast to write one thing--money, money, money. I finally contributed to my mother's passage; she went to Paris and brought Uncle Max back to the United States. It must be said that she was a plucky one: she had spirited Uncle Samuel out of jail in Russia at a time when he was going to be shipped off somewhere for revolutionary activities, had paired him off with Aunt Annie, and sent them off to America. Now here she was with Uncle Max. That meant that the whole family was in this country. Father had passed away a while before.

During World War I, Uncle Louis was put into the limited service category. He probably would never have been called if one of the local draftees had not failed to report. So he left on Labor Day for Camp

Upton, with the last draft out of Skowhegan. This brought a hectic situation upon me: two stores and one man and a clerk, with nothing organized in a way that I could keep a finger on everything. At the time Lazar left, he had already obtained a divorce and was free and single. So I had to shake myself, brace up, and go to work--as though I had been loafing before! I commuted between the two stores. Even though we already had the Overland, I did not travel by car, for the roads were too rough or muddy. I had a clerk in each store and divided my time, one day in Skowhegan, one day in Waterville. I left here on the seven a.m. train taking with me whatever work I had not finished. This I would do in Waterville, along with the jobs waiting there. I would return on the eight-forty-five in the evening, go into the store to do more bench-work, and go home late. I kept on this way until the end of the war.

But I must say that it was not nearly so easy as it may look on paper.

Finally, one Saturday night, just as I was closing the Waterville store, preparatory to driving home, for I had become accustomed to use the Overland when the roads were passable, I suddenly heard the sound of sirens from all directions, as though the city were surrounded by fires. Naturally, I went out to investigate and learned that word was out that the war was over. What a thrill! If there was any celebrating to do, I wanted to be home and headed for Skowhegan, blowing the horn all the way. (Actually, this was the false rumor of November third or fourth; the real armistice took place on November eleventh. But we

were all so eager for this news that we accepted the error happily!) At the tooting of the car's horn, farmers rushed out to the roadside, lantern in hand, asking where the fire in Waterville was, for they could hear the sirens and see distant flames from the many bonfires that had been started. At the top of my lungs, I informed them that the war was over.

How surprised I was, upon reaching Skowhegan, to find that everything was as quiet as on any night at about eleven or eleven-thirty. In those days, the town had a night watchman. I assumed that the town had already had its celebration, but learned from him that he did not know about the great news. I was so excited that I didn't call home but first roused the fire chief, Mr. Savage, who decided not to blow the fire whistle until he was sure. Meantime, I put on all the lights full-blast. Lyle Moore, George L. H. Smith, and Dr. Bisson's brother were around, and they all began to drag boxes and barrels out of their cellars. I telephoned Clyde Smith, woke him from a deep sleep, and told him what had been going on in Waterville when I left. He called the governor in Augusta, who informed him that these were rumors, nothing official, but that everywhere people were celebrating. So Clyde Smith called the fire chief, who blew thirty-four, the signal for a fire downtown. Of course, that brought everyone flocking. In the meantime, the pile on the square was high, and when it was ignited, people naturally thought that the whole town was on fire. As if by magic, crowds gathered. There was such joy and gladness; people sang, snake-danced, and blew on horns, real and toy. At home, poor Ma and the children had awakened in

fright. Whenever the youngsters were troubled by anything, they ran into our room. That night, they gathered shivering in Ma's bedroom, the repeated sound of the fire alarm giving them reason to fear a major disaster. Then I thought to call them. What a relief!

The celebrations, although held throughout the country, were premature, for the true Armistice which ended World War I was not signed until November 11, 1918. Word soon got out that any soldiers who had a job waiting could be mustered out of camp at once. Uncle Louis, having completed basic training at Camp Upton, New York, was already on board a train, ready to be shipped off to Europe, when the war ended. I immediately started the ball rolling for his release, but red-tape slowed down this operation. And there he was waiting to get out and here was I waiting just as anxiously that he would come back before the busy Christmas season. We kept writing back and forth. His letters were full of complaints over the delay, how tired he was of waiting, how long would he have to wait. He even wrote that he would give them the two stores if only he could be released! This was really something--that he would give up everything of mine, which he brazenly considered his own. How much had he contributed to the building of the first one? and how much less to the second?

Meanwhile, the army did ease up on furloughs. On one of his visits to New York, he met Yetta Herkus, a bookkeeper. Before they became engaged, she wrote in to Dunn and Bradstreet to check the financial status of S. Russakoff, although I had never made an effort to provide them with any such statement. It was later that

I saw the report she received, and it was almost perfect. In short, it started with an immigrant boy who established himself in Skowhegan in 1907, married, congenial wife, five children, lived modestly, slow in paying bills but always paid them, credit rating good, in the vicinity of ten thousand dollars. On the merit of my record, Yetta then came here to investigate and, satisfied, married my brother. In March, he was finally released from the army and came back to Maine. I was able to catch my breath once again. When you kids see me now moving slowly, don't forget that my paces of old were fast and many. In a small way, I did a great deal of work, kept the bench going, kept books in both places, wrote my own advertisements, which may not have been professional but did produce good results.

At about this time, Dr. Borden was running into difficulty. He had bought the Oxford Hotel property some months before and, while drunk, had made arrangements for the payments. Soon after, he was locked up for being intoxicated and was sent to the State Hospital in Augusta. By the time he returned, payments were due, and he couldn't obtain a cent anywhere. He peddled the building up and down the street, but apparently the businessmen had ganged up against him and he was about to lose the whole thing. He used to stand near my bench and talk and talk for hours. He cried like a baby, begging that I should come in as a partner. Much as I disliked partnerships, I will admit that he finally persuaded me. He was willing that I be in complete charge and be manager, leasor, rent collector, signer of checks, submitting a report once a year. For three years, I never had a more congenial

person to do business with. Everything I did was fine. At the end of the year, we used the net income to reduce the mortgage.

One day the thought came to me that I could get even with the Green Brothers, who owned the first five- and ten-cent store in town. You will recall that I had a lease with them in Waterville. I never failed to send the advance rent check to their Boston office, if not on the day due, then several days before. But they tried in every way to break the lease and to fool me on various deals. They tried to make me let them do this or that on the building so that they could charge a higher rental. I informed them that at the time of the lease's expiration, I would listen to what they had to offer, but not at present. It was easy to see what shrewd connivers they were. So I decided to give them some competition at least here in Skowhegan. In my own handwriting, I scribbled a letter to F. W. Woolworth in New York and asked if they would be interested in a location here, as I had just the spot for them. Soon after, I received a letter from their Boston office, headquarters of their New England territory, requesting the dimensions of the store and a sketch of the layout of the street and the stores. I was never good at drawing but did my best. Lo and behold! Within a few days, I received a telegram from Boston with the request that I be there on such-and-such a date. With F. W. Woolworth Company I would have kept that date even if it had meant postponing a trip to Bermuda!

Soon after, the New England manager and several other men came to Skowhegan. The engineers surveyed

the building, stayed here two days, and left. Needless to say, I was on pins and needles. I did not know how they were planning nor what they expected but waited until the manager came with a set of blueprints for remodeling the store. We bargained back and forth, what I should do, what they would do, what the rent was to be. We finally agreed to a twenty years' lease with a certain rental for the first ten, an increase for the next five, and another for the following five years. Until the lease was drawn up in Boston, sent here for my signature, back to New York to be signed officially by the F. W. Woolworth Company, and back here to be recorded, it seemed as though a century had passed. In all, it was not more than two weeks. Finally, everything was set, and they sent in a crew of men to do the alterations.

When this took place, the whole town talked about what a smart fellow I had turned out to be. This was wonderful; why hadn't anyone else thought of it? But, smart as I may have been, I had plenty of headaches out of it later. The prosperity brought by this deal was too much for Dr. Borden, who promptly went on one of his famous sprees. The first thing he did was to buy the lease on the hotel proper so that, if driven out of his house, he could continue to drink unmolested in one of the rooms. Not only that, but he bought Bucknam's Drug Store, where he could have access to the alcohol used in compounding medicine. As a partner, he could do these things, and I had no power to stop him. I found myself working feverishly with the crew to get the store ready for May fifteenth, the date agreed upon. Mrs. Borden was not at all cooperative

and refused to supply money as required and necessary. Dr. Borden was sent back to the State Hospital.

I was bewildered, but Mr. Butler advised me to go ahead with the work. He said that when Dr. Borden returned home, sober, we would bring suit for equity, whatever that might mean. Previously, I had been dragged in with him into the radio business with a fellow named Sprague, who was a faker and an embezzler, and I was heavily involved in that, too. Borden finally returned, temporarily cured, and received notice from the Court. I told him that if he was capable of doing what he did and had no one to look out for his interests, I wanted no further part in his dealings. I didn't want to push anyone out and would take an offer or give one so as to settle the matter in a friendly way. Don't worry. Neither I nor anyone else ever took advantage of Dr. Borden. On matters of business, his mind was very keen. There was a differential of how little he would give and how much higher I should pay him. He would decrease a bit on what I should give in order to buy him out but never would he increase a cent on his offer to me. I insisted that we would have to leave it to the Court to decide, perhaps in a forced sale, and then he would not get as much as this. He bothered me so much and I so badly wanted to get out of it that one day we finally closed the deal. I was to pay a sum as agreed, while he assumed the radio bills and took over all outstanding bills. Mr. Butler put the money in escrow, and that was the end of the Borden and Russakoff partnership.

The birth of Archie, on December 19, 1920, was a very happy event. Another boy! Now the family was evenly divided, three girls and three boys. By this

time, music was flourishing in our home. Joe and Beck played the piano, and Lake took lessons on the violin. Little is it known that such renowned personages as the Misses Margery and Grace Morrison came to our house to hear them play. Margery was accompanist for many Metropolitan Opera singers and even traveled to Italy to play at their rehearsals. The children did not do so badly in school or in music or behavior.

Of course, no one could beat Joseph. With my help, he advanced rapidly. He skipped the third grade, spent one-half term in the fourth, and finished the fifth in the space of one year's time. But how upset Miss Lizzie Higgins was! She maintained that she had taught school for so many years and knew that a child had to go through all the grades in order to acquire a foundation in English necessary for high school work. She almost convinced me with her argument that he would not be prepared to tackle Latin. I suggested that when he was in her fourth grade class, she observe his work carefully. If he could not keep up, there would be no harm in sending him back to the third grade. I wouldn't care. Just try him out. But of course you know best. Picture her surprise when she discovered that, with a little extra instruction, she could send him on to the fifth grade, which he finished as competently as the best of them. It was with this class that he went through school, joining with others in the freshman class in high school. The Shepard Prize was given to the freshman with the highest marks and to the upper-classmen whose grades indicated the greatest improvement. First prize was forty-five dollars, and second was thirty. Presentation of these awards was made at the graduation exercises.

Ma and I always liked to attend the graduations and had done so for years. That year was no exception. The names were called out and prizes given. When we heard Joseph's name announced, you can understand our overwhelming joy only when your own children bring you such honor. We were so surprised and so happy! The old saying that Dad pays and pays held true in this instance: I doubled the forty-five dollar check. Let it be the punishment for having drummed arithmetic, reading, and spelling into Joe, back and forth, up and down, over and over. I paid the price, and it was worth it.

Of course, the caliber of his work remained at this high level all through the upper classes and he was graduated as top student in his class, and was valedictorian. He made this by one-eighth of a point, the runner-up being Helen Hight, a high school teacher's daughter three years his senior. And so Miss Higgins' predictions were proved wrong. Joe was accepted by Dartmouth College before he turned sixteen, which was pretty young. While at Dartmouth, he felt sorry for himself because, while big for his age, he was nothing more than a child and not big enough to go out for serious football. I'll bet he was peeved at me, but it was too late. When the football season ended, he got over his disappointment, particularly since an unusual event had taken place that semester: Thirteen of the men on the squad had been sent home because of poor grades. From that he must have concluded that grades were more important than game pennants.

When Joseph left for college, he was fitted out reasonably well. I only hope that his children will

have no worse. Besides the necessary items, I gave him a checkbook against my own account, with no limitations or budget. I will say that soon after midyear exams, he took a kitchen job peeling potatoes so that his food would not cost anything, or at least not quite as much. The reason he did this, he wrote me, was that he knew that Beck would soon be ready for college and would need to be outfitted. I considered this very fine, indeed; he wanted to be of financial help rather than to have his sister deprived. I really consider this noble on the part of a child who had every reason to think that he was the son of a rich man, what with the two jewelry stores, our nice home, the Oxford Hotel property, and so on.

But the pleasures that Ma and I enjoyed were not of a materialistic, mercenary sort. We had been happy to see Beck skip the seventh grade. It had pleased us that Joe and Beck did well with their piano, playing duets and in recitals for many important local functions. Beck was graduated high in her class; she attained third place and was historian. We felt that her speech was an appreciation of all we had ever done for her and were very proud. Joe and some of his friends formed a dance orchestra, called The Troubadours. Clad in dark trousers and white shirts, with wide red taffeta sashes that Ma made for them, they earned a few dollars by playing here and there. Later on, after Beck had transferred from Wheaton College and was graduated from Boston University, she had a job within two hours of receiving her diploma, and this was at a time when jobs were scarce. Lake was popular with her violin, won a silver medal representing

second prize for her studies at Burdett and played in trios. Ida was a good student at Radcliffe, graduated with high honors, and found herself a job immediately, even though this was 1933. Later, she developed the Jewish Vocational Service of which she was director. We got a lot of pleasure from her accomplishments and heard with pride of her association with people important in educational and social services. Her name was well known and respected in Boston.

And we were glad, too, that Abraham was favorably known. When he attended Roxbury High, he was on the military training staff and in marching, was next to the major. Again, we were pleased when after many years away from his junior high school, when the school and teachers staged some kind of celebration, they sought him out to play a solo on his trumpet. On another occasion, the whole high school orchestra played at Jordan Hall. Ma and I were in seventh heaven when he faced us from the center of the stage, where he played a solo. Nor will I forget the day when I took him to Tufts College for his interview as an applicant for admission. When he came out in the company of a young fellow who was a Latin High graduate, I felt that Abe's chances of being accepted were slim compared to the glittering background this boy displayed. Fortunately, my judgment was mistaken, for Abe went successfully through college and medical school. All the while, he was active with his trumpet, playing at dances and in summer camps. He was always well-liked. Later, when he became a doctor, he was accepted by Sinai Hospital in Baltimore for a one year's internship, was made assistant resident the next, and resident

the third. He could have been exempted from military service by staying on but went into the foreign side of the U. S. Public Health Service. Archie, too, did good work, was liked by everyone, and played a solo which was wonderful at his graduation. While at the famous Juillard School of Music in New York, he played first trumpet, a very great achievement, for the school has musicians of top caliber. And finally, our youngest, Philip, always a good boy and a good student, whose record at University of Maine and Bowdoin were the background for his fine career as an optometrist, after his graduation as a doctor of optometry from Columbia. Philip had begun his schooling in Boston and completed it in Skowhegan, when we moved back. But I have gotten far ahead of my story.

As you know, Archie was born in our own house on Mt. Pleasant Avenue and so was Philip, who arrived September 5, 1924. It was always a good home for us, and we all enjoyed it, I'm sure. When I first bought the Overland, it caused us nothing but grief. I got it late in the Fall, 1918, in Waterville, and told Uncle Louis to take a lesson in the driving of it and to drive it to Skowhegan, where I would take a lesson from him. I meant well, but he ran into all kinds of troubles. On the way here, he found that all the cows in the county were in the road; before long, he was in a deep ditch. When he got out of that with the help of the probably not too impressed farmers, he drove on to Skowhegan. In town, he wanted to show everyone that he was driving a new car. There were, he decided, too many cars parked downtown, and he wanted to see what they would say in the way of a how-do-you-do if he

put the mudguards close together. They did not come out in a cheek-to-cheek position; there were bent mudguards, hard feelings, and everyone knew that Louis had a new car (ours).

My mother was visiting us at that time, and when he drove up to the house, we all went out to welcome the Overland. I myself knew nothing about a car. After dinner, we started out for Madison, first to enjoy a ride and second to show the Blooms that we had a car. We got there without incident. But we left the car doors open, and Louis forgot to pull the emergency brake. The car, parked on an incline, rolled back, and brushed against a telephone pole, which took off both right doors. So we started back with the doors inside. Beginning our trip homeward, we passed the first railroad crossing and started to go uphill. The car was new and did not pick up power too well. Instead of shifting into second, Louis put the car into reverse. It began to roll back, back, and bang! it rested against a high curb, while the spare rolled merrily down the hill. As the car stood now, the gas tank was in the shape of a V, the harness that held the spare rim was broken, and so were several spokes in the wheel. But the good old Overland started up readily enough and we were on our way again. We were going by the back road, but at Blackwell Road, we took a wrong turn. By this time, it was dusk; the lights were turned on. There was a curve and then uphill, but we couldn't make the grade. Again, Louis shifted into reverse and, to make the story short, the car's downward journey into a ravine with a stream at the bottom of it was stopped by a boulder which stood in the way and

refused to budge. The back of the car had actually passed over it, but the front axle locked and held. By that time, my mother had loudly and fervently uttered all the prayers necessary for meeting our Maker, but we were not even scratched. You see, Louis was a good navigator; he always found an anchor. In one day, he had found a ditch, sides of cars, poles, curbstones, and now, a boulder. We climbed out of the car one by one, as the back of it was down in a hollow. The front put its eyes, the lights, to the sky, counting the stars, no doubt. I don't know how the word got to Pooler and Emery in town, but they sent a car for us and a wrecker to tow the Overland in. We got home and were so glad to be there!

I had my private opinion but said nothing. My mother, may she rest in peace, was not so reserved. She was in the habit of making many strange pronouncements which, perhaps, she didn't mean, but some were hard to swallow. About these events, she said that if you fail to help those who are in need, the devil takes it anyway. As though Ma and I had not helped to our utmost! I think that I helped my family more than I could afford and than they deserved. But I raised no protest; there was no point in stirring up an argument. In my mind, however, I knew that if anyone had made me an offer for the Overland, no matter how small, I would have gotten rid of it. To my way of thinking, this was far too expensive a Sunday ride. Nonetheless, I did tell Mr. Emery to fix it up--to the tune of about two hundred and fifty dollars. They did a good job, drove it into our garage. There I covered it with a large sheet of cheesecloth. Whenever I

walked through the garage on the way to feed the chickens, I do not mind telling you that I was afraid to look at this Overland, which, like a dog, had to visit every object it passed. I actually shivered to see it standing there. And there it stood from late October until May. At that time, I took myself in hand and decided to take driving lessons.

A fellow by the name of Charles Smith, who worked for Pooler and Emery, took me to North Anson, giving me instructions all the way. I drove home without difficulty but did have trouble backing. With practice, this was soon overcome. I will never forget one occasion in Waterville, when I was a novice at the wheel and found myself in the thick of some kind of parade. Just what was going on I do not recall, but I do remember that a huge flag had been spread out and people were dropping money into it. After that, I had confidence in my own driving ability and never needed to rely upon such anchors as Uncle Louis had used. We had a lot of fun with the Overland, went to Lakewood or Island Park for picnics regularly and even as far as Old Orchard for a Sunday. We took long trips, too, to New York and to Gardner, Massachusetts, where my sister lived. Although it was built as a five-passenger car, we somehow made room not only for our own family but often for a guest or two.

Later on, I bought the building on the corner adjoining my store. This, too, sort of fell on me. The Hulares brothers owned it; their store was next to mine and we were always on friendly, neighborly terms. When they found that they were going to lose it, I took over the mortgage. I also bought the Waterville

property, which at the time was nothing more than a dilapidated pile of second-hand boxes but was rented. My purpose was to protect myself for a future location in case we could not arrange a new lease on the Waterville store. Again I showed my brotherly love by taking in my brother as partner with twenty-five hundred dollars against my twelve thousand five hundred, and gave him a chance to pay his part from the rentals as they came in.

But was this ever appreciated? I should say not and sadly add that it never was. Nor did his wife, Yetta, ever show any respect or appreciation. In fact, I got the full impact of her ingratitude after Uncle Louis died and she decided to dispose of the store. This was the store, mind you, that I had worked so hard to establish for our future, for I had thought that you children could go to college (Colby) and still live at home. It had been my intention to have him take over in Skowhegan, which was a much better paying stand, in exchange. The outcome of such kind thoughts, as you will read later, was a life's ruin. But just because I was not at her beck and call, willing to do the millions of things she demanded of me after Louis' death, she did not even give me an inkling that she wanted to dispose of the store. Merchandise was hard to get at the time, because of World War II, but she sold to a stranger without giving me a chance to buy so much as a hairspring, even though she knew perfectly well that I would gladly have met the other fellow's prices. Such was the thanks that I got for all the years of Good Neighbor policy and brotherly love. Oh yes, she did, when it was all over, offer me some cheap

bric-a-brac, but I told her that she could hand it over to the person who had bought the store.

At this point, I must relate one episode that will wind up this affair. During the war, it was hard to get watches, and we received allotments so small that they were hardly worth mentioning. The few I did get I sold at the regular prices. There were never black market dealings in my store. On one of my trips to New York for some occasion or other, I saw that Uncle Max, who had a store in Harlem, had a few Bulovas on hand. My trade was quite different from his. My customers came to ask if I was sure to get a watch and waited for it; my allotment was sold before it arrived. With him in New York, the trade was transient, and it made little difference to whom he sold, for there was none of the personal relationship that has existed between so many of my customers and me. When I asked if he could spare me a couple, particularly a nurses's watch that one of my customers needed seriously, he of course said yes. I don't recall exactly what the prices were, but I took out the money and paid my own brother the full retail price, plus the tax. Aunt Ida (his wife) was in the store at the time, and Uncle Max called to her attention that I was paying him the full retail. I will say that they did not want to accept it, but I insisted. My reason was clear: He could have sold his watches and made a profit; why should he forfeit this on my account? I didn't care if I didn't make a cent on the deal; my one thought was to accommodate my customers. I never gave the transaction another thought until Yetta, after she had sold the store and was about to move to New York,

asked me to come and take over the books from the building we owned jointly. At the time, she asked if I would take some watches she had received since selling the store. Well, I had to take over the building, which was sick enough and made sicker by their unfortunate management. Not only was a tenant of long years' standing driven out, but they had let the store, which had stood empty for years, to a Greek faker. He had messed it up, and not only was he behind in rent but had gone through bankruptcy. I had had to go to Augusta several times to defend an equity suit against the owners on some repairs the tenant did to the building and did not pay. It was the most unusual case you ever heard of: The judge came personally to inspect the building to see what improvements could have been made to a practically new structure. At this writing, the lien is still on, but for over five years has stood still; neither side makes a move. Our lawyer says that it will die in the archives of the court. This was the state of the building that I now had to manage.

When I went to Waterville that evening, I was determined not to take the watches. I had been able to get along without them until now and could continue. My meeting with Yetta was hard and sombre. When I told her that she could give the bric-a-brac to the man to whom she sold the store, she lashed out at me. She complained that no one cared for her or for her problems and that when the opportunity had come along, she had sold. I had no choice but to tell her a few harsh facts. I told her why she had not seen much love, especially since I went back to Maine. I informed her, too, that she had always been the kind of person

who takes but never gives even an indication of friendship. I reminded her of the summer that we had all shared a cottage at Webber Pond, how she had quickly selected for herself the best rooms and the nicest of the coverings that I had brought all the way from Boston. She had brought nothing from Waterville, fifteen miles away. I recalled to her attention how she had promptly dipped into the foods that I brought on my numerous trips from Boston; she did not bother to keep track of this but wrote down to the penny whatever she happened to spend on a loaf of bread or bottle of milk. I remembered one Sunday when I had actually come to Waterville for the night and mainly for a home-cooked meal, for I was alone in Skowhegan while the family was still in Boston; on that occasion, she talked to me about a bill I was paying on and how the company wanted their full amount due at once. She said that it was only a measly bill of two hundred dollars and the reason the house was so mean was because they were liquidating. Anyway, I paid the bill even though it meant a tight squeeze for me since I was just in the middle of trying to re-establish myself in the jewelry business in Skowhegan after the years of real estate losses in Boston. Yetta and Louis were in a position at the time to send off the check without saying a word, but of course they wouldn't. Needless to say, when she served dinner, I couldn't swallow a morsel. At the time of the showdown, I also told her that for years she and all her family had looked upon ours as an open house. Even though they might have eaten dinner late, they were always starved at our meal-time and partook of a hearty meal, noisily amazed

at their own appetites.

Nor did I let her overlook the fact that when we had a cottage at Lakewood, they spent every Wednesday afternoon and Sunday with us and never brought anything and never left hungry nor empty-handed. When we kept chickens in Skowhegan, we supplied them with bountiful supplies of eggs and poultry without a penny in return. But when we moved to Boston, she charged us at the prevailing price for the three dozen eggs we got from her hens. I told her that she had married Louis on my record and that it was my name that was on the safe in the Waterville store all those years. That I had signed away most of my life and the children's future to obtain the lease from Green Brothers. That I almost ruined myself going to Boston because she had refused to make the switch that I had intended; she wouldn't move to Skowhegan. I should have told her then that if she did not want to go to Skowhegan, I would take over the Waterville store anyway and that if she wanted to work with me, all right. Instead, I sold out the Skowhegan store. And when I returned from Boston stripped, what help did she and Louis offer? When I tried to make a comeback, I was enveloped with bills, bills, and more bills. I had no money, no credit, and no one to ask for help. I already owed Max a lot; my insurance was pawned, and there were mortgages on everything I looked at.

Then McLellan died. What would his partner Young do about the mortgage they held on my property? Would he sell the mortgage? Mr. Hagarty of Waterville had approached Mr. Young with an offer to buy. I knew why. So that he could foreclose and I would be out.

I had all these things on my mind, and Ma, whom I wanted so much to see happy and well, was sick.

I concluded by saying, Yetta, you did get a good price; so how much could I have made if I had bought your store? Five thousand? Ten thousand? Let me tell you, I spit on such money every day. You keep on the way you are--giving me advice!

On the day I returned from New York after Louis' funeral, I stopped in Waterville to see if Mr. Kanuff at the bank there would take a mortgage on the Oxford property. After talking with him, I naturally stopped by the store and, when she asked what I was doing there, told her that if ever I had to scrape together every cent I could lay hands on, now was the time. What I meant was that I wanted to reduce the mortgage so as to make it more attractive to the bank, for I had been given just forty days by the McLellan estate to pay off the mortgage they held. Actually, they had made the conditions just as tough as possible because they really wanted the property and hoped to squeeze me out.

If she had been anywhere near decent, she could have said, Sam, I have three cents, or thirty dollars, or whatever it was, that you may use. But no, she recommended that I sell my half of the Waterville building; then I would have some money. I said not a word in reply. I just went to the bank and then home. When Yetta heard that I had told Ma how mean she was, she denied having made this suggestion. A week later, however, the mortgage was accepted, and Ma and I went to Waterville to sign the papers. On our way to the bank, we stopped in the store. Again, she asked if I

had thought of selling. So Ma heard it with her own ears. Thus, I cornered Yetta. Having given her this complete account of her shabby dealings, I asked her whether she could expect us to be on goody-goody terms with her. I pointed out that even under these conditions I had often helped her with the benchwork. And here we come to the conclusion of this episode and the business about the watches that she wanted me to buy:

For a moment she became sweet and gentle. Well, Sam, don't make it harder, etc. Take the watches. There was a tear in her eye, but not for long. She opened the carton and spread out each watchbox separately, in the manner of a traveling salesman. As I glanced at them, she said in her best Canarsie manner, Max told me that you paid him the full retail price for the watches you got from him. At that moment, the whole situation spread itself clearly before me. So this was why she was letting me have the watches, not for my benefit but for her profit. Deliberately, I snapped each box shut, rose to my feet, and announced that she could sell the watches to the person who had bought the store. But why, she asked. Can't you use them? You paid Max the full price, didn't you? -- Yes, of course I did, said I, but Max is in business. He needed them and could have sold them at the proper markup without me. So you think that I am a black marketeer! If I paid him the full price, you probably think that I must have tacked on double or triple. Did it ever occur to you that a person can be decent? that perhaps one might sacrifice profit just to accommodate another? You should have seen her face! But quick as a wink she said, Well, take them anyway and pay me

whatever you think is right. There have been hard feelings enough, etc.--I thought for a minute and decided to take them. I was in need of them, it is true, but really could have gotten along without them. But there were eighteen pieces, and Christmas was coming. It was not so much the money involved as the fact that I could make eighteen customers happy. So I put down on the counter cash for the amount that was on the invoice, plus five dollars extra for each unit, and left, after taking the Building Book. To this day I do not know whether she figured out that I had given her almost a hundred dollars' profit on the deal, thus making my return that much smaller. She would never appreciate it anyway.

Let me tell you about Mr. Kanuff, whom I mentioned in connection with the mortgage on the Oxford property. When I first met him, he was a cashier in a bank in Waterville that later failed. In my early days in Waterville, I had kept my account there and found him very friendly. In later years, I was interested in finding another store in Waterville in order to protect myself for two reasons: first, in case of fire, as the store in which I was located was a shanty, and second, against the time when the lease would expire. Standing snugly next to the bank was a wooden building. When I asked Mr. Kanuff who owned it, he said that it was bank property and being kept in case the bank wished to expand in the future. But, he told me, he would let me know if it were ever put up for sale.

Time went by. One day, he telephoned to say that they had decided to sell the building. I am not usually fast but this time I was in Waterville first

thing in the morning. I was to see Mr. Vigue, the president. When I entered his office, he knew the purpose of my visit and we came to the point immediately. He wanted to know how much the building was worth to me. -- How much are you asking for it? -- We haven't set a price. -- How, then, can you sell? To the highest bidder. -- Then why don't you put it up for auction? -- No. He would accept offers. -- But how can I know if my offer is high or low? -- That is for us to decide. -- Suppose, Mr. Vigue, I put my price down on a piece of paper and you put down the asking price on another. If mine is the higher, I will expect the deal to be closed. -- No. I don't want to do it that way.

By this time, I was good and angry. I told him that I, for one, refused to serve as a tool to boost the price of a building belonging to them, because I did not approve of their methods. And good-day, sir. When I came over to Mr. Kanuff, he asked how I had made out. Instead of answering his question, I asked him to tell me what my balance was. He looked up in surprise. I requested a blank check, made it out in the amount he had stated, and presented it for payment. -- What happened? he asked. -- And I told him, you have there a man whom I will not trust with a cent of my money. He is not worthy of confidence. -- Mr. Kanuff begged me not to withdraw my business for his sake. To this I replied, -- Mr. Kanuff, some day you will be on the street soliciting subscribers for stock in a new bank and I will help you. -- Then I took my money and departed. Sure enough, not so very long afterward, Mr. Kanuff came to Skowhegan. -- Here I am, Russakoff, doing just what you predicted. -- I pledged

eight shares and gave him a check. I did not do much business with the bank but received dividends regularly.

After Young and McLellan died, I was afraid that when the estates split, the mortgage would be called. This happened within a year. Mr. Edward Merrill brought me a paper showing the amount due. I almost fainted. I had no idea that it would be so much. As you kids know, my pockets are a desk; a drawer is a desk; a pigeonhole is a desk. I went through every possible nook and cranny and unearthed information from here and there. It was here that Lake's training at Burdett served as a rescue mission. She had had a sad experience at New England Conservatory when her violin teacher died, and she had never been enthusiastic about a business course, which seemed to be the only possibility at that time. Now, when this occasion arose, she computed amounts, added interest, and deducted payments as the various slips of paper indicated. She worked terribly hard and systematized what was a hodge-podge. I took the four copies of the report she prepared to the conference. Present were Mr. Merrill, representing the estate, Dr. Young, and Ordway representing the McLellan estate. For some reason, Jenkins was there, too, as well as the accountant from Portland. Mr. Merrill looked at their figure, looked at my paper, and, as chairman, proclaimed that there was a discrepancy of almost ten thousand dollars. Dr. Young questioned this item and that. This went on for ten or fifteen minutes, at which time Mr. Merrill suggested that they withdraw for consultation. Instead, I left the room.

The longest ten minutes of my life dragged until

Mr. Merrill called me back. The meeting was held upstairs in the large office of the First National Bank. When I returned, I found them all seated in their places. Mr. Merrill said, -- Sam, the committee accepts your figure as it stands.

You can imagine my joy! But it was short-lived. When I asked whether the estate wished to hold onto the mortgage, I was told no, that they needed the money with which to settle their affairs. This was lie, for they needed investments more than money. They gave me forty days in which to get other financing; very nice of them. But at least I had a fighting chance of holding onto my property.

I first approached the Skowhegan Savings Bank. I had paid up four mortgages with them, always on the minute. Here was a piece of property that had increased in tenancy and rental. Would they take a mortgage on it? I hit a stumbling block. After being made to wait for some time, I was told that the board of directors considered the loan too large and did not want to allow it. In the middle of all this upheaval, my brother Louis died. Such is life, and this matter has to be attended to. When, on the second day after the funeral I went to Waterville to see Mr. Kanuff, Yetta asked me to sell her my half of the building we jointly own. I just went out and had a session with Mr. Kanuff. This is what I told him: Mr. Kanuff, you are always scrutinizing properties, investigating and appraising them. I need so-and-so-much money. It's a lot, but even if the building is worth only twenty-five cents on the dollar, remember that when you first opened your bank, I gave you dollars for something

that might have been worth not one cent. I trusted you. Now I'm asking you to trust me. I need to raise that money. I've never asked you for favors. My character is worth the difference between what this is worth and the full pay, which you will get.

Within a few days, the loan was granted, and they even told me to have all the papers cleared in Skowhegan and make out the check, which they would honor. And they did. How surprised Mr. Merrill was when I asked him to have all the papers released from and by the Estate, Directors, and Presidents. When he demanded to know when I would give him the money, I simply handed over the check. Thus ended the greatest episode of my life. Ma was very happy. I tried to make her comfortable about everything. Three years later, I had occasion to lecture Mr. Carlton Merrill of the Savings Bank for his part in the foregoing transaction.

As you know, the house in which we now live is at 34 North Avenue. Ma and I had looked at it from the outside for almost five years. Mrs. Mary Stinchfield, the owner, lived in it, claimed that she did not want to sell but assured us that if she ever decided to, she would give us first choice. Although the house was terribly neglected and shabby, its location was a particularly good one for us. Because Ma was not able to walk far or uphill, we considered this place ideal, right near downstreet so that on a nice day she could walk out easily and not have to depend on transportation. One day, out of the clear sky, Mrs. Stinchfield came into the store and asked if I had bought a house yet. My reply was no, that I was waiting for hers. She said that she had decided to sell; she was going

to Boston for a few days and would let us see it upon her return. I suggested that we go over at once, but she was not too enthusiastic, saying that it was not clean, and so on. I convinced her that we were not a bit interested in how she kept house nor the arrangement of her furniture; we just wanted to see what it was like inside. Having persuaded her, I got busy; went home to get Ma, and together we went to inspect the house. Well, you know the place. It wasn't much, but its location was ideal. I asked what price she had put on it; she told me. I immediately paid her a deposit and two hundred and fifty dollars extra for having kept her word. Little did she know that I would have paid a thousand dollars more had I known the set-up regarding the house.

Dr. Cora Johnson had owned the house for years, and Mrs. Stinchfield had been her very close friend. When the doctor died, the house had been willed to Mrs. Stinchfield in such a way that she was to live in it for the rest of her life. After that, it was to go to the Aged Ladies' Home Fund. But the house needed repair badly, and Mrs. Stinchfield had been told by the director of the home to sell the house and receive the income from the money as long as she lived to collect. And who do you think this person was? None other than Mr. Carlton Merrill of the Savings Bank, the wise gentleman who had refused me a mortgage on the Oxford property even when I offered to include the corner property in the same security.

The deed had to go through his hands. I made it possible to march in with cash, and told Ma and Archie just how it would be; he would start counting it by

hundreds; lay down the first one, cross the next one, and when it was all piled up, he would count one, two, three, four--up to a thousand and again and again. He did not, however, say, as I had expected, that this represented a lot of watches worked on. But I brought it about by saying, Mr. Merrill, by right this money should have been yours. -- Oh no! he returned. You worked for it. -- No, I insisted. For this money I didn't work at all. You gave me the chance to save it. Do you remember refusing to take my mortgage? Well, in the years that have passed, I have saved lots more than this. -- So we deserve a commission? asked he.

At this response, I opened my mouth in the presence of Roy Symonds and the clerk. No, you don't deserve anything. When you refused me that loan, you insulted everything in me. I had paid you up on five parcels of property, never a day late. All the principles on account were paid in even amounts to save your book-keeper computations. I know that you gave a \$37,500 certified check on a parcel in Lewiston, Maine but wouldn't help on a good piece of property right here in town with a businessman whom you know well. When you refused me that loan, I felt that I was not considered better than some drunk, liar, or cheat. My honesty, morality, clean living, and past record brought me no consideration. I wasn't looking for money at lower rates of interest; I had always done business here and wanted to continue.

During all this speech, he did not look up at me; he sat with his head down. The assistants were frozen in their tracks. He did manage to say that he was

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