

The Memoirs
of
Ida Florence Gertner



A few notes on these memoirs:

Ida last worked on them in 1984; there's no date indicating when she started.

A few editing changes have been made, and those are primarily for clarity or to give further information (for example, the names of her parents have been added, as well as definitions for a few foreign words she'd left undefined).

As for the various spellings of "Cronsberg," it's generally recognized that immigrants entering the country often had their names misspelled by the immigration officials. Relatives arriving at different times could find they had differently spelled last names. Adding to the confusion, Ida recalls, were the schools; her teachers taught her to spell her surname with a "C," while her parents spelled it with a "K."

My name, Ida Florence, in Yiddish is *Chasia Feige*, and there is a story attached to this name.

I was the fourth child born to my parents, Max and Rivel Kronsberg; the other three died at birth. When my mother became pregnant with me, she was naturally worried that she might lose this child also. What to do? There were no doctors to consult in our *shtetl*. The solution was to go to the chief rabbi, a holy man of great renown, for advice and blessing.

So my parents traveled to a distant town where the rabbi resided. My mother told him about the loss of the other children and her fear for this one. He listened to her, calmed her down and told her not to worry. She would have a healthy child and she should name her after his grandmother, whose name was Chasia. "But, Rabbi, suppose the child is a boy?" asked my mother.

"Go home, my child, do as I tell you; everything will be all right," said the rabbi.

That's how I got my name.

My second name I also got in a strange way:

When I was about a year old, I became very ill with typhoid fever. Very few babies survived that kind of illness and I was very near death. It was during the night. My mother was sitting near my crib watching me when she fell asleep. She dreamt that her grandmother came to her and said, "Your child is very sick, but give her my name, 'Feige,' and she will get well."

The next morning my father went to the synagogue and gave me the name of my great grandmother. So you see, I must have had a lot of pull from heaven.

I was born in a small town (*shtetl*) in the Russian Ukraine at the turn of the century. The town, called *Selisht* in Yiddish and *Ludvipol* in Russian, was in the province of Rovno. As I remember it, our town had about 300 families, all Jews. On the outskirts of the town were the small farms and settlements of the *Muzhiks*, the farmers, or *goyim*, as we called them. They didn't have much.

When I was very small, we lived with my maternal grandparents, Eli and Chaya Werner. The house was one of the better ones in our little town. Grandfather was a wholesale butcher, a learned man, and one of the most respected men in town. I remember him as a very kind and loving man, whereas my grandmother was a rather strict and dour woman.

As I remember the house, there was a big central room that was the living and dining room, two bedrooms, and a large kitchen. My grandparents had one of the bedrooms; my parents, my brother, and I used the other bedroom. My uncle Avrum slept in the living room.

The house was heated by a big, built-in clay oven in the central room, fueled by wood. I'm sure we didn't have any heat in the bedrooms. It was pretty cold in the winter, I remember.

We had double windows and I remember the pretty designs Jack Frost painted on them in the cold winter.

The kitchen also had a large built-in-the-wall clay oven in which all the baking and cooking was done, and it also gave heat during the winter. Near the outer door of the kitchen stood a big, wooden tub that was filled with water brought in by the water-carrier. He had a pole across his shoulders with a pail of water on each end which he had filled from some well nearby. This water was for washing, cooking, and drinking. You must understand that there was no plumbing, no sink, no bathroom. We washed up in a basin, and the dirty water was thrown outdoors. I don't remember any outdoor privy, but there must have been one. What I do remember was that we kids often did our duty in a spot a few yards in the back of the house which was overgrown with tall weeds that looked like bulrushes and which we called "*lepeche*," pronounced with a soft sound like "*chale*."

I remember that domestic animals like geese, ducks, and pigs from the neighboring farms used to stray into our village and roam the streets. One incident happened that I'll never forget. I was about six years old, and my brother, Sam (*Shepsel*, in Yiddish), was about three. It was a summer morning and we had just finished our breakfast and were sitting outdoors on the steps of the house. Sam had in his hand a piece of bread and butter, which he was still eating. Just then a big pig passed by, saw the bread and butter in the child's hand, and went for it, taking in his mouth the bread, hand and all, and he wouldn't let go. Sam screamed, I screamed, and my uncle Avrum, who was in the midst of his morning prayers, ran out of the house. In a moment he realized what was happening, so with the *talis* and *tfilin* still on him, he jumped on the pig's back. The animal opened his mouth and let go of Sam's hand. What a candid, amusing picture that would have made.

It was that summer, also, that we moved out of my grandparents' home to a house next door. My uncle Avrum was getting married and our bedroom was needed for him and his wife. Also at that time, Myrna (*Mindel*) was born and we certainly needed more room. We were in that house, which was nice and spacious, when, about a couple of years later, my little brother Yidel was born, and my father left for America.

My little brother Yidel was an adorable child with light hair, blue eyes, and a split upper lip that didn't take away from his attractiveness. We loved this child but, unfortunately, he wasn't with us very long. He died when he was about a year old from an attack of cholera.

My mother had a premonition about his death. She was sitting at his bedside watching him, dozed off, and dreamt that she had lost the stone from the ring on her finger. She woke up with a start in time to see the child draw his last breath.

By present standards, or maybe by any standards, we were poor, but we didn't know it. We certainly had enough to eat. There was a garden in the back of my grandparents' house where vegetables were grown during the summer. Mostly, it was some sort of beans, possibly lima beans, that grew on long sticks or poles. Also, we had a brown and white cow that my mother milked every day and, since my grandfather was a butcher, meat was no problem.

I had a happy childhood, playing with my brother, sister and cousins, running barefoot in the summer, and going with my mother and other women and girls to bathe in a pond on the outskirts of town. There were different times for the men and boys to go swimming because we swam or bathed in the nude. Bathing suits were unknown.

My education in Hebrew started when I was three years old. Usually boys start at that age, but not girls; as a matter of fact, in most instances they don't start until five or six, and then on a limited basis. However, because my cousin *Leibchik* (Lew Caplan) had already been in *Cheder* (Hebrew school) for a couple of years, I, too, wanted to go and kept bothering my mother about it. She spoke to the *Rebbe* (teacher) to let me come in and stay for a little while, thinking I would get bored and soon leave. However, I really wanted to learn and continued to come, so the teacher demanded the same fee the other parents paid. My parents had no choice, and I became a regular student.

The schoolroom was the main room of the teacher's small house. A large table with benches on either side, like our present picnic tables, was where the students sat with their books in front of them. The teacher read a word or a sentence out of the book and we repeated it in unison. We also learned to write, first the alphabet, then words.

During my five years in this school, I learned to read and write Yiddish as well as Hebrew. My Hebrew education was completed when I was eight. The boys continued with another teacher who was more learned and who prepared them for their *Bar Mitzvahs*.

It was at this time when, not being able to make a living for us, my father left for America. It was pretty difficult to make a living in our small town, especially for a family of six. So, like most men of that era, my father had to leave his family to seek a living for all of us in the *Goldene Medina*, the Golden Land. After he left, we moved to a smaller house. Later, I realized it was because Mom couldn't afford the rent of the house we were in.

Our new living quarters weren't as comfortable as the previous ones. Instead of wooden floors, at least one floor, I remember, was red clay that mother repainted or refurbished with a new coat of clay every so often. It was pretty cold in the winter there. Mom got rheumatism and suffered from it off and on all the rest of her life. It was in that house that all of us three kids had measles. All of us together at the same time. Poor Mom! Imagine taking care of three sick kids,

I don't remember much of the two years between my eighth and tenth birthdays. Probably I did what kids of that age do—played outdoors with my cousins and friends and ran barefoot to save shoes in the summer.

One thing stands out from that time. An itinerant photographer came to town and we (Mom, Myrna, Sam, and I, and also our uncle Yidel—Ida Ninberg's father who was visiting us at the time) had our picture taken in order to send it to our Dad in the US. I remember borrowing a pair of shoes from my cousin because those I had were pretty well beaten up—not fit to be photographed. The background of our photo was a barn door. This was in the summertime, of course, and out-of-doors.

During the summer our family usually visited my paternal grandparents, who lived on a farm on the outskirts of a town a little larger than ours, called Tutczin. The farm that my grandparents had wasn't actually a farm. It was just a house with a plot of land, maybe a half-acre, where they raised potatoes and vegetables. Also, there was a big backyard with fruit trees, which some of the grandchildren liked to climb. I wasn't one of them.

They lived in a farming community settled by a group of either Germans or Austrians. My grandparents called them "*Deitchen*," which meant either German or Dutch. They spoke some sort of German dialect that was certainly not regular German because I would have understood some of it. My grandparents, uncles, and aunts spoke that language fluently.

Here I must tell you a little about my grandparents, Pinchas and Blume Krantzberg. This couple was just the opposite of my other grandparents. Grandfather Pinchas seemed to be an aggressive and very strict man. We kids were slightly afraid of him. I'm sure he loved us, but he gave the impression that we had better be on our best behavior *or else!*

Grandmother Blume was the sweetest and kindest woman you ever knew. She was aptly named "Blume," which means flower. We kids adored her. She always wore an apron with large pockets and nearly always there was a treat for any or all kids that happened to be around.

My grandfather Pinchas was a grain dealer. He would buy wheat, corn, and barley from the farmers; store it in a large room in the back of the house, and then sell it.

I also remember my grandmother having a little side business of her own. She would sell some kind of a liquor that smelled like ether or chloroform—something like that. It was sold to the men in very small quantities, a tiny finger glass, for five *kopecks* (pennies). As a treat, we kids would get a bit of that stuff on a lump of sugar. It tasted nice and cool.

One summer, I was there by myself for a few weeks. My uncle Yidel came to visit and took me back with him. I had friends; a couple of kids from the neighboring house, and also a little Jewish girl my own age who lived a mile, or a mile and a half, distant. It was this girl's

home I visited most of the time I was at my grandparents'. The main road to her house and to the town beyond was deeply rutted, very sandy soil. When it rained, the ruts filled up and the water stayed until the sun finally dried it up.

One day during a visit with my friend, it rained. On my way back home, the road was impassable, or maybe I just didn't want to get my shoes wet. I decided I would cut across the fields in the direction in which I thought my grandparents' house was located. Sure enough, I got lost. Since then, I have found out that I have no sense of direction; at that time, I didn't know it. Anyway, after a while, I knew I was lost, so I stopped at a house I saw in the distance to ask directions. A couple of barking dogs came out to greet me. I got scared and ran. At the next house some distance away, I tried again, and again I was greeted by a barking dog. However, this dog was tied up and a man soon came out to see why the dog was barking.

In a combination of German and Yiddish, I told him I was lost, and when I mentioned my grandfather's name, he understood and pointed me in the right direction. I wasn't too far from the house and I made it back. My grandmother remarked that I'd had a long visit, but I was ashamed to tell her I'd gotten lost. Later, the man told my grandparents about the incident.

I loved staying at the "*Lisen Barg*" ("Bald Mountain"), as the area was called. I could run freely through the lovely fields of corn and wheat and eat the sweet peas right off the vines. Berries were in abundance, as well as fruit from the trees in the big yard. I loved going with grandmother in the field to dig up the small, red potatoes that grew there, and cooking them and eating them with gobs of butter or sour cream, which was always a treat.

My uncles Yidel and Yaker (who was later to be Herb Kronsburg's father) would give me short rides on the horse that belonged to my grandfather.

In the winter, my grandmother, aunts, and cousins would sit on the benches beside the big table in the living/dining room and pluck goose and duck feathers for stuffing in pillows and in big, heavy quilts called *perrines* (a Jewish word), which were used for the beds. Wow, were they warm and comfortable in the cold winter nights!

The adults would tell stories of all kinds; some very weird ones about ghosts and witches. After that, I was afraid to walk outdoors at night even for a minute.

When I was about nine, or nine-and-a-half years old, I began preparing to go to school (the Russian school). For the "*goyim*" it was easy. All they had to do was apply; know nothing, and it was free. For us Jewish children, it was different. Not being familiar with the language, we had to take lessons from a private teacher in preparation for the exam we had to take. Also, there was a fee of ten *rubles* for the year. That was a lot of money at that time. We Jews always had to strive to do better than the Christians. So the preparation was for the second grade, and if you failed the exam, you were automatically put in the first grade.

Incidentally, the school was at that time called a two-class school. It consisted of four grades, and it was equivalent to our eight grade elementary school. When you graduated, you were eligible for the *gymnazia*, the high school. Of course, that's if, being Jewish, you could get in or had the money to pay for it. But back to my story: The teacher prepared me and a couple of my friends to take the exam for the second grade. We were taught reading, writing, spelling, and arithmetic. I don't remember how long the preparation took, but finally, before the beginning of school, we were ready for the exams. I was the teacher's star pupil, and she was sure I would pass the exam with flying colors. My two friends failed and so did I. They really didn't expect to make the second grade, so they were not disappointed and were content to start in the first grade.

I, on the contrary, was so sure that I'd pass that I was devastated at my failure. My teacher could not understand why it had happened. Being a former graduate from that school, she went to the principal to find out why and in which subject. It turned out to be spelling, my best subject. All the words that I misspelled, I had spelled correctly when she had previously given me the test. She couldn't understand the reason for it, but I knew; the teacher that gave us the spelling test mumbled his words. Many of them I didn't understand or didn't hear correctly. I was afraid to ask him to repeat, so I put down what I thought he'd said. I told her that. My teacher begged the principal to let me take the test over again, assuring him that I knew the words and was just nervous. But he refused.

I cried so much that my grandfather finally said that he knew the principal and would try to persuade him. Off he went and came back with the good news that I could take the test over and that the principal would give it to me himself. He did and I passed easily. It wasn't until much later that I found out the persuasion was a side of beef that my grandfather gave the principal as a gift. Bribery—it works everywhere!

I enjoyed my two and a half years in the Russian school, even though it was a long, two mile walk. I didn't think it was too far, even during the very cold winter days. A bunch of kids from our village would go skating on one skate or just sliding along on the frozen pond, which was a short cut to the school.

During that final year I also took lessons in German from a private teacher. My Dad thought it would help the family if I were able to understand and read German because we would be traveling to Bremen, Germany to board the ship to the US. Within two months I learned to read, write, and understand German. I can still read it fairly well even now. As for speaking, I guess every European Jew can make himself understood in *Deutsche* (German).

It must have been the late summer or early fall of 1910 when Mom packed our belongings, which consisted of, I believe, most of our possessions including bedding, linens, etc., which were sent on ahead to the ship that we were to sail on.

After tearful good-byes to family and friends, we left our home town of Selisht to go first to my paternal grandparents' home in the *Lisen Barg*. We were to stay there, I think, only a couple of weeks, and then we were to leave for the big city of Rovno, the county seat from where we were to entrain for our trip out of the country.

In the meantime my brother Shepsel got an ear infection that, in spite of medication (whatever there was at the time), would not clear up. It took several months but, finally, he was okay. In the meantime, our passports had expired and getting new ones was out of the question. It would have taken too long.

My grandfather arranged through an agent for us to be led secretly across the border from Russia to Austria, which was the nearest place. This was common practice in those days since people, for one reason or another, could not leave the country legally. For money, everything could be arranged.

It must have been late in the fall when we finally started on our journey from Rovno, where we'd stopped for a couple of days to visit with uncle Sam Kronsburg, who lived in Rovno with the Gertner family and whose best and closest friend was Chaim Gertner¹, the oldest boy in the family. It must have been a brief visit because I don't remember much of it. I certainly, in my wildest dreams, would not have imagined that someday I would become a member of that family by marrying their number two son, Sholom (Sam).

The journey from Rovno is very hazy in my mind. It seems to me that we traveled for days sitting or sleeping on hard benches. Then someone must have met us and taken us to the place where we were to cross or, better said, steal across the border from Russia to Austria.

I think there were eight or nine of us in the party—Mom and we three kids (Sam, Myrna, and I), another woman and her two children, and couple of men. We gathered at a house where we met the two men who were to take us across. About midnight, we started out. It was a cold night and there was snow on the ground. It seems to me we traveled a long time through woods and on frozen, rutted roads. Myrna was about five and a half years old and the distance was too far for her to walk, so one of the guides carried her on his back. The border crossing was a small, narrow ditch between the two countries. Just as we were about to cross, a shot rang out and we all started to run. We got across the border and nobody was hurt.

In a few minutes we were in the house of a peasant who lived near the border and whose business it was to take in travelers like us. Just as we were catching our breath and beginning to relax, Mom noticed that Myrna was missing. My God! Can you imagine Mom's feelings and the panic and consternation of the rest of us? The guide and Mom ran out together and in a few min-

¹Although Ida doesn't mention it in these memoirs, she's written elsewhere that the family's name wasn't originally Gertner. Her son recalls that the name was taken from a cousin who was in the military, and therefore able to leave the country.

utes came back with her. They found her lying in a pile of snow, crying. She had slipped off the guide's back as he was running, but fortunately it was on the right side of the border. Thank God! In later years, if Myrna did or said something nutty, as she sometimes did, we'd tease her by saying, "Don't mind her; she was dropped on the border."

We spent the night at that house. At this point my recollection is nil. Next, I remember being a long time again on a train—this time, on our way to Bremen, Germany to board the ship that would take us to America.

Coming from a country like Russia, and particularly being Jewish, the inbred fear of authority, and especially of anyone in uniform, was great. This time our fear was that we didn't have, or the train conductor would think we didn't have, the right amount of tickets. Mom, naturally, had a full-fare ticket. The rest of us had half-fare tickets, but because I was a big girl and looked older than 12 (the cutoff age for half-fare), we could be asked for full fare for me. Children of four or younger could travel free. Luckily, there wasn't a problem.

Every time the conductor came through the train, we made Myrna sit down on the floor so she would look small—more like a four year old rather than a six year old. Mom told her that if anyone asked her, she was to say she was four years old. I doubt that any of you children can imagine the hardships and fears that we, and thousands of others like us who traveled from small towns and villages from Europe to the US, experienced. Books and stories have been written by and about these people, but as in any life situation, one must really be in it to truly feel it. But back to our travels. . .

Before we reached Bremen we were stopped at a way station, an immense place where there were showers and large washing machines that looked more like steam boilers. There were hundreds of people, travelers like us. We were given towels and soap and taken into a room with showers. Our clothes were taken from us and thrown into big steam vats to wash and sterilize them. The showers felt good, and did we need them! After what seemed to me like weeks of traveling in dirty trains and sleeping in our clothes, we sure must have been dirty and smelly. When we got our clothes back, not being "permanent press," they were well-wrinkled. If you missed an undergarment or a sock, as happened to many, what could you do about it? At least the clothes were clean and so were we.

How we got to Bremen and to the place where we were to board the ship, I don't remember. However, I remember very well how upset Mom was because of our slow traveling. We just missed the ship *Prince Wilhelm*, one of the better ships in the German-American line. We had to wait a week for the next one, the *Brandenburg*.

The week in Bremen wasn't bad. Our quarters were clean, and the food was adequate. Here we were introduced to a forerunner of margarine. Butter was not on the menu, certainly not

for us. The taste wasn't very good, but we had no choice.

We had made friends with the woman and two children (a boy and a girl) who crossed the border with us. The boy, who was a couple of years older than me, and I roamed around a bit in the streets close to our quarters. Everything was so different from home that I'm sure we didn't mind the waiting like the adults did.

Finally the day came when we boarded the ship that was to take us to America. What a voyage that was! The *Brandenburg* must have been the oldest in the line, and though we weren't accustomed to luxury, even to us it wasn't much. Our quarters were in third class—steerage, that is. The cabin we were in, if I remember correctly, had six bunks and accommodated two families—not very much privacy.

We stood in line for our food, holding tin utensils. I don't recall how good or bad the food was. It must have been fairly edible. Sam and I ate it, but Mom and Myrna were seasick through most of the voyage. They subsisted mostly on tea and the black bread that Mom brought.

We had been told that the voyage would take about seven days, but we encountered a severe storm. The old vessel couldn't take it, and we almost sank. Our cabin was awash in water almost up to the second bunk. We all huddled together on the highest bunks, fearful and trembling. The man prayed; the women and children cried, thinking that we would all drown. Finally the storm ceased; the water subsided and the ship limped into New York harbor after 12 harrowing days. Like the thousands of immigrants before us, we gathered on deck as the ship approached the harbor to see the Statue of Liberty. We had heard of it and, to the adults, it was a sign of all the good they hoped for in the new land. To the kids, it was something very large, strange, and wondrous.

After great confusion and what seemed a long time, the steerage passengers were herded into a strange boat (a ferry) and taken to Ellis Island, called Castle Garden. We'd heard talk of Castle Garden. To us kids it didn't mean much, but I, as the oldest, was imbued with the fear of the adults that something dreadful could happen to us, such as being sent back if in some way we didn't pass inspection.

When we got off the boat we formed two lines, with inspectors standing several yards apart in each line. As we walked, the inspectors observed us carefully. If, for any reason, one of them decided that there was something physically wrong with some person, the inspector would mark an X with a piece of chalk on that person's back. This was a sign for the inspector at the end of the line to take that person out for further questioning or examination. As we passed, one inspector marked my forehead with an X. Why, I don't know. Maybe because I was a fat, red-cheeked, scared-looking little girl and he felt like having a little fun. Mom evidently had heard about this marking method, although she didn't know exactly where the mark was made. As soon

as we passed that inspector, she grabbed me, wet her finger, and erased the mark. At the time, I didn't know what it all meant, but I could see that Mom was scared. Finally we reached the last inspector, who was seated at a table, and here the questioning began.

We were all asked our names, ages, and to whom we were going. Myrna had been instructed so many times during our journey to tell everybody that she was four years old that she had begun to believe it. (Even now, she thinks she is younger than she is.) When the inspector asked her how old she was, she said very firmly that she was four years old. "You're a big girl for four years," said the man, and Myrna agreed with him. Thank God we passed okay and were led into a very large room, the main hall. Here we spent several days, not in the main room except waiting around during the day with lots of other people.

I don't recollect much of anything we did while we waited. One of the meals we got included rice pudding with raisins. It was something we had never had and I enjoyed it very much. I also remember our sleeping quarters, a large dormitory room with bunk beds. Women and children were accommodated in one area. I heard the men and older boys had similar quarters in another area.

I remember an incident that happened one evening while we were assembled in that main room. Some official was talking to us when all of a sudden the room was plunged into darkness. It happened because brother Sam got bored, saw something on the wall beside him (the light switch), and pushed. Somebody turned the light on again, and I think only Mom and I knew who the culprit was.

Finally a representative came from HIAS, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and took us off the island and brought us directly to Grand Central Station, where we boarded the train to Portland. It was a long, all-day journey. What I remember about this trip is that Mom bought us candy and cookies from the boy that peddled those things on the train. Also, I remember trying to read the signs of the towns and stations that we passed. You can imagine our relief when I saw the sign that said "Portland." I read it and knew that we had finally arrived.

Dad and someone else (I don't remember who) met us at Union Station, bringing some fruit for us, among which was bananas. We had never seen bananas before and Sam tried to eat one with the skin on.

Our first apartment in Portland was a four-room apartment. I couldn't get over the fact that all one had to do was turn a faucet and there was running water. Another great astonishment was when I first saw an automobile. I ran into the house yelling, "Mom, I just saw a horseless carriage going by itself." The wonders of America—little by little, I got used to them.

A few days after we came to Portland (January of 1911) our neighbor's daughter, who

was a little older than I, took me to school to register me. I was twelve years old, but since I couldn't speak the language and they didn't know what, if any, education I'd had, they put me into the kindergarten. So there I was—a big girl, playing with blocks and some other games. The teacher knew that I was capable of more. She gave me some arithmetic examples, which I completed. She taught me the alphabet and some simple words and, within three days, I was transferred to the second grade.

By the end of the semester, I had learned to speak and read English fairly well and I was promoted to the fourth grade. My year in the fourth grade was a tough one for me. My teacher, Miss Johnson, was a redheaded (anti-Semitic, I think) bitch. I'll never forget her. She picked on me all the time. Here I was less than a year in the country, coming from the second grade, and instead of trying to help me, she always called on me for things I couldn't possibly have known. I was scared and, if I didn't answer fast enough, she would pinch me. I learned though, and, at the end of the year, I was promoted to the fifth grade. Here I encountered a teacher who was just the opposite of Miss Johnson in every way. Miss Whiteley was petite, white-haired, kind, and helpful. She taught me to speak the language without an accent. For instance, I pronounced "teeth" as "teet." "No, Ida, put your tongue between your teeth and say 'teeth,'" she would say to me. From her and with her, I really learned and became her star pupil in spelling, grammar, and arithmetic.

At that time in Portland, grade schools were marked only in five subjects—the three I mentioned, in which I got E's (excellent), as well as drawing and music, in which I got G's (good). Actually, F's (fair) or maybe even P's (poor) might have been justifiable, but I think my teachers didn't want to spoil my good record.

In the next three years, I skipped grades and, within four and a half years of my coming to the US, I graduated from grade school. At that time, there were nine grades in elementary school. Again I must give credit to darling Miss Whiteley, who was assigned to the seventh grade at the same time I got there. She was very, very helpful, teaching me after-school hours and preparing me so that, at the end of the year, I was promoted from the seventh to the ninth grade.

With graduation from the ninth grade, my formal education was over. I was almost 17 years old—too old, my parents thought, to go into high school, at least for a girl. Besides, they couldn't afford to keep a growing girl in clothes and things, however meager, for the next four years. I had to prepare to earn some of my own living expenses.

At this point, I'll back up a little and relate some incidents that I remember during my first four and a half years in this country. Once incident: for graduation, I was told that the girls wear white dresses. When I told Mom that I needed a white dress for graduation, she said that I would never get any wear out of it and we just couldn't afford the money for a one-occasion dress. I

ended up getting a blue, flowered dress and I stuck out among the white-dressed girls like a sore thumb. It's strange, but I didn't feel bad about it. Nobody made any remarks, and at that time I surely wasn't clothes-conscious.

Soon after we arrived in the US, Mom became pregnant and, at the end of the year, in December of 1911, sister Sue was born.

Sometime afterwards we moved to a larger house on Fore Street. I think one of the reasons was that we were expecting relatives from Europe and, naturally, they would stay with us. My uncle, Sam Kronsberg and cousin, Edith Caplan, arrived soon afterwards.

From time to time, we had other relatives staying with us for short periods of time. Uncle Sam stayed with us until after he got married. He was divorced a short time afterwards, and went to New York to live with the Gertner family. Edith stayed with us until she got married to Sam Nelson.

Here I recollect another funny (to me) incident. Edith was too shy to go to the City Hall with Sam to get their marriage license, so I offered to go with him to fill in the necessary information. When we walked out, license in hand, the guard at the door congratulated us. I got a kick out of it and giggled all the way home. I was 16 at the time and Edith was about five years older.

We lived on Fore Street, which was near the waterfront and not the best neighborhood (but the rent was cheap), for about five years before Mom and Dad decided it was time to move. The house opposite us housed a couple of prostitutes. We kids weren't aware of what was going on there, but the adults were. After a while, the hush-hush talk made us aware that something was going on that we weren't supposed to know. With the money they had saved, they had enough for a down payment to buy the house at 76 Monument Street where Mom died, where I got married, where Sue was raised, and from which we children finally left to be on our own.

We came back from time to time, and Dad stayed there until his death in February of 1948. But I'm getting ahead of my story, so back to the time after my graduation.

It was decided that I should go to a business school and learn bookkeeping. The cost of the course was \$10 a month. It was supposed to be a six month course, but I made it through in five months and became a full-fledged bookkeeper, ready to get a job. However, Dad was too religious and he wouldn't let me work Saturdays, and where in Portland could I get a job in those years (1916-1917) not working Saturdays? For over a year, I worked at odd jobs, sometimes writing business letters for our friend Eisenman who had a rag and metal business. At one time, I worked about six months for a Jewish junk dealer for the magnificent sum of \$6 a week, and walked three miles each way in all kinds of weather because his place was at the other end of town.

I even worked a couple of weeks in a sardine factory but, after the second Saturday of not being home, Dad found out and stopped me. Finally, and with Mom's persuasion, he decided to give me permission to work on Saturdays. Soon afterwards, I found a job as a bookkeeper in a bookbinding place for \$12 a week. It was shortly afterwards that we moved to Monument Street.

During the preceding five or six years, a lot had happened. Quite a few of our relatives had come over from Europe—Uncle Caplan with Lew and Edith, Uncle Yidel, Uncle Sam—and they all stayed with us for varying periods of time. Edith stayed with us the longest, staying until she married Sam Nelson. Ours was always a busy home, people coming and going, and Mom taking care of everyone.

Having a full-time job and earning money gave me a feeling of independence and prestige. I enjoyed working and, with my \$12 at the end of the week, I could treat the kids to ice cream and sodas at least once a week and buy what I needed for myself.

Life in Portland was simple, not much excitement, but my friends and I enjoyed whatever we did, going to a movie or to an occasional lecture, or just getting together and talking.

Later I joined a group of people older than myself, a so-called more intellectual group. Edith and Sam Nelson were in the group called the *Poale Zion* (Part of Jerusalem), which was the Zionist Labor movement working for Palestine to be a Jewish homeland. I remember Ben Gurion, who was then a very young man, coming to Portland and speaking to us and others about the need for money and dedication to help establish the homeland.

The first World War in Europe was going on, but somehow it didn't seem to touch our lives too much. I remember the Armistice, November 1918, when the war was over, and the celebration in our town, as it was everywhere in the country.

It must have been about a month later that I took a vacation and went to visit my aunt and uncle Gold in Chelsea, Massachusetts. That was a trip that I was looking forward to. A couple of my cousins there were my age and they had lots of friends. Also, I was eager to see again a young man from Boston who had visited us some time before. Anyway, I had a wonderful time for about a week or ten days, until I got a telephone call saying that Mom was sick and I should come home.

When I returned home, I found that Mom had double pneumonia. The flu was raging at the time and she'd gotten it and it had turned into pneumonia. There were no antibiotics at that time and the doctor couldn't do much to help her. When I went to her bed and asked her how she was feeling, she didn't answer that, but instead asked me if I'd had a good time.

That day she lapsed into a coma and three days later she died, without regaining consciousness. I was sitting by her bed watching her when suddenly she opened her eyes, and with the most surprised and pleased look on her face, a look I will never forget, she uttered the word

“Babel.” Babel was her older sister, Lew Caplan’s mother, who had died about fifteen years previously. Then she drew her last breath and passed away. Her sister had come to meet her. I believe that those whom we love and were close to come to meet us when we leave this world. Experiences like that have been told by many people who supposedly were dead but were brought back to life. The date of Mom’s death was January 2, 1919.

Due to Mom’s death, I started a correspondence with Sam Gertner in New York. At that time my uncle Sam Kronsberg was living in New York and staying with the Gertner family in Brooklyn. Mom would write to Uncle Sam about our family and he, in turn, would inform us of what was going on in his life, including news of the Gertners, a family we knew from Europe. (Uncle Sam and Chaim Gertner were close friends and had worked in the same store in Rovno.)

At the time that Mom died, Uncle Sam’s sister Rose was about to be married. Uncle Sam knew that Mom was ill, but he did not know of her death. Dad asked me to write to Uncle Sam about it but, because of the upcoming wedding, I did not want to send such sad news. Instead, I wrote to Sam Gertner about it, enclosing a note to Uncle Sam to be given to him the day after the wedding. Thus began a steady correspondence between Sam Gertner and me. Some time later he had occasion to be in Portland. He was a cutter, designer, and sometime-traveling salesman for the neckwear firm he worked for.

He came to Portland to sell neckwear to the local department stores and to see the girl he was corresponding with. I guess he liked what he saw, and I also felt the same way. He gave me the ring he was wearing with his initial on it as a token of our friendship. We continued to write to each other discussing current events, politics, etc., in our letters. Our views of world events, the state of the government, and such, were quite different. I was strictly conventional, conservative, and very naive. Sam, being a New Yorker, was more sophisticated, liberal, and socialistic in his thinking. He pointed out to me a lot of things about the way the public was hoodwinked by propaganda from big industry and government. He considered himself a liberal and was taking a course in economics from a noted professor who was a socialist when the school, which was considered socialistic by the government, and therefore suspect, was raided. The professor and students, including Sam, were arrested and taken to jail. All were soon released because there was no evidence of any threat to the government. This episode was quite disturbing to me, but Sam assured me that he was not involved in the Socialist Party.

A couple of months after our first meeting, Sam came to Portland again, this time, just to see me. He brought with him a diamond engagement ring, and we became formally engaged. On an occasion like that, I guess there is usually some sort of celebration, even if very small or just for the family. For us there was none; I’m sure it was because Mom wasn’t there. Dad didn’t

really approve of Sam as a son-in-law because Sam was irreligious, quite radical, and not stable, to Dad's way of thinking. There was another guy from Malden, Massachusetts who had courted me briefly whom Dad approved of; he owned an ice cream cone factory and was more religious. However, Dad couldn't object; he could see that Sam and I cared for each other and he wanted me to be happy. (Here I must tell you that after I was married and he got to know Sam better, he liked and approved of him.)

The first year after Mom's death was a rough one for all of us, although we seem to have adjusted. I know I missed her very much, as I'm sure we all did. When she died I couldn't shed a tear, but afterwards, whenever I thought of her, whenever her name was mentioned, I couldn't stop crying. Mom was a beautiful person—kind, gentle, warm and friendly to family, friends, and even strangers, and was helpful wherever and whenever she could be.

While I'm talking about my mother, I want to say something about Dad. He seemed to be a stern person, but he, too, was kind, very honest, and very proud. He demanded the best from us, honesty, integrity, and respect. We didn't always come up to his expectations, but I'm sure he never punished us. He may not have shown it, but I know he loved us.

It was January of 1920 when I decided to give up my job and go to New York, get a job, and stay there. Like most of the young people in Portland, I was beginning to think that life in Portland was dull and wanted to go to a big city like Boston or New York. Being engaged to a man from New York gave me that opportunity. Of course, Sam was pleased at my decision and encouraged me to come. I could stay with his folks and he was sure I would get a job and we could be together. I gave my employer notice and recommended a friend of mine for the job.

The following month, February, I was ready to leave. Because I thought that Dad would not approve and would not let me go, I didn't tell him that I intended to stay in New York. I gave him the impression that I was just going for a couple of week's vacation. I intended to write later and tell him. It's a decision that I've regretted to this day because shortly after I left, Dad found out from the father of the girl that replaced me at the job. He must have been hurt and embarrassed to find it out from someone else. Thinking about it now, I feel sure that even if Dad didn't approve, he would not have stopped me. He never reproached me for deceiving him about that. Youth is self-centered to the point of selfishness. I didn't think then that I was leaving the home and family at a time when they needed me most. It was only a year after mother's death and I shouldn't have been in such a hurry.

The trip from Portland to New York was a 12 hour train ride; you left about 8:00 PM and usually arrived about 8:00 AM the following day. My trip, however, took 24 hours. It started to snow the evening I left and continued to snow heavily all night and most of the following day. The rails and roads were impassable and the snow made movement impossible. Sam waited for

me in Grand Central Station all day. They kept changing the time of arrival and he couldn't leave for any length of time. But he always said I was worth waiting for.

My first impression of 92 Boerum Street, Brooklyn was a bit of a letdown. Our home in Portland was a palace in comparison. There was the little candy and stationery store (owned by Sam's parents), the entrance to the living quarters in the rear. It consisted of four rooms—a dark living room, two bedrooms (one very small, one larger), and the kitchen. The kitchen had a large sink, a stove, an ice box, and a big table and chairs. The toilet was in the back of the table. Picture the privacy if you had to go to the toilet and someone was sitting at the table. There was no bath or shower. Everyone took their weekly bath at the local public bath house. For five cents you got a towel, soap, and a shower to keep you clean for the rest of the week. Between times, you washed up at the kitchen sink.

The Gertners were very kind to me. They gave me their best bedroom, the larger one. Sam and his brother Harry slept in one of those folding beds in the living room. (My uncle Sam, by that time, was living somewhere else.)

A couple of days after my arrival in New York I bought the *Times* and started to look in the want ads for a bookkeeping job. I can't remember how long it took me to find a job, maybe a couple of weeks. In the meantime, I did a lot of walking and traveling by subway and trolley, saw quite a bit of the city, and had a couple of adventures.

One time I saw an ad for a bookkeeper's position somewhere downtown. After a long ride I finally got to the area, but not knowing where the place was located, I asked the cop on the beat to direct me. He asked me why I wanted to go there and I told him. He looked at me and said, "Young lady, that is not the kind of place you would want to work in. I'd advise you not to go there." I understood, took his advice, and went back.

Another time, a man standing near me in a trolley car started a conversation. I assume that from my accent he guessed that I was a New Englander and he told me he originally came from New Hampshire. So here we were practically *landsleit*, of the same area. He said he would like to have me visit at his home. I said I'd love to and I would bring my boyfriend. He didn't give me his address.

Finally, I got a job with a furrier somewhere on 7th Avenue for \$25 a week. Imagine that! Twice the salary I made in Portland. The best part of it was that I could have lunch with Sam most of the time. Child's Restaurant was one of the places I liked best. Also, we were able to go home together, or stay in town and see a movie or a play, or attend a concert. It was great for two months, then the firm I worked for went bankrupt and out of business. The fur business at the time was in bad straits and failures in that field were not unusual. Well, here I was without a job and the firm owed me a week's salary. I eventually collected it months later.

Again, I was job hunting. I worked a few weeks for an accountant who sent his employees to do the bookkeeping for small business firms. Then that petered out too, and I was laid off. By this time, Sam and I decided that we should get married. So at the end of May, 1920, I returned home to prepare for my wedding. There wasn't much preparation that I can remember as far as getting clothes, etc. The wedding date was June 6, 1920, which was on a Sunday. It was held in our house, just for the immediate family and a few friends. Sam's dad and mother were the only ones of his family that attended. Uncle Gold from Lynn came and he officiated at our wedding. Evidently he was also a marriage performer as well as being a *Shochet*, a kosher butcher. I don't remember Auntie Gold being there, but maybe she was. Mrs. Eisenman, who had been my mother's best friend, baked all or most of the cakes and things for the wedding feast, of which I can't remember a thing. My wedding gown was Lola Holman's high school graduation dress, which she lent me. (The Holmans were our upstairs neighbors.)

Because the wedding was in Portland, I had to get the marriage license. So off I went to City Hall, made out an application and found out that there was a five day waiting period before I could get the license. The end of the five days was Sunday, the day of the wedding. I couldn't pick up the license because the City Hall was closed that day. What to do? The clerk was helpful; she said she would leave the license at the drug store next door and I could pick it up there.

Come Sunday morning it was raining. Off I went to the drug store to get my license. But when I asked for it, I was told there was no license for Cronsberg. I almost panicked thinking no license, no wedding. I asked the man to look again. Maybe he had mislaid it. Again he said there was no license for Cronsberg. The only one he had was for Gertner. The day and my wedding were saved!

A couple of days after our wedding we left Portland for our home in New York. It wasn't much of a home because we had to continue to live in the same bedroom that I had occupied by myself before our wedding. Although we owned the house, the apartment on the upper floor that we wanted was rented and the tenant refused to move. At that time apartments also seemed to be scarce, and for \$30 a month to get four nice rooms with a *bathroom* yet was a bargain.

After a year's wait and going to court a couple of times pleading that we were newlyweds and had no place to live, we finally got a court order and the tenant had to move.

But before all this happened, as soon as we returned to NY, we went on our honeymoon to Krasnopalsky's farm in the Catskills. By present standards it wasn't much of a place, but we weren't used to luxuries and just getting away from NY by ourselves for a week and in the country was a treat.

The food was fresh and good. It was beautiful June weather in the country. The Krasno-

palskys, a very nice middle aged couple, treated us especially well and we enjoyed it.

It was a small farm. They had a few cows, chickens, ducks, and a horse. There was also a large fruit orchard, mostly apples I believe. I think most of their income was from the guests they accommodated.

That reminds me of the incident with the cow and an apple she swallowed which stuck in her throat. She couldn't get it out and she couldn't get it down and was slowly choking to death. Mr. and Mrs. K. were frantic. Somebody suggested pouring egg whites down her throat, which they did. That and nothing else helped. Everybody stood around not knowing what to do, except Sam. He rolled up his sleeve, stuck his hand and arm down the cow's throat and extracted the apple. The cow was saved and Sam was the hero of the day.

When we returned home, Sam went back to work and I started looking for a bookkeeping job. Within a week I found one in Brooklyn not very far from Boerum Street where we lived. It was with a firm that sold men's, women's, and children's clothing on the installment plan—\$1 down and \$1 a week. It was owned and run by the Friedman brothers, Mike and Nathan. At that time, the 1920s, the department stores did not extend credit to the poor blue collar working man. So they were forced to buy from firms like the Friedman Bros., who gave them credit but also sold them second-rate merchandise for their money. Those poor people were always in debt because the clothes would wear out before they could pay for them. I felt sorry for those people, but unfortunately they were treated no better elsewhere. Mike and Nathan were good men and, in some instances, treated their customers better than some of the other, similar firms did.

When I was hired at \$25 per week (a good salary), I was the only girl (person) in the office other than a man who was mostly outside collecting money. The place was doing well, and after working a couple of months, I needed help in the office. It was then that I, with my boss's approval, hired Lee Witkin as my assistant bookkeeper. My job with the Friedmans was good; Lee and I became fast friends and formed a long friendship.

Here I want to note that I applied for the job as *Ida Cronsberg*, not Gertner. At that time married women were not hired for responsible positions. The usual excuse was: "What if they become pregnant and leave! We'll have to break in someone else." It was not until the end of my three years with the firm that I told them. They'd met Sam a couple of times, but I'd introduced him as my boyfriend.

I mentioned earlier that my in-laws had a little candy and stationery store, which was opposite an elementary school. The store was primarily a school supply store, selling pencils, maybe pads, and other school stationery, but candy was also sold there. Since my office was within walking distance from the house, I would rush home at noon during the school lunch hour

to help sell penny candies to the horde of kids. There were four of us working at the counter: Mr. and Mrs. Gertner; Rose, Sam's married sister who lived upstairs; and me. The big take for that busy lunch hour was usually about \$10 to \$12. I took about ten minutes for a quick bite to eat and then ran back to the office.

In 1923, Sam decided to quit his \$35 per week job with Weber Neckwear and start for himself in the same line. With \$1000 that we had saved and a \$500 loan, the firm of S. A. Gertner became a reality. Sam knew all the firms that sold laces and embroideries. The owners liked him and extended him some credit. He rented a small loft at 100 West 21st Street in New York. I quit my job and, with four girls, we started our business, which was to last for 35 years, until 1955.

The first few years were a struggle. Sam did the buying, selling, cutting, designing, and a few other things. I was the bookkeeper, secretary, forelady, dyer, and general helper. We often worked until 8 PM, grabbed a bite in some restaurant, and drove home.

In the second year of our business venture, we almost went bankrupt. It happened this way: At that time, Rose's husband, Dick Meade, or the "*Loksh*" (short for "noodle"), as my father-in-law nicknamed him, was working for himself at the wholesale produce market, buying and selling fruits and vegetables by the carload. The reason for the nickname was that, at the time, that business was handled mostly by Italians and he had a lot of Italian friends and maybe adopted their manner of speech. He wanted to buy a couple of carloads of fruit and strawberries for a quick turnover and needed \$1,750. He approached Sam and asked him to be a cosigner with another man, an Italian friend of his in the market, so that he could get a loan from the bank. Sam and the other man signed the note. The *Loksh* got his loan, but he couldn't sell the fruit fast enough and it rotted. Instead of making the big buck as he anticipated, he lost the money. He couldn't pay the debt when the note came due, so Sam and the friend were stuck for \$850 each. Evidently the Italian man was pretty well off, and he probably took the money off as a business loss. To us, on the contrary, it was like an \$8,000 loss instead of \$850. Somehow, we managed to pay it. Meade, though, never paid us back a penny. He never made an effort to pay even a small part at any time. There were times later that he could pay, but didn't. Evidently it didn't bother Rose either that her husband never paid her brother.

Sam never said a word and never asked for the return of the money. And when his brother, Harry, borrowed \$400 from us to open a millinery store for his wife, Elizabeth, and the store failed, that loan was never paid back either. In spite of that, our relationship with them never changed. We never held it against them as many other people would have.

I can really be proud of my family. When we loaned money to Myrna and her husband Arnold, and to Sue's husband Burt when they needed it for business, it was paid back as promptly as possible with thanks. Myrna still feels obligated for the loan after she paid back many times in

money and gifts. The same for Burt and Sue, and I'll always be grateful to Burt for all the help he has given me in all the years since Sam died.

To continue: In 1924, Chaim, Manya, and their 3 year-old son Isaac, now known as Dick, arrived from Europe. Sam immediately took his brother into his employ and taught him the cutting trade. He also gave him a small apartment in the rear building at 92 Boerum Street, which Sam and his father owned at the time.

Chaim was with us until Sam retired in 1954. He was a good employee, a loyal brother, and a great help to us. I loved Chaim. He was a fine person.

Come to think of it, Chaim also helped us when we bought the Laundromat in New Hyde Park after Sam retired from the neckwear business. He traveled from Brooklyn by subway and bus five days a week until his death.

A few years after we went into business, Sam decided to buy a car. We used to work late, and traveling by subway to Brooklyn, and walking back and forth to the subway station was tiring. Having a car would make it easier for us.

I don't remember what make the car was that Sam originally chose. I didn't see it, but it much have been very nice, from Sam's description. When he told me that it cost \$2,200, I was flabbergasted. We both knew that we couldn't afford that much money at the time.

The dealer said he could pay it in installments, but after thinking and talking about it all evening, we decided against it. Sam went back to the dealer the following day and came back driving our first car. It was sort of a compact—small, but nice. It was called a "Star." He paid cash for it, and it was ours. Sam had never driven a car, but the salesman showed him how, and within an hour, he'd mastered it.

That evening we (Sam, Chaim, and I) left early (about 6 PM) with Sam, naturally, driving the car. As we turned the corner from 37th Street to 9th Ave, the car stalled right in front of the cop who was directing traffic. We were all scared that the cop would ask Sam for his license which, of course, he didn't have. But our luck was with us. After the policeman approached us while Sam was fiddling with the gears, he was sympathetic. All he said was, "Having trouble with your car?" Sam said yes, and then the car started and we were on our way and got home safely.

After supper Sam went out and drove around the neighborhood for a couple of hours, got very well acquainted with the car's workings and was very confident in his driving.

The following day he went to apply for his driver's license, took the test, and failed. It wasn't because he couldn't drive, but because this particular inspector expected a "*shmir*" (a bribe), which Sam wasn't about to give him. At his next appointment for the test he got another inspector, passed the test with flying colors, and got his license.

* * *

The years from 1923 to 1928 were busy years with some problems, some good times, and some bad times. During this time our business thrived. We moved from the small loft on 21st to a much larger one and increased our production with more employees. We bought the house at 1636 49th Street in the Boro Park section of Brooklyn. That was the good part. It was a three story house. We had a tenant downstairs and occupied the middle floor ourselves. The third floor, the attic, had two rooms, and was used on different occasions by different people. Harry and Elizabeth Gertner stayed in this little apartment for a couple of months until they got an apartment of their own. Myrna used it for some time and so did other relatives.

During that period my mother-in-law became ill with cancer. She suffered about three years and we suffered with her, taking her from doctor to doctor to a hospital for surgery that didn't help. In the final months of her illness we'd rush home from the factory to her bed, stay with her as long as we could, and then drive from Boerum Street to Boro Park, upset, tired, and hungry.

I guess it was Manya who had the greatest burden; living in the same building, she was the one who was taking care of my mother-in-law constantly. Sam's mother died in July, 1927.

I'd like to say something about my in-laws, Sam's parents. They were very, very nice people! They were more like second parents, they treated me as one of their own family, and I loved them!

Sam's dad (Abraham) was a fine, gentle, lovable man. He was honest and religious, but not aggressive or outgoing. His religion meant a great deal to him; it came even before making a living for his family. So much so that he returned to Europe from the United States because he couldn't find work unless he worked on Saturday. Eventually, what little money he had ran out; there was no work for him in Rovno, and he returned to the US where he found a job as a pants presser in a Jewish firm. A few years later, with the help of my mother-in-law, who had a small store in Rovno, they saved enough for her and the children (Rose, Sam, and Harry) to come to the US.

Here too, my mother-in-law, *Chavele*² (Eve), worked very hard (if you read the book, *No Time for Tears*, that's her), only she couldn't accomplish that much. But she was aggressive, ambitious, a "doer," and a good business woman. She was also a fine, kind person.

A few months after the family came over to the US, my father-in-law lost his job. Because he wouldn't work Saturdays, he couldn't find a new one. Again, *Chavele* took over. From

² Were she writing her memoirs in 1999, Ida would drop the "C" in this name to emphasize the softness of the "Ch." The name should be pronounced *Ha-vuh-luh*.

somewhere she borrowed \$100 and with that, opened the little store at 92 Boerum Street where they both worked to make a living.

In 1928 I became pregnant. We hired Gertie Bober as my replacement for bookkeeper, but I stayed on in the business until about two weeks before I gave birth. (Several years later Gertie married our salesman, Mac Mass.)

On October 12, 1928, Sam and I became the proud parents of a little girl. We named her Rita Evelyn after her two grandmothers. It's too bad our children missed having grandmothers and our mothers never knew the joy of having grandchildren. I feel so blessed having four lovely and loving ones.

The house in Boro Park had become too much for us to handle. The tenant had moved out, we were away all day, and often in the evening there was no one to take care of things. In 1927 we'd sold it and moved to a one bedroom apartment a few blocks from our old home. Rita was born in the Boro Park hospital close to our apartment. It was in this apartment that we met Gertie and Abe Brand, who had a similar apartment and whose daughter Mella was born a couple of weeks after Rita.

The Brands, Sam, and I became fast friends and, in spite of a few unpleasant incidents, our friendship continues to this date although now, 1984, it's just Gertie and me. (Sam died in 1965 and Abe in 1983.)

Rita was a colicky baby and cried constantly for about three months. Being a very inexperienced mother I listened to my pediatrician who said to let the baby cry because there was nothing wrong. She just wanted to be picked up and that shouldn't be done. For the next generation of babies the doctors changed their opinion to the opposite and both babies and mothers were better off, more relaxed. I think the only time in that three month period that Rita and I were relaxed and happy was when I was walking her in her carriage outdoors. So this mother was out with her baby in all kinds of weather.

When Rita was 2½ years old we bought our present home in Williston Park, Long Island. Sam always wanted to be in the country. At one time he even talked about buying a farm. Maybe it was because he loved animals, all kinds. At that time, Williston Park, Long Island was the closest thing to the country side. Sam saw an ad for new houses there and we investigated. We like the house, the neighborhood seemed nice, and it was close to the railroad station if he should want to commute to the City.

I almost forgot to mention that we lived in the Boro Park apartment only about a year and then, following Gertie and Abe, we moved to a larger two bedroom apartment in Bronx Park East, opposite the Bronx Zoo. We actually didn't see the zoo, but it was there, not too far away.

It was a new apartment building and every now and then something went wrong. Most of the time the elevator wasn't working. We lived on the fifth floor and stupid me *shlept* Rita and the carriage down five flights of stairs. I think God takes care of foolish mother like me. Anything could have happened to both of us going down those stairs.

We were in that apartment a year when Gertie decided that she didn't like it and moved, again leaving me without a single friend in the building or the neighborhood. We were not about to follow her this time, so we stayed on for another year.

At that time Sam saw an ad in the *Times* about a newly built house in East Williston, Long Island. It sounded good, and we decided to investigate. We liked the house, the price was right (even for those years), and we became owners of 445 Pennsylvania Avenue.

We put a lot of work and more money into it—landscaping, putting a back porch in, adding storm windows, converting from coal to oil, etc. We took a lot of pride in keeping the house and grounds looking good. Sam worked a lot outside and I kept it in pretty good shape inside. Sam made the basement into a playroom. There was a pool table, a Ping-Pong table, and a punching bag. There was also a machine like what was in the old arcades where you put in a coin and a marble would zigzag around in different spots; in our machine you didn't have to put in a coin because it was free to play for as long as you liked. The kids had a ball with it.

Relatives from Brooklyn would come almost every Sunday. My family also would come when they could. Sometimes I'd have twenty people in and out of the house. Food was always available and Sam and I were good hosts. We were always entertaining somebody.

Everett was born December 15, 1932 in Nassau Hospital in Mineola. At that time there were few Jews in Mineola and Ev's *bris* (circumcision) with the *moyel* officiating at the ceremony was a novelty.

He was a chubby 8 lb., 2 oz. baby with a sunny disposition. The fact that I was more experienced in baby raising and more relaxed than with Rita, as well as in a different environment, helped us all to enjoy him.

Unfortunately, at that time Rita had contracted whooping cough and, when I returned from the hospital, we wouldn't let her go near the baby for fear of infecting him. Although she knew the reason for that she was very unhappy and thought we didn't love her or that we loved the baby more. I didn't suspect that until she was a grown woman and it all came out in the talks we had.

In the 1930s domestic help was cheap and readily available. I had a series of maids that helped with the baby and did chores in the house. As is usual, some were pretty good and stayed on; others, I had to discharge. One of them ran up an enormous telephone bill and when she left, I

found a lot of things missing.

In 1929 came the Wall St. crash. We lost some money in some stocks we'd bought, but not too much. It was the terrible 30s and the depression that got us down, together with the rest of the country. There was no work and we had to lay off our girls. Sam tried hard to get at least one or two days a week of work for them, but didn't always succeed.

We cut expenses to the home, but with no money coming in, Sam canceled \$40,000 of the \$60,000 personal insurance that he carried and barely managed to pay the premiums on the \$20,000 that was left to me and the children.

Little by little, things improved and we were able to get more work in the factory. In the late 1930s I went back to the office, taking up my old job as bookkeeper. Both the children were in school and I had a maid who did the household chores and took care of the kids until I came home.

Rita graduated from Cross St. School in January of 1942 at the top of her class and got most of the medals and awards offered. I think there were four of them. She entered Mineola High School and here, also, she got the highest grades with medals and awards and was valedictorian of the graduating class of January, 1946. She selected Syracuse University as her college, but because she graduated from high school in January, she didn't start college until September of that year. During that summer she took a course in stenography and typing at the Skinner Business school in Mineola.

In college, Rita did as well as she had in grade school and high school. Her major was early childhood education, and in 1950, she graduated at the top of her class. She was also very active in social and cultural activities. She got her Master's degree in Syracuse, graduating in 1951. Returning home, Rita started teaching first grade in the Half Hollow Hills elementary school in Dix Hills, Long Island.

Everett was a sweet, quiet kid. (He still is sweet, quiet and lovable.) He wasn't an outstanding student, not because he didn't have the capability, but because he didn't try very hard. He graduated Cross St. Elementary with fairly good grades and entered Mineola High in 1946.