

Bolotins. I thanked them for all their kindnesses to me and left. But before I sailed, I wrote to Ma telling her that up to this time I had had some difficulties but was now on my way to America and that she would hear from me as soon as I got there and had an address.

So goodbye, England. And since England is what she is now, I am mighty glad that I am not one of her adopted sons!

## CHAPTER VIII

So about forty-four years ago, as this is being written on December 31, 1948, I was actually crossing the big ocean on a large ship, not as large as the Baltic but spacious enough so that one felt awfully small. Third class, while far from luxurious, provided decent accommodations. We had our own bunks and ate at tables, covered with a cloth. The food was served neatly and was plentiful, although not fancy. We did not get celery, tomatoes, or finger-bowls, but there was tasty vegetable soup and enough herring and potatoes. The men sat on one side and the women on the other. Sleeping quarters were arranged in the same way. On the next morning, we discovered how many among us were good sailors. I don't know how many were seasick, but I was up and about, feeding lemons to some and helping others get from their bunks up to the deck. And so I became the favorite young co-sailor, bringing one person a glass of water, fetching smelling-salts for another. Some of my companions soon found their sea-legs; other poor creatures suffered all the way.

Among those whom I helped was a young girl named Sonya, an orphan from Russia, who was on her way to live with a married sister in Brooklyn. She was later to cause some uneasiness between Ma and me when Ma came to this country. But that is getting ahead of my story. Before long, we found ourselves in groups based on our country of origin, Austria, Poland, Gallicia, Russia. In the latter group, there were some Russian

Goyim. Of course, an accordian and balalaika appeared from somewhere, and we were soon singing old favorites, folk tunes, and revolutionary songs. Here, we had nothing to fear from police and sang as loudly as we wished. Music and girls added up, naturally, to dancing. And we danced. From right after breakfast on. There was nothing much else to do. But we found this entertaining enough and so, evidently, did many of the first- and second-class passengers, who came down to join us. Now we had oranges and candy galore. They were probably bored by their more reserved co-travelers.

Occasionally we received scanty news bulletins on such matters as the progress of the Japanese War, a peace conference at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, our position and direction on the ocean. It seems that a heavy wind had driven our ship off-course so that we would not arrive on schedule. But who cared? We were enjoying a leisurely life with good food, plenty of rest, and lots of singing and dancing. Let it last a little longer. Certainly there was no one waiting to welcome me to the shores of America. If anything, I knew that as soon as I landed, the carefree life would be over; I had nothing with which to start but an awful lot to do. So I didn't object to the delay, which made us three days late in reaching Boston.

At last, the great moment arrived and we marched down the gangplank onto the shores of the United States. My heart was elated again. I was actually here, free from the Gardavoys, border inspectors, and endless restrictions. I don't know why, but I, along with some of the others, was herded into a separate, railed enclosure and kept there until almost dark. Then, we

were taken outside. This was Commonwealth Pier, Boston. At this point, we were jammed into a horse-drawn cab and taken to South Station. The driver took whatever money we had, since not one of us had the faintest notion of the exchange and few of us had any money anyway. We stood at the train gate and, when it opened, were to get on the train with the tickets that had been given us. With the advantage of years of experience I now know what this was all about. The train would take us to Fall River, there to connect with the boat for New York. But at that time I was completely bewildered. Where were we going? Were we still being pushed around by authorities? Catching sight of a group of Jewish people, I asked them what this was about and learned that I was free to go wherever I pleased and needed no special permit or passport. This was, indeed, America.

At Fall River, we walked from the railroad station through side streets to the wharf. There were only a few of us now. My ticket, I assume, must have indicated third-class, for I was directed to a hole that was the dirtiest and nastiest I had ever been in. Even the piggery was better. This short, over-night trip was by far the worst of my experience. If this is typical of the boats America operates, I decided, I would never again travel on them. Even the small boats on the Dnieper were palatial by comparison. It was not until two years later that I discovered that these vessels had other accommodations that were quite luxurious. Anyway, that night seemed longer to me than the one I had spent on the Austrian border! Finally we arrived; it was a good thing that I couldn't see myself in a mirror. Actually, I didn't care how I looked, so glad

was I to get out of that black hole. On shore, I started walking. Where? I knew--to Watkins Street, Brooklyn. I kept on walking. It was early in the morning, and there were not many people around, especially here on the waterfront. Now I realize that I must have been near the Battery. I kept walking, toward the Bowery and Delancey Street. There seemed to be many Jewish folks in this neighborhood; in fact, almost everyone I saw was Jewish. One kindly gentleman informed me that I was a long way from my destination and had better take a street car. He asked if I had a five-cent piece. When I said no, he gave me the fare. How I have wished that I knew who that man was! But I have in my lifetime repaid in charity thousands of dollars that loan of a nickel.

That five cents did wonders. The ride, lasting almost an hour, brought me to Watkins Street, Brooklyn, where I found my uncle's butcher shop, three or four short blocks from the car-line. Here, finally, I was among family again. Cousins Beck and Ida were working girls and, therefore, not at home. Uncle was busy in his market, and the aunt was none too hospitable. Neither of them displayed much interest in me or my family. Toward evening, the girls came in, as did Cousin Israel, whom I had seen in Ekaterinaslav and who had arrived recently. Cousin Max Belson, Aunt Ida's brother, walked in, too. (To clarify the relationships, I might mention that Aunt Ida, who married my brother Max, was a first cousin of ours.) Perhaps the reason for the cool reception was that at the time of my arrival there were these two cousins on the scene and also Cousin Maishe, who later settled in Bridgeport,

Connecticut. He had just arrived with his family, and they were all terribly concerned because their infant was being kept at Ellis Island because of some illness. So you can see that the Brooklyn relatives had more than a full house. I felt this the moment I entered and knew that I was not one bit welcome. No wonder I had enjoyed the prolonged ocean trip; I knew that just as soon as I landed, I would have to get busy. And I did.

My cousins Ida and Rebecca at once had plans for me. They knew someone who worked at the Ansonia Clock Factory in Brooklyn and who could get me a job. But that wasn't what I wanted. I made up my mind once and for all that I was not a factory man, not a clock assembler. I was a watchmaker. Although I had no definite plan, I decided to find some jeweler who could give me the address of the firms that provided materials to the watchmaking trade. They usually maintained a kind of exchange of men who wanted jobs and jewelers who needed help. But hold on! I hadn't a cent with which to operate, and somewhere on Madison Street I was to collect my sixteen dollars in American money. What to do? I finally asked my uncle to lend me five cents; when he generously handed me a quarter, I felt quite rich. Cousin Zelik and his wife Stishe lived in Brooklyn and not far away. I visited them. Cousin Abe lived in the Bronx. Cousin Israel was here alone, as was Max Belson. I don't remember if the latter two were employed, nor do I recall how long they had been "guests" in my uncle's home. But I do know that I wanted to get work and be on my own as soon as possible. At this point, something happened that, but for the

infant who had been released from Ellis Island several days before, would have ended this story. Ma would never have heard from me. There would never have been any of you. Nor me.

One night, shortly after my arrival, there was a heavy snowstorm. My uncle fixed the coal-burning stove as he always did, and we all retired to our respective sleeping places. During the night, a strong wind blew the coal-gas fumes into the house, and we would all have been kaput had that infant succumbed quietly. Instead, she cried. That finally roused my uncle, who by that time was so weak that he had to crawl on all fours. Despite his condition, he had the presence of mind to break a window and yell for help. The first thing I knew, I was being marched back and forth out-doors by strangers who were helping revive us. I will never forget the fact that I lost one of my Russian galoshes in the deep snow. It took us all a few days to recover from the shock of this experience. Cousin Israel kept crying over what might have happened to his wife and children if he had died; I think he had left three of them in Russia.

The clock job turned out to be only talk. No one even tried to see the foreman. But that mattered little to me. I had collected the sixteen dollars and was ready to strike out on my own. I certainly had no desire to stay at Watkins Street any longer. My visit to the material houses had brought forth the offer of a job paying two dollars a week as a start and, after four weeks, three dollars plus room and board. This was fine except that I was to provide my own tools. By this time, I must have had thirteen or fourteen of

the sixteen dollars I had collected. The tools which I selected as essential came to over a hundred, and so I offered to pay ten dollars down, one dollar a week until my wages were increased, and more later. That did not satisfy the material-man. He wanted my uncle to sign for it. What a calamity! They all shivered as though they were signing away their lives. There wasn't any risk, for I fully intended to pay that dollar every week. Finally, however, he signed, and I went off to my first job in America--in Astoria, Long Island.

You have probably heard that new immigrants were generally called greenhorns. The folks who preceded us were known as geller, or yellow ones, because they were somewhat ripened. My relatives fitted into this category, but they actually knew much less about their environs than they were willing to admit, especially to us later arrivals. On my first visit to them on a Sunday, I reported that I had a job in Astoria, Long Island. This caused much laughter; they were convinced that I meant that I was working in "a-store-in-Long-Island." But Astoria it was, and my employer's name was Mr. Schapiro. His wife dressed elaborately in fine clothes and displayed many diamonds; she had a mouth full of gold teeth. Neither of them could read or write. I will say that I had a nice room, and the food they provided was good. But I was far from happy. I realized how much of a stranger I was. I could not understand a word of the English I heard around me. Mr. Schapiro, in his conversations with customers, had the habit of using what-do-you-mean, what-do-you-mean constantly. What was this what-do-you-mean I just did

not know, nor could I figure out why it had to occur so frequently in his business talk. If one were dealing with milk, then the repetition of milk hundreds of times would be natural, or bread, or oranges, if one dealt with those things. But this what-do-you-mean really had me puzzled. I promptly decided that if I was going to stay in America, I simply had to learn English. That Sunday I went to an East Side bookstore, bought a Russian-English self-education book, and set to work.

Do not think that during this time I had neglected my letters home. As a matter of fact, they were a major expenditure, for every stamp to Russia represented a five-cent piece. The trip to and from Brooklyn cost sixteen cents; Sweet Caporals sold for twenty for a nickel; and every week one dollar went toward the tools. How much could that leave of the two dollars I received on Sunday morning? You can imagine my surprise when, on the fifth Sunday, Mr. Schapiro handed me the usual two dollars with the prelude that I was not worth more because he didn't think I was familiar yet with American watches. To this, I replied that I was getting along fine and that I had been working on them successfully and without benefit of help from him, since his bench was on the other side of the store. In any case, he cheated me out of the dollar that time, but from then on he paid me my three dollars. All the while, the Schapiros kept harping on how much people liked to work for them, how a man could stay on indefinitely (provided that he didn't demand a raise!), and so on. It soon developed that her brother, a jeweler and not a watch-maker by trade, was due to arrive before long. Since a job had to be made for him in the store, Mr. Schapiro

informed me that he could not continue the weekly salary increases that had been agreed on. In view of such circumstances, I had no choice but to quit, which I did on the spot.

The following Sunday evening, I stayed over at my uncle's, and on the next day went back to the place where I had bought my tools and told them what had happened with regard to the wages. They sent me to an address in Long Island City, where I accepted a job paying fifteen dollars a week without room and board. When I returned to the Schapiros to get my tools, they tried to persuade me to stay; they insisted that they had changed their minds and wanted me. But I hadn't changed my mind and left. But, before I leave Astoria, I must tell you that it was here that I met Isadore Targovnik (later Tarr) and that group of life-long friends and also Harry and Sarah (Herrisheh and Serrisheh) Edelman, who were instrumental in our getting to Skowhegan eventually.

In Russia, meanwhile, a feud had developed between Ma and her sister-in-law, Maria. None of my letters had arrived, and she kept asking why I didn't write. Was it true that I had married someone else? Maria said so, Roskin said so; everyone said so. I kept denying this and insisting that I had plans for her to come here. There were pogroms in Russia, and my family kept asking for help. I sent them the twenty-five dollars I had managed to save. There came a period when I did not hear from Ma for quite a while, but I always kept a picture of her in my pocket. The talk at that time was that any girl could sue anyone quite easily for breach of promise, so whenever I got in with a new crowd, I

produced this picture and announced that this was my girl, coming to join me just as soon as possible. Meanwhile, I used to spend Sundays with Sonya, the girl whom I had met on the ship. I introduced this Sonya as my ship-sister. In Yiddish this is Schiff-Schwester; but it was misinterpreted to be Stief-Schwester, or step-sister. The consequences of this I will report later.

Meanwhile I kept on working, saving, and hoping that I would soon hear from Ma. Little did I know what was going on in her life. Uncle Avrom had been sent to Paris, for otherwise he had threatened to leave Tante Dvoseh. How the family ever raised the money I do not to this day know, but I am sure that Ma contributed a substantial share of it. Then, Tante Pashe and Uncle Lazar went to Paris. Tante Dvoseh and her children soon followed. Then, Ma went to Paris, and then her parents. Uncle Moteh and Aunt Maria were the only members of the Simkin family to remain in Ekaterinaslav.

It was just before Yom Kippur. On Saturday night, when I told my employer, Mr. Eypel, that I wouldn't be at work on Monday because of the Holy Day, he snapped that if I didn't come on Monday, I need not report on Tuesday. This upset me, and I argued that I did not expect him to pay me for the day. But, he informed me, a business cannot survive by observing religious holidays. I very firmly told him that his store was not worth enough for me to give up my Day of Atonement and left.

My lodgings were on Forsyth Street, on the lower East Side of New York. Most of my acquaintances lived around there. One of our favorite forms of recreation

was to attend the Jewish plays in a group and then spend long hours discussing them heatedly. The Targovniks were the pivot for these get-togethers, and it was at their house that I first met Harry Edelman.

On Tuesday, the day after Yom Kippur, I went to see about getting another job. The materials house had no openings listed. So I went to a wholesale jeweler, where I had often done errands for Mr. Schapiro. He had a German name which escapes me. The man was surprised to hear that I was hunting for work, for he assumed that I was still with the Schapiros. When he telephoned them to check on my reference, they urged him to tell me to look no farther, but to return to them for Mrs. S. was almost sick over my having left. When I explained the reason for my decision to leave and how I had been cheated out of a dollar, he asked about the Eypel job. I told him that everything had been fine until the Yom Kippur episode. Thereupon he telephoned Eypel and asked, Did Sam shtole anything from you? The answer was evidently satisfactory, for he sent me to Yonkers, to a jeweler by the name of Gordon.

The trip out there took at least two hours. Mr. Gordon was a quiet, middle-aged man, not much of a mechanic. The store was nice. The salary was better than what I had received in Long Island City. Late that same night, I packed my tools and asked Mr. Eypel to forward my mail to me or to leave it at J. Cohen's. This J. Cohen had done the jewelry repair work for the Schapiros and I had got Mr. Eypel to send his work there, too. In that way, I used 17 Eldridge Street, New York City, Cohen's place, as my mailing address. I liked the job in Yonkers, but as I knew few people there,

I kept my lodgings on the East Side, where all my friends lived. This involved a lot of travel. As soon as I left work, I ran to catch the trolley that would take me to another and to Fordham. Then, on the Bronx Elevated to Eldridge Street to see if I had received any mail. No mail. Not a word from Ma. Nor from Moteh and Maria. I was really surprised not to have heard from them. Their laxity in writing served them no good purpose; in later years, after World War I, we had great difficulty in tracing them. In the ten or eleven years we had been in Skowhegan up to this time, we had not had more than one or two letters from them. It was small wonder, then, that I found nothing during this relatively short period.

Perhaps if I had become better acquainted with Yonkers, I might have settled there. But all it represented to me was a place to work. My landlady came from Ekaterinaslav, although I had not known her there. She used to bring in work for me to do, watches and clocks to fix, jewelry to repair, and I liked the idea of earning a bit extra on the side. But, although I made the East Side my headquarters, I hated the place like poison--the filth, the crowded tenements, the inescapable smell, the climbing of endless flights of stairs to reach my own uninviting quarters. All these things oppressed me. I stayed on only because all my friends were there. The job in Yonkers was satisfactory. I did, however, object (silently) to the fact that Mr. Gordon's son and daughter were constantly dipping into the cash register for whatever amounts they wanted, while their father complained about his unpaid bills and lack of funds. Very frequently, he scurried around getting Guilas Chesodim (good deed, or kindness,

loans), borrowing from one to pay to another, with no end to the chain. One day, I offered him a loan of the few hundred dollars that I had saved. He accepted gratefully. On Christmas eve, just as I was about to leave, he called me into the back room and paid back the loan, four weeks in wages due, and gave me a ten-dollar gold piece and a watch as a gift. He then told me that tonight he was H. Gordon but that after Christmas he would be nothing. His children had ruined him. He warned me never to be so free and easy with my money again, for not many persons would regard such a debt as the one he owed me any different than the others involved in a situation of bankruptcy.

That night, I was a rich boy. I was almost afraid to ride back to the East Side. But I kept my eyes open and reached my room safely.

Again, I must mention that if Ma and I had been united at that time, I would probably have remained in Yonkers. My thinking might have been different, and I might easily have considered taking over the Gordon store. As it was, however, I felt impelled to be near my mailing address. I spent that Christmas day making plans. I had no job to which to return the next day, and I decided not to look for another just yet. For almost a year, I had been in the United States and hadn't been able to visit any of the places of interest. I would do that. But first I must see Mr. Eypel. There might be mail waiting.

And there was. I found several letters. But Mr. Eypel was interested in knowing why I wasn't at work. I kept him in suspense while I caught up with the events that had taken place in Russia and Europe

with my sweetheart. She was in Paris. After the pogroms of 1905, she had decided to leave Russia. There had been no letters from me. She had been told that someone had written that I was married. She wished me luck and happiness. She had been in Paris for a short time, working at her trade, which was dressmaking. Now I had a lot of writing and explaining to do to shake off the burden of an imaginary wife from my shoulders. Mr. Eypel's curiosity was not to be put off. Ignoring my anger over his having kept my mail so long, he wanted to know how long a vacation I planned to take now that I had told him that Mr. Gordon was bankrupt and that I was considering taking a trip. Deep down in my heart, I didn't feel like losing a precious week's pay now that I knew where Ma was. I was sure that I could convince her of my innocence and that if I sent her money and a ticket, she would come to America.

Mr. Eypel suggested that since I would be in the market for a new job, he knew of an excellent opening. But, I protested, there will be another Yom Kippur. Just go get your tools, he advised; there will be no problems as far as Yom Kippur is concerned. You are the man I want, and your job is here. So on that Thursday, by the time I had come, gone, set up the bench, and so on, it was time to quit. I worked Friday and Saturday, and he paid me a full week's wages, more than he had paid before and more than Mr. Gordon had paid me.

Of course, I sent letters to Ma and to my folks. There, too, an exodus had taken place. My family had left Starodub and were in Wilno. Starodub had become too small for my brother Samuel, who had been active in

the revolutionary movement. It was safer for him to be in a strange city. Things were tough for him because to him, every policeman represented the Czar. And, since he couldn't reach that exalted one, he made a practice of bedeviling the police. The difficulty that he constantly got into always landed most heavily on my mother. It was she who later got him out of jail, married off, and shipped with his bride to America. But that is another story.

At Eypel's I felt at home. I worked hard there and at the jobs I had at the rooming house. I had gained prestige and was glad to see a few dollars piling up, for now I knew that I would have an important place for them in the near future. All this helped the two weeks pass until my answer would come from Paris. While the waiting seemed long, I tried to make the best of it. Then, I got not one but two letters. The first, from Ma, told me how happy she was that I was the same Zusheh and how tortured she had been by the rumors she had heard. She said that my letters had been kept from her. She assured me that she would come to America as soon as I wanted her to, and that if only she had money of her own, she and not this letter would have been here. Not bad. She didn't ask me how much money I had nor what my prospects were. She simply wanted to join me.

The other letter was from Uncle Alfred, her older brother, who had been in Paris for some time. He set forth that before the Simkin family would let their beloved little sister break away from the fold, they wanted to know what my outlook on life was and what future I had planned. So here I had two letters;

one was positive, the other asked for security. It didn't take long to formulate replies to each. To Ma, I sent some money and a prepaid ticket, leaving to her the details as to date and ship. To Alfred, I wrote that I had high hopes, but that in so short a time, I could hardly lay out a prospectus for the future. Things would eventually develop, and with my Manyetchka here, I would work even harder. I had loved her all these years, and I knew that she loved me, too. Nothing would be too difficult for me to do for so wonderful a person as his sister, and he had no cause for worry. In closing, I did rub in that even if my prospects were not as rosy as I had described, Manya would come to me if she wished, and no outside interference could now keep us apart. Like it or not!

My happy day came soon, when Ma arranged her passage on La France, to arrive about the twenty-fifth of March. Then came disappointment. There was some delay and she would not arrive until April first, on La Touraine. At that time, and through Ma's recommendation, I took lodgings with a friend of hers on Madison Street, somewhere near Rutger Place, and it was here that Ma first came upon her arrival in the United States.

No. I cannot describe the thrills, fears, excitement, before I went to Ellis Island to take her off, nor the joy when I beheld her through the gates. I must have matured some. She, certainly was a little girl no longer. We both had undergone plenty of harsh experience during the one and one-half years since I had left Russia. Now only a wire fence separated us, and soon we would be in each other's arms from that day

on forever. At least, these were my thoughts.

It was the most beautiful April first we have ever had. A warm, summery sun was shining as though to give her a heartier welcome with a few higher points of greatness. At her friend's place, she was made comfortable, and I know that she was happy to see a familiar face and also me in this land peopled by strangers. All my friends gathered to welcome her that evening, and we talked, laughed, and sang. By now, I had acquired a guitar, and the Russian songs we had known in the old country flowed from us all. Ma became a favorite with everyone. She was very pretty, with smooth, petal-soft skin, blue eyes, dimples, trim little figure. Her simplicity and kindness charmed everyone, and she never put on airs. She was the heart and soul of sincerity.

For a while, she decided to stay on with her friend, and I arranged to pay for her board and room. After my work, I was with her every evening; we often visited friends. But luxury or idleness were not to her liking; she wanted to work. And there were jobs to be had in the various shops manufacturing clothing. It was to one of these that a fellow-roomer took her. There were several reasons why she went to work: In the first place, it relieved the monotony of the day; second, it made her feel that she was earning and paying her own way, for she was always proud and independent. I didn't object, for I could understand her wanting to keep herself busy.

Meantime, our circle of friends was growing. Each gathering brought new faces. Sonya was there, too. Since she was an orphan and we had come over on the same

ship, I was her father-confessor and had to hear all about her adventures, whether she was working, whether she was being treated kindly, and how she was progressing with her studies in English. We all danced. Sometimes I danced with Sonya, sometimes with Ma, who was not too good a dancer. But then, neither was I. Little did I understand the ways of a girl's mind. Ma became jealous of Sonya, particularly since I did display concern when she didn't show up for a while. Unbeknownst to me, Ma's fears developed to such an extent that she had begun to ask who this Sonya was, anyway. The information she received was upsetting: Didn't you know about Sam and his family background? Why, she is his step-sister! (Remember the mix-up about Schiff-Schwester and Stieff-Schwester?)

But the damage was done. When I discovered that Ma was uneasy and that my friends had misunderstood the difference between a step-sister and ship-sister, I tried to reason with her. I told her that even though I felt sorry for Sonya, it certainly was not Sonya who was on my mind. If that had been so, I would never have sent for you. But, for the sake of peace, let us just disregard Sonya. She means nothing to me. Sonya must have sensed, or someone may have told her, that she was an unwelcome third between us, for she disappeared and, to this day, I do not know her whereabouts.

Ma did not get along well in the shops. She could not turn out work at the pace demanded in such places, and the forelady put no value on the fine work Ma was capable of doing. Quantity and not quality was what was demanded. Ma had a hard time of it. The

solution I offered was marriage. What she earned didn't amount to much, and I was paying for room and board for us both. The theme of my argument was that two can really live as cheaply as one.

We went to City Hall in New York and were married. The reason that we did not stage a big wedding was that we had no really close relatives near us, and there was no point in spending the three hundred dollars I had saved just to wine and dine strangers. We planned to rent a room with a gas-stove or plate, so small that we probably wouldn't have had space even to hold or keep presents if we should receive any. So we had a fine gathering at her friend's house, to which we invited all our friends with orders not to bring presents. And they obeyed.

So we were married. Others in our group believed in free love. There were also anarchists among us, the kind who chose to burn candles rather than gas so as not to increase the riches of the capitalists! So short-sighted were they that they didn't realize that the money spent on candles found its way to John D. Rockefeller, the biggest capitalist of them all. The most heated of these burning individualists, the one who advocated free love, the destruction of capitalism, and so on, when he became a contractor with the shop where he worked, always turned out to be the worst slave-driver and exploiter of labor! But we minded our business and let others live the way they wanted to; we pursued the best course we could.

Here is how Edelman came into the picture and how Skowhegan first came into our lives. This Edelman was a selfish kind of fellow, much older than we were.

He was a cousin of the Tarrs, and it was through them that I met him. Although he never participated in the singing nor went to the Jewish shows, he always seemed to be around. I do not recall if he was married yet to Serrisheh at the time we first became acquainted. All I knew about Harry Edelman was that he had a job in a shoe factory and was related in some way to the Barg family, who were among our early friends. One evening, as we were leaving the Tarrs, he was unusually gloomy. What's the matter, Harry? -- Well, it seemed that the doctor had advised him to get away from New York, as the climate was bad for his asthma. He had asked his relatives for help but with no success. So, in a friendly lecture, I told him that he was wrong to judge his folks this way. We all knew each other's circumstances, and everyone had responsibilities to families back home and folks who had just arrived in this country. Suppose I should ask you for a loan right now, I said. If you were to tell me that you couldn't help me out wouldn't mean that I should get mad at you. And you shouldn't adopt this attitude toward others. How much do you need? -- He said that twenty-five dollars would be enough to start him on his way. If he did happen to mention Maine, I do not recall. It would have meant little to me. I do recall that Serrisheh was in Maine and married and that there was some difficulty with her first husband. She finally divorced him and married Harry. And so he left.

Later, I received small money-orders in payment of the loan and cashed them without knowing or caring whether they came from Skowhegan, Maine or anywhere else. At about this time, Ma whispered that we were

on the way to becoming parents. I had not expected or thought much about this possibility, but now something inside me clicked. This was no place for a child; we needed better living quarters. This child would be well received, but not in this sort of place.

One day, Harry Edelman sent me an old key-winder Swiss pocket watch to repair. I fixed it, and, as it was such a simple job, wrote that I was surprised that he had sent it here. The postage alone amounted to more than the repair if he would have taken it to a local jeweler. In replying, he thanked me and said that he had been told that it would have cost several dollars because, being a Swiss movement, it would have had to be sent away to be fixed. That gave me food for thought. Here I was about to become a father. I must do something for my wife and child but have only three hundred and fifty dollars. What can I do with so little? How can I set up a business with so small a sum? I want to establish my family in a decent home. Do I have to remain a worker at the bench, depending on my week's pay? I had lots of questions but no answers.

So I wrote to Edelman, asking what kind of place he was in and whether there were any jewelers. What I had in mind was that I would be better off working for myself. His reply was that if I was interested, he would advise my coming to investigate. This thought wedged itself into my mind: If I don't venture now when I am young and have a little money put by, when will I be able to take such a step? I determined that after Christmas (1906), I would tell Mr. Eypel that I wanted a week's vacation to go to Maine to see about getting started on my own. If I didn't like the place, I could

keep my present job. If I did, I would come back and stay until he found someone to take my place. He tried in every way to make me change my mind about Maine. It was a backward state, not progressive, had few Jews, and so on. But I paid no attention.

Ma was agreeable to my ideas, as she always was. To her, Maine or Colorado were the same thing. So I was on my way. I took the boat to Fall River, went to Boston by train, transferred to North Station, took the train for Waterville, and changed for Skowhegan.

When I arrived, the air was beautifully clear and frosty. The snow was as white as snow could ever be, and as one walked on it, it responded with a crispy, clear singing. Its song was one of welcome to me. Edelman was at the station, not because he expected me but because meeting trains was his hobby. As though many people came to see him! He took me to his apartment on Mechanic Street, an attic lighted by kerosene lamps. Believe it or not, one still used those smelly matches that take a minute or so to ignite. But the meager meal that Serrisheh served tasted good. I was sick of the East Side, tired of running for the El, the ferry, and crosstown cars, weary of the pushing and jumping and of the music of the alley cats. Here, there was a serenity and peace.

Next morning, the sun shone. It was clear and frosty, but I hardly felt the cold as I walked down-street. There were two nice, large jewelry stores and a third, smaller place on Madison Avenue. I figured that there must be people around who could support such fine places. Possibly, the owners didn't care to take in work unless they got a good price for it; maybe

there would be enough surplus for me. I was willing to do all kinds of work just so as to get away from New York and have my wife and baby in a good, small place, with plenty of fresh air. So long as I was here already, I decided to look around for a flat to rent in case we did settle here. I kept walking, and the only place available was down on Water Street, close to the bridge to the Island. (This is now part of Sterns Department store.) At that time, it was a wooden building that had formerly housed a blacksmith shop. Mr. Fisher, who had shoed many horses there, had retired to Athens. Mr. Richard Brown, the present owner, had put in a partition and two doors, thus making two stores, neither of which was occupied. As I poked around, Mr. Brown appeared. What are you looking for, my son? We started to talk. Yes, there was an upstairs that could be used as living quarters. Yes, he had some furniture, also a stove for the store and a cook-stove for upstairs. It would cost twenty-five dollars a month for all of it. Situated almost on the main street, with this rental, where else could I pitch camp with so little? Can I get a safe? It seemed that Everett Goodrich had one for sale for twenty dollars. A showcase and a counter Mr. Brown could provide. Then, why delay? I made my decision then and there, put down a deposit, engaged an old gentleman to build a bench and a few shelves. Now I could return to my wife and expected child and tell them that we were in business.

I find it hard to understand some people's meanness. When I returned, my little Manya was surprised to see me, and looked so worried and upset that I couldn't imagine what had happened. I was afraid that

she was not feeling well. But that was not it at all. I had not written while I was in Maine, to be sure, but I had been away for so short a time and had been so busy that it hadn't seemed necessary. But some so-called friend had filled her mind with doubts: How did she know where I might have gone? Some fellows invent a trip and then just disappear. I regretted that she would even think of me in this way, but I suppose that there were such crazy things happening that anything could be true. But not so with us. Besides, I had really changed since I had learned about our baby. I had become more serious.

Anyway, I was back. The next day, I went to Long Island City to give Mr. Eypel the news and my notice. How surprised he was! While I packed my tools and the various other things I needed, Ma bought whatever articles were necessary for setting up housekeeping. And, of course, our baby's needs figured prominently. The layette was not something that one could get ready-made. Ma bought cloth and made the diapers, nighties, and everything else. Not having been in a household where there was an infant since my early childhood, I was somewhat mystified by all the preparations. Babies are babies the world over, I thought, and I imagined that everyone did as in Russia. There, you simply rolled them up tight like little mummies and that was that. Was our baby to receive a special wardrobe? Compared to the equipment with which a baby starts life today, it was very meager. I really knew little of such matters. That was Ma's province, and she attended to the linens, towels, and dishes, while I accumulated a few alarm clocks, leather chains, dollar watches,

rings, and lockets. Businessmen very kindly extended me credit, which may have amounted to two hundred dollars. To me at that time it was a great deal to owe, and I felt that I had assumed a great responsibility. In fact, even as I received the merchandise, I was thinking about payment.

Next morning, as I entered Mr. Eypel's place to pack my tools in the satchel I kept there, I was closely scrutinized by several strangers in the place. The store itself was thick with white dust, as though someone had been tearing down plaster. In great surprise, I asked what had happened. This is what had taken place: Late on Saturday night, burglars had broken into the empty apartment which was in the rear of the store. Through an opening, which was neatly cut out as though they were going to frame in a door, they had made their entry into the store. Once inside, they chiseled the back right out of the safe, picked up my satchel, and packed it full of whatever valuables they could find. They had had all Saturday night and Sunday in which to work.

Naturally, police and detectives were there. They had picked up my satchel somewhere--empty. There had been no doubt that the intruders had known their way around. But how was it possible, asked the police, that Mr. Eypel didn't know where I lived? He certainly had known that I was getting ready to open a place in Maine; I had been there to tell him about it just a few days ago. So I was planning to go away, hmmm, well, of course....To them it was a clear case. This fellow must be the one, a Russian desperado who had at least furnished information as to layout. He would probably

get a share of the loot, too. So he was going to set up a jewelry store in Maine, was he? It was as simple as two times two. Mr. Eypel kept insisting that they were wrong. Sam was a clean, decent boy who would call for his tools soon. Even though his address on the East Side was not known, that didn't matter; he had been trusted even to the extent of having a set of keys to the store.

It was a good thing that I had gone there early. Otherwise, their suspense would have been all the greater. As it was, I was taken for questioning, but after a few minutes, they gave up. They sent one of these dime-novel detectives with me to the police station to retrieve my satchel. I didn't for a moment minimize the seriousness of the predicament I had been in. My heart became heavy when I pondered over what might have happened, had they detained me longer, what with no wages coming in, merchandise already bought and owed for, rent piling up, the baby maturing in its development. I simply had to get going. But, thank God, there had been no real delays. The thought that at no time had Mr. Eypel been the least suspicious of me was comforting. I told him that I would be staying at a Christie Street address for the next two or three days and would leave for Maine after that. I packed my tools and left a printed business card with him. Oh yes! I had started my business right and had had some made up.

The move was exciting. We packed all the things we had in our room, tied and labeled the boxes to be shipped, and set aside whatever we planned to take with us. Now we made the rounds of our old friends to say

our good-byes. It was not a heart-breaking departure from the city or from our friends, for we felt that we were going to a better place to live. All of them, we knew, were working people. During the season, they made a fair living; in slack times, they used up their savings and ran short of funds for groceries and rent. Between us, I might tell you that some of them made a practice of moving quietly from a section where the bills had piled up, and in that way wiping off the debts and back rent behind them. I know it was done by some folks. But not by us.

We had adventure ahead, a baby and a jewelry store of our own in the making for the future of us all. Ma always felt safe with me around. Our trip went well. We didn't go first class; but this was the way I had traveled before and was familiar with. At the stations between trains, Ma guarded the bundles while I lugged them by making several trips back and forth. In that way, we saved a lot of shipping expense. When we finally arrived in Skowhegan, not one of the dishes was broken.

This was the beginning of our pioneering, of our great adventure!