

Immigrant Boy 1

My mother and I arrived in New York Harbor when I was fifteen months old. Those in steerage heard the announcement, quickly translated, that they could come to the upper deck with their baggage. Some two weeks earlier we had left Aran, the town in Czarist Lithuania where I was born, an hour by horse-drawn wagon from Vilna, its capital. Aran had a population of about two thousand, three-quarters of whom were Jewish. There had been tearful farewells; some of our friends and relatives acted as though disaster faced us; others rejoiced that we would soon be in the *Goldene Medina* (the "Golden Country"). I have no personal memories of events before my fourth birthday, but my mother's repeated accounts are etched in my mind.

After long train rides from Vilna, and many customs stops, we boarded the ship at Hamburg. My mother never forgot the rats, vermin and filth of steerage and frequently gave a vivid and frightening description of the ordeal, especially during rough seas and battering storms. A young woman named Rebecca, who slept next to us, was my mother's helper and heroine of the crossing.

On deck in New York Harbor we were almost blinded by the noon sun

after two weeks of practically no light in steerage. It was a clear hot day. All the decks were crowded, as was the harbor. Hoses poured water from fireboats; flags and bunting decorated the shore and the ships at the docks; bands played lively marches; firecrackers exploded. "A *Goldene Medina*," my mother sang out as she embraced Rebecca and other steerage friends. She was then five months pregnant with my sister-to-be, to be named Rebecca, the name also of my mother's mother, who died during my mother's infancy. "What a way to welcome immigrants!" my mother repeated again and again in Yiddish with a look of joy, relief and fulfillment. It was July 4, 1906. She did not then know that the welcome was in honor of Independence Day.

My father, Jacob Menahem Weinstein, and his father, Abraham Isaac, gave us a joyous welcome at Ellis Island. Every immigrant had a greeting squad—there were shouts, sobs, embraces and hugs, long, staring, sometimes unbelieving looks. The Eastern European masses, most of them Jews, were leaving shtetl after shtetl, where their families had settled and lived for centuries, and were now flocking to their new *Goldene Medina*, over two million strong.

My father had first arrived at Ellis Island in 1898, when he was fourteen, with his father, mother, Chaya Sorah (Ida Sarah), and two younger sisters, Annie and Kranie. The family joined a cousin from Bath, Maine, who had welcomed them in New York. In immigration our family name of Sklarsky became Weinstein, because the only name our cousin could write in English for the official was his own name, Weinstein.

In Bath my grandfather first tried his cousin's business of peddling rags. He would buy old clothes, throwaway furniture, furnishings and almost anything else he could manage with his horse and wagon. But the town of Bath could not support two peddlers, and my grandfather soon moved the whole family to Portland. He turned to selling dry goods, clothing and even furniture from his wagon for cash and later on credit. In spite of his humble calling, education had top priority, and my father was graduated from Portland High School in 1901.

A year later, my grandfather suggested that my father return to Aran and try to sell the two-story brick house that had belonged to the family for a century. My father needed no coaxing; he had been corresponding in Yiddish with a young girl from Meretz, near Aran, who was a year his junior, Kuna Leah Romanow. They had never met, but a relative of my father who lived in Meretz had suggested that he write her. They began corresponding when he was seventeen and she sixteen. My father had learned that Kuna had had a good Hebrew and Jewish education, unusual then for girls, and was bright, warm and pretty.

My father once showed me, when I was about nine or ten, a box full of

letters that both had kept, a few with photographs, some with love rhymes and some about books one or the other had read. I remember one book that my father had summarized in a letter: *Auto-Emancipation*, by the early Zionist Leon Pinsker. Some letters were romantic, and my father blushed as he read one love note and gave it to me to read to myself.

My mother was a beautiful girl. She had very long, flaxen-colored hair that almost reached the floor. Later it turned to brown, then gray and white. Her eyes were a rich brown and sparkling. Because of a serious fall and lack of proper orthopedic care anywhere near our small Lithuanian town, my father was a "hunchback." He was slightly shorter than my mother and three or four inches shorter than his father. His face was strong and rugged, and he had a thick black moustache as far back as I can remember. He always called my mother "Kunale" (little Kuna), and she always called him by his Yiddish nickname, "Yankel." His physical infirmity did not disturb him or make him shrink from people. He never discussed it; it was a fact and he always accepted facts.

On April 12, 1903, after the close of Shabbos Hagadol (the Great Sabbath, just before Passover), less than half a year after the couple met, my parents' marriage was celebrated in Meretz. Their first child, a boy, lived for a few months. Then I came, on April 10, 1905, (also Shabbos Hagadol) with the same name as my older brother, but preceded by the word Chayim (life), to "ward off the Angel of Death." Chayim Yehuda Leib later was somehow shortened to Chayim Leib. My sister-to-be was conceived, and my father returned to Portland, Maine. He could not sell what remained of the two-story brick family "treasure," and it was destroyed in the battle of Aran in World War I.

All my father's ancestors, as far back as he and his father could recall, were tailors who worked only part time; they spent most of their days studying the Bible, Talmud and commentaries in Hebrew or Aramaic. The women tended shop, kept the accounts, ran the household, bore the children and did most of the heavy work. When my father left Aran with his family, he was pulled out of a nearby yeshiva he had entered six years earlier where he had studied the Biblical commentator Rashi, a half-dozen tracts of the Talmud and some medieval writings. (When my mother read *Life Is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl*, by Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, she told me that the book was a perfect portrait of the villages around Vilna, including Aran and Meretz, where my father and she were born.)

My mother had *yichus* (ancestral status) and on a number of occasions reminded us of her pedigree. My maternal great-grandmother was a sister of Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaCohen, the sage and preacher known as the

Chofetz Chayim ("the will to live"), the title of one of his books. The yeshiva he established in Radin was famous throughout the world (the Nazis later burned it to the ground). Yeshivas in Israel and New York now bear his name.

Jews were limited by the Czar to the Russian "Pale of Settlement," which included Lithuania. In the villages of Aran, Radin, Meretz, Baltremantz, Ostryn and many another shtetl, Orthodoxy, with its rigid Jewish observance, was the only way of life. A chicken with a doubtful entrail was declared *treif* (nonkosher) and was discarded. Life was governed by *halachah* (Jewish law), and the *Shulchan Aruch* (Arranged Table), with its 613 positive and negative commandments, was the cornerstone of our lives, religious and nonreligious, dietary and commercial. Mother told me that once, as a girl of fifteen, her father caught her surreptitiously smoking one of his cigarettes; he did not punish her but taught her how to smoke "more efficiently and with greater relish."

Sabbath began before darkness on Friday. Every mother and daughter, old enough to recite, blessed the Sabbath candles; every father and son chanted the Kiddush over wine and pronounced the Motzeh over the white flour *chalah* (braided bread) that was a Sabbath symbol. Sabbath was synagogue, rest, song, study, cholent and tzimmes (meat, carrot and other vegetable delicacies). When the family recited Havdolah at the close of Sabbath, the prayer of separation of the holy from the unholy and the Sabbath from the weekday, with the lighted braided candle and the silver spice box, Sabbath was over. The struggle for survival began again.

Non-Jews were friendly with my parents and their families. They hid adults and children when rumors spread of an imminent pogrom or the arrival of a military draft supervisor (who would invariably seize more Jews than non-Jews). Whenever I read Chaim Grade's stories or other accounts of Eastern European villages, or when I view the art of Chagall or other painters depicting shtetl life, I am reminded of the many stories my parents and grandparents told me. Aran and Meretz must have been like the village of Anatevka, home of Sholom Aleichem's Tevya, "der Milchiger" (the milkman), in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Life was hard and cruel, but the Sabbath brought respite, and the hope of a Messiah was in the minds and hearts of all believers. On Saturdays every Jew wore his or her best clothes—which meant the only presentable clothes. While most Jews remained intensely faithful to their tradition, those exposed to study in Lithuanian, Polish or Russian schools, or who had close contacts with non-Jews, occasionally lost faith, in the fullest meaning of the word. My parents read and spoke Russian, Polish and Lithuanian as well as Yiddish; they knew Hebrew, and seemed to keep apace with the

times and with world events in general. Orthodox Judaism was the very essence of their lives.

My maternal grandfather, Israel Romanow (Romanov in Lithuania) was a "Cohen," a descendant of Aaron, the first high priest and brother of Moses. Zadie (an intimate word for "grandpa") took great pride in this ancestral office and his priestly blessing of the congregation on certain Jewish holidays. When he mounted the *bihma*, his eyes glistened and his demeanor showed his ecstasy; he pronounced the priestly blessings with extraordinary dignity. He was so proud of his priesthood that he named my mother Kuna, a contraction of *kehuna*, Hebrew for "priesthood."

Zadie Romanow was once summoned to appear before a Lithuanian tribunal, charged with using the family name of the Czar, Nicholas Romanov, without authorization. Fortunately he produced a letter to an ancestor from the first Czar Nicholas authorizing the use of the name of the royal family. The official warned my Zadie not to use the word "Romanov" more than once a week. My grandfather nodded. After all, who could enforce that limitation? My mother reported the details of the family celebration of "the victory of the name," where vodka and brandy enriched the exultation. On several occasions my mother, winking at me, would say to others that she was a thirty-third cousin of the Czar. My Zadie Romanow was a trader in lumber, grain and almost anything from which he could make a ruble. For several years he was designated overseer of an island off the Lithuanian coast, and he soon developed a wholesale business in lobsters. All shellfish (like pork and other meats forbidden in the Old Testament) was *treif*. My mother, when teased by some of her friends about the lobsters, told them with a straight face that the family had lobsters at least once a day, but never on the Sabbath, and that lobsters were delicious. The girls expressed horror and Kuna soon told them that it was all a joke.

My earliest memories of Sabbath, from Friday evening through its close at Saturday's darkness, came when I was in kindergarten. My parents had only two children at the time, Becky and me. Although Father's work had been irregular, he was then employed as a picture-framer, a mirror silverer and a photographer in a store on Congress Street, Portland's main street. His earnings were eighteen dollars a week, which he brought home in fifteen dollar bills and six half-dollars. We had four pushkes, small tin containers with a coin slot and the name or emblem of the charity each represented: Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael (the Jewish National Fund for Israel); our Hebrew School and Congregation, Shaarey Tefila (Gates of Prayer); our Jewish local charities; and our Portland general community charity. One fifty-cent piece went into each pushke, and these two dollars were more than the minimum of a tithe. A half-dollar was my father's

pocket money, for car fares mostly (a nickel then), and the remaining fifteen and a half dollars went to my mother to run our household.

My father sometimes used the expression *tzvay bis tzvelf* ("two to twelve"). When I asked what that meant he answered, "Now we give two dollars a week; I hope we will soon be able to afford twelve." Then he recounted a story he often repeated (translated from lively Yiddish): "A poor man, on a freezing cold day without anything but a skimpy suit, sees in a second-hand clothing stall a coat with the tag twelve rubles. Since he knows that he has only two rubles, he walks away, but the coat is like a magnet and pulls him back. He summons up courage and asks the vendor, 'How much for that coat?' The reply is: 'Can't you read? The tag says twelve rubles and that's the price.' To which the coldster replies: 'You say twelve, and you mean ten; if it's worth eight and I'll give you six, will you take four? Here's two.'" And then my father would explode in laughter. My father knew jokes without end. And whenever he told a story my mother would often tell another. And each laughed at his or her own and also at the other's. They also liked to play gentle pranks. Birthday parties and weddings were livened with fun and cookies baked by my mother. We celebrated the holidays, especially Purim (the story of the Persian Queen Esther, who saved her Jewish people from death) and Chanukah (Feast of Lights to celebrate the victory of Judah Maccabee over the Syrians), with their appropriate games. When tragedy came, my parents often forced themselves to laugh. Fun was part of their existence. Even a serious holiday like Passover bubbled with joy—especially when we chanted "The Only Kid" from the Haggadah (the book read on the first two Seder nights of Passover, recounting the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery). Fun was an important word in the family vocabulary.

My father was always busy, giving advice to relatives and friends, attending meetings, painting signs or carving wooden memorials for graves without pay when there was no money for headstones. He was a skilled painter and draftsman (although he had no formal training), and his printing and calligraphy of Hebrew letters were amazingly precise and polished. At our synagogue on Saturday afternoons, he helped the rabbi with a class in Mishna and Gemorra (the two constituting the Talmud) and was constantly performing *mitzvos* (good deeds). He often acted as cantor or *bal kriah* (reader from the Biblical scrolls) and always had the honor of the Yom Kippur *mincha* (afternoon prayer) chanting from the Prophets, the Book of Jonah. He was a *koch leffel* (a pot-stirring spoon), always busy. After several years as employee he bought out his employer, completely on credit, and there was more money available for the house and for charity.

The Sabbath eve dinner was a feast, my father and mother king and

queen. After lighting the candles, sipping the wine, nibbling the bread, each with its special prayer, we had our big Sabbath eve meal. Mother would awaken at about four or five every Friday morning to scour the house and prepare the food, not only for Friday, but for the Sabbath as well. We were scrubbed clean and dressed in the only decent clothes we had (except for the resewn and patched everyday wear). When dinner ended my father chanted a long benediction, then began the *zmiros* (the liturgical songs), followed by other Hebrew and Yiddish folk songs, which my father, mother and I sang with gusto.

I did not talk until I was almost four. Apparently, I understood what people were saying but did not speak until I was ready. According to my mother, in a grocery and fruit store I blurted out mandatorily, "I want that basket of grapes. Papa told you to buy it. He gave you money and I like grapes." I remember that incident probably because my mother recounted it often, with the addition, "And Lew hasn't had to learn to talk since." But that is as far back as I can remember.

But the best of Friday evenings were the stories that my father, and occasionally my mother, told from the Bible, the Talmud and the Midrash, from Jewish history, from their own lives and the lives of their parents and grandparents in the villages of Lithuania. Most enjoyable and meaningful were stories about Theodore Herzl, the Viennese newspaper correspondent in Paris who witnessed the conviction and degradation of the Jewish-French captain Alfred Dreyfus, and was so moved that he returned to his hotel room and wrote *The Jewish State*, thus founding the modern Zionist political movement for the reestablishment of a Jewish homeland and state; Rabbi Menasseh Ben Israel, neighbor and friend of Rembrandt in Dutch Haarlem and Amsterdam, who persuaded Oliver Cromwell in 1655 to let the Jews return to England, despite their banishment by King John in 1290, and "live in peace and have their own houses of worship, schools, and cemeteries"; and Yehuda Halevi, poet during the Golden Age of Spain from whose poems my father and mother recited beautiful lines.

In Portland at that time, children began attending Hebrew school at age four or five, certainly—even for the few girls who attended—no later than six. Most of the teachers were dedicated and competent, a few were mediocre, and one I remember only too well was a sadist. We sat on long benches with higher benches as our desks in a crowded small room on the first floor of a two-story building, diagonally across from the synagogue.

Since I had begun taking violin lessons at about age six, music in all its forms became a game with me. I would pour water into glasses to varying levels to make a scale on which I could clink out melodies. Perhaps better, I assembled a set of safety pins graduated in size, the smallest giving a

high C (or what I called "C") and the largest a low C. Having stuck them into my bench, I could pluck out melodies. One spring day, when I was about eight, I carefully stuck my safety pins in the sequence of their respective notes, up and down the scale, into my bench near the back of the classroom, and my musical or pseudo-musical impulse impelled me to play "Hatikvah" ("hope"), the Zionist and later Israeli anthem.

My teacher, Abraham Weisberg, first thought that the music was coming through the open windows from neighbors. After the second performance, however, the teacher became suspicious and began looking into each desk bench. I was able to pull out all the safety pins except the largest. As the teacher came toward my row, I jumped through the open back window assisted by several of my classmates. The teacher followed, caught up with me and pulled me, struggling to get free, into the classroom. A strong slap across each side of my face was not as painful as the lecture my classmates and I had to endure for the "sin" I had committed while we were studying the "portion of the week" from the Book of Leviticus, the disgrace to my family and the community, and the disruption of our class, the bulwark of creative Jewish survival. My mother took the event in stride, but my father gave me the worst punishment possible: he refused to talk to me for several days. Thereafter, I left my safety-pin musical instruments at home, and Mr. Weisberg became my good friend and guide in Jewish studies. But to avoid being called a "sissy," especially since I wore glasses and was called "four eyes," I joined one of the gangs in the North School, three short blocks from my house.

Several months after my frustrated musical performance, a minor war began during recess in the schoolyard (of the North School on Congress Street, near India Street), when the older gang pounced on a small, helpless, unlucky shlemiel named Hirshey Sulkowitch, who looked upon me as his protector. As I entered the fray, the opposing gang leader, named Nick, called the schlemiel and me "dirty Jews," "kikes" and "Christ-killers." Enraged, I tried to fight back, but we were outnumbered and outpowered. The battle left me on the ground, bruised and unable to use one leg. The principal telephoned my mother and ordered the opposing belligerents to carry me home. The family doctor, John Davis, arrived within minutes and, after a quick examination, drove my mother and me to the Maine General Hospital (now the Maine Medical Center) at the other end of town. The x-ray diagnosis by the hospital doctors was "osteomyelitis," a serious bone disease, and their recommendation was immediate amputation.

When Dr. Davis drove us home, my father was waiting for us. Dr. Davis immediately called the hospital about other tests that had been performed on me. The adults sat around the kitchen table and listened intently to

Dr. Davis's report: "I saw the x-rays and I'd have to say it's either osteomyelitis or a couple of defective x-rays or a mix-up. The blood tests don't support bone disease. But there's no history of bone disease. The hospital suggests further x-rays but is strong on amputation." My father asked, "Would waiting a day or two make a serious difference?" Dr. Davis responded, "Are you thinking of taking Leibel to Boston for an opinion from one of the great hospitals?" My father nodded and Dr. Davis continued: "I think that's a good idea. I'll call you back with the names of two doctors, one at Mass General and the other at Children's with the addresses and telephone numbers. Better still, I'll call them."

As Dr. Davis, who was a near-god to our family, picked up his bag to leave, my mother, who had been silent during the entire conversation, kissed his hand and said with words that were barely audible, "Doctor, you'll save my Leibel's leg—you and the Almighty." Dr. Davis replied, "I'll do all I can, but both of you parents can help by keeping up your courage and Leibel's."

The next afternoon, the doctor at Children's Hospital in Boston said that I had nothing more than a bad wrench of the leg muscles and that something must have been wrong with the Maine x-rays. He seemed pleased, however, that we were going to Massachusetts General Hospital the next morning for an additional opinion. After a sleepless night for both Father and me at a cousin's tenement in the South End of Boston, we got the same diagnosis from the MGH doctor. My father promptly telephoned the news to my mother. Joy reigned supreme, and to celebrate my father and I had hot pastrami sandwiches and soda pop at a kosher delicatessen not far from the Boston Common, where my father took me for a "swan boat" ride.

Back at school, the principal called Nick and me into his office; Nick said that he was sorry for hurting me and for using "dirty words" about my being Jewish. Having rehearsed the scene in anticipation, I answered, "Sure, forget it, but don't try to beat up Hirshey again." Nick and I became friends, and he came to my bar mitzvah.

The trip to Boston had been responsible for the cancellation of one of my violin lessons. My teacher, Mr. Tappan, was sure that I was no Kreisler, but he thought I had talent that ought to be encouraged. My playing was at least good enough to let me play in the grade school orchestra, with a solo at graduation, and later in the high school orchestra, where I shifted to viola. To quote our conductor, "Viola players were at a premium; violinists were a dime a dozen."

There was, of course, no violin practicing on Sabbath, which allowed time for some innovation by the time my second and third sisters, Anne Esther ("Arnie") and Celia ("Civie" now "Cele") had arrived. Friday, after

songs and stories, my father began putting on little original plays, with minimum scenery and costumes and maximum hilarity. He always cast himself as villain and me as hero and my two older sisters played other roles. Mother and Celia as audience were the perfect clique. On Sabbath afternoons (when my father tested me on the commentary by Rashi for the portion of the week from the Pentateuch), I read the four or five books I had taken from the school library and did my homework for Monday. Sunday was reserved for Hebrew school in the morning, an hour or more of my father's supplemental Hebrew teaching, then play, practicing violin, play, study and more violin to make up for Saturday. But even with all this activity there was still time for my friendship with Moe Huberman.

Moe's father ran a delicatessen and grocery store on Middle Street, about a block from our house. I was older than Moe by a few months, and at age four our mothers had brought us to kindergarten, our first absence from our mothers. Moe handled himself like a little man; I wept—but the tears disappeared quickly when beautiful Miss Donahue hugged me, picked me up and carried me, leading Moe into the Franklin Street kindergarten with the others. I remember her pug nose, carrot-colored hair, the few freckles on her upper cheeks, bright blue eyes, warm smile and tinkling laugh. Both Moe and I fell in love with Miss Donahue and, as best friends, often talked of her as we did about other momentous matters.

I recall once walking with Moe from his house toward the kindergarten, when we saw Moe's father attempting to force out a rat from the entrance-way to his store. Mr. Huberman had a broom, and the rat, cornered, jumped for Mr. Huberman's throat, missed but got away. Mr. Huberman took it calmly, but Moe and I couldn't. Moe went to his father and put his arms around him, then came back to me. With clasped hands and tears streaming we walked to kindergarten together. Even after Mr. Huberman's store expanded and the family moved to High Street among the "Yankees," Moe and I remained the most intimate friends through grade school and high school and thereafter.

Our family continued to expand. My mother's father, Israel Benjamin Romanow, arrived in 1908. Yisrael Benyamin HaCohen, (the Cohen, descendant of the Biblical high priest Aaron, brother of Moses) had a magisterial face and stance. When he would *duchan* (pronounce the priestly blessings on the festivals and high holidays) with his *talis* (prayer shawl) covering his head and face, he stood erect and proud of his role and heritage. With the pennies and dollars that he saved from peddling dry goods and notions out of his wagon with its slow-plodding horse, he sent money back to Meretz. Then came Uncle Harry, my mother's full brother, son of Israel and his first wife, Rivke. (Harry appeared in Portland, departed, then

returned several years later. In the early twenties he arrived with a wife, Sarah, American born, and with a baby son, Robert, but again, after several years, he left only to return alone and depart again several years later.) In 1910 came Grandpa Israel's second wife, Feygel, with their children, Samuel, Harold (who died several years later in a Boston hospital) and Goldie, all of whom my mother treated as mother, brothers and sister. There was never mention of "stepmother" or "half brother" or "half sister." Goldie, who was ten on her arrival, when my mother was twenty-five, was always her younger sister and, in later years, closest confidante. All of the children in our family loved Goldie. Grandma Feygel's family soon came in droves, brothers and sisters and cousins galore, many of them with the family name Lebovitz, which in some cases eventually became Loeb. Some settled in Portland, others in Boston.

On my father's side, most of his relatives came to Boston and remained there. But in 1915, his cousin, Samuel Quint, age seventeen, son of one of the many sisters of my grandfather Abraham, arrived in Portland. Black-haired and strong-faced, like my father, and over six feet tall (in my boyhood I always thought of him as a giant), he was all muscle and energy. My father arranged for his employment as apprentice to a blacksmith. Several months later he became enamored of a beautiful sixteen-year old immigrant, fresh from Poland, named Lily. She was a rosebud and chirped like a nightingale. She worked as a waitress in the coffee shop of her older sister and brother-in-law on Fore Street near Portland's docks. One day, disconsolate, Sam told my father of a misunderstanding with Lily. She had refused to see or talk to him, and his life was now miserable and meaningless. He would go back to Lithuania. My father insisted that I, then ten, remain and listen. Then came my father's decision. He would go with Sam to Lily; he would plead Sam's case, and at the right time Sam would take Lily's hand, kiss it and beg forgiveness; and I was to accompany them and learn how a broken romance could be patched up again. My father began rehearsing with Sam while I played the role of Lily. As we walked toward the coffee shop, my father continued coaching Sam. Here, combined, were my father's interest in fun and play-acting and his dedication to family.

At first Lily would not talk. But my father persisted: "You did not understand Sam. He was so overcome by your beauty and loveliness, that the words became twisted in his mouth and you misunderstood what he intended; it was not your fault, but his. He loves you and begs your forgiveness," my father entreated, as though he were reciting Shakespeare or Sholom Aleichem. Sam grabbed Lily's hand, kissed it and wept, and between sobs uttered, "Please, please forgive me. I love you." There was no dove of peace or love flying in that coffee shop, but my father's pleading and

Lily's warmth prevailed, despite Sam's gauche manner of courting. Several weeks later there was a small wedding in our tenement. I held one of the four poles over which the *chupah* (marriage canopy) was draped. Later Sam and Lily joined the other Quints and the Dobby, Friedman and Burstein and (still later the Fistel and Kupferman) families (all descendants of my grandfather's sister) in Winthrop, Revere and Malden, north of Boston. They lived full and ripe lives; their great-grandchildren are college graduates, one a successful New York lawyer.

Several months after the wedding, our Hebrew school produced a play written by one of the teachers in Hebrew (with occasional Yiddish translations when the Hebrew was too difficult or esoteric) and I played the blacksmith. Sam provided anvil, bellows, tongs and all the other paraphernalia, lugging literally tons of stage "properties." I recited, sang and took the bows, while from the wings, Sam and Lily, with his arm around her waist, beamed and chuckled.

At a Zionist conference in 1914 my father met Boston lawyer Louis D. Brandeis, who had just assumed office as head of the American Zionist Organization. On his return, my father could not restrain his enthusiasm: "What a Zionist leader! What an orator! He's brilliant and he knows Jewish history! And can he move an audience! Have we got a President!" Two years later, during the four months of confirmation hearings by the United States Senate on the Brandeis nomination to the United States Supreme Court, my father's spirits rose and fell as the news reports were cheerful or chilling. On the Sabbath following the Brandeis confirmation in early June 1916, my father made a special *mi she-berach*, a blessing from the pulpit during the reading of the weekly portion of the Five Books of Moses, in honor of the joyous occasion: the first Jewish justice on the United States Supreme Court.

Around this time, my father's business ventures, which had begun with his picture-framing, mirror refinishing and photography store on Congress Street and soon included greeting cards and art reproductions, took a turn for the better. He finally sold the business and paid off his debt to his former boss, using part of the proceeds to pay off the mortgage on our house (some five stores and four tenements owned by my grandfather and father) and the rest as part payment for a business at the west end of Congress Street. The new store was loaded with toys and games and Christmas gifts, and I had fun helping in the store. There was an active shopping period, but January came and my father sold the store again for what he said was a good profit. Then he bought Murdock & Freeman, a soda bottling factory within a half mile of our house, borrowed anew to the maximum on the house mortgage, withdrew all of the family's personal savings and began

his new manufacturing operation.

I began helping in the factory, running the bottle-washing machine at age twelve and helping to provide jobs for my young friends—especially during the school vacation—all in the absence of child labor laws. One day my father reported that the expensive syrup, which, when added to carbonated water, made the variously flavored soda pops and Hires Root Beer (for which my father had a franchise), was disappearing. He thought it was an inside job but he didn't know whom to suspect. The detective and courtroom stories that I occasionally read had their effect on me. Without telling my family, I planned the mystery-solving technique, enlisted five helpers, plus Moe. On Sunday, I surreptitiously took my father's keys, opened the factory main door, placed my fellow plotters in areas throughout the plant and arranged for signals in case we were spotted and needed help. Otherwise we were to be silent and watch closely. I then opened the lock in the syrup room door, accompanied by Moe, and locked the door from the inside. We hid in the clothes closet, keeping it slightly ajar so that we could listen and peek out.

We waited and waited, then heard the insertion of the key and the squeaking of the door. Two men entered; one was in his early twenties, and I immediately recognized him as John, my father's employee. The other, somewhat younger, turned out to be John's brother. They left the door open and, in several trips, funnelled a good part of the syrup into bottles. After the brothers had locked the door, we waited for what seemed to us fifteen or twenty minutes, then left the syrup room locked, rounded up our fellow spies, only two of whom had seen the thieves enter and leave in several trips by the rear door. We opened and relocked the side door through which we had come and pledged that we would tell no one except my father and agreed that Moe and I were to be the tale-bearers.

When Moe and I entered the house, my parents sighed in relief. They had telephoned Moe's house, and his parents were also frantic. Moe called his family immediately, then Moe and I told my father what had happened. My father grabbed me by the shoulders with a threatening look on his face. Moe yelled out, "We were only trying to help you, Mr. Weinstein." My father released me, then flopped into a chair. "What if they had guns and shot you?" he asked. I jumped in: "But we hid all over the place, and Moe and I hid in the clothes closet in the syrup room." My father looked at us and, still very angry, added, "What if one of you had sneezed or made a noise?" My mother rushed over to Moe and me and embraced us. My father said, "Never let anything like this happen again. Now, everyone stand up and we'll *bensch gemel* [recite the Hebrew prayer for escape from death or serious danger]." We followed my father in unison, but I caught Moe's eye

when I was sure my father's eyes were closed during his intensive praying. I winked to Moe and Moe to me, and my mother, who caught both of us in the act, also winked. After Moe's departure I got one of the longest speeches of my life from my father. But never once did he punish me corporally. I've known no one who could control his temper so well.

At the hearing before the grand jury on John's indictment for grand larceny and his brother as his accomplice, Moe, another of our fellow spies (who also identified John), and I were witnesses. Joseph Connolly, later Judge Connolly, lawyer for my father, the complainant, and our family counsellor and friend, put one arm on Moe's shoulder and the other on mine and said, "The district attorney told me that you were excellent witnesses and will probably make good lawyers." My father beamed for the first time since the crime-detecting Sunday. John and his younger brother pleaded guilty and were sentenced, John to a long term.

I was to be a witness in court again only a few months later. On a Sunday afternoon at the end of a buggy ride, my parents, my three sisters and I were about to turn into the back gate on India Street when we saw Kevin McLaughlin, the youngest son of one of our neighbors, running out of the open gate with a smoking gun—literally a smoking gun—in his hand. He dashed up India Street toward Newbury, in the opposite direction from our buggy. As we entered the stable area, we saw Mike, Kevin's oldest brother, lying motionless on the ground with blood gushing from his head. My father jumped from the buggy, rushed all of us into the house, locked the door and called the police. The trial was simple: the prosecution called my parents and me as witnesses. (My mother was obviously pregnant; less than a month later my brother Sidney was born.) The district attorney also introduced a confession by Kevin (this was many decades before the "Miranda" preconfession warning decision). The jury brought in a guilty verdict within a few minutes. Since Maine had no capital punishment, Kevin was sentenced to life imprisonment, and my father, the expert picture-framer, used his T-square and right angle miter to make a frame to fit the newspaper account (with a photograph) of father, mother and son as prosecution witnesses.

Both trials made an impact on me and undoubtedly were factors in my later determination to go to law school.

Meanwhile, my father had become a notary public and a member of Portland's Board of Assessors to fix the assessed value of taxable real estate and personal property. Since he was now a government official in the Golden Country, he performed his duties with great pride and satisfaction. When he impressed his notarial seal on a document with the seal of the State of Maine and its motto *Dirigo* ("I lead") and inscribed his

name below it, he did it with a flourish.

The arrival of Sidney on January 30, 1917, was a great family event. Civie was no longer the baby; Arnie loved to hold and change and dress him, but Becky was the oldest daughter and ready and eager to play the baby's mother. There had been a brother, born after Becky, who died of spinal meningitis in his infancy, after whom Sidney Moses was named: Sidney for *shalom* (the Hebrew word for "peace"), and Moses for his deceased older brother, Moshe, the Hebrew equivalent. (My mother said that although the doctor called the fatal illness "meningitis," it was really an "evil eye," as in the case of her first born, who preceded me and died shortly after birth. Mother said that the symptoms were the same, and I could never learn whether she was serious or playing a prank.) But now I had a brother, twelve years younger than I.

Our tenement was bursting at the seams. We had two bedrooms (one the entry into the apartment) plus a third, the "dark" bedroom, which was used as a storeroom. One could tell whether anyone was in the "inside" bathroom by the light through the frosted glass window. I slept in a cot in the kitchen, the three girls were in one bedroom, with a single and a double bed, and my parents, plus Sidney, were in the other bedroom. The dark bedroom had no outside window, but a window that led into the back hall entrance. Among other furniture, it contained a large trunk with remnants or mill-ends my father had picked up from his acquaintances in the wool and cotton mills near Portland, Sanford, Lewiston-Auburn or Biddeford-Saco, so that Mother could make dresses for the girls and herself and shirts for Father and me. But Mother had little time for sewing and running the household, while father was busy working, attending meetings, painting, chatting or playing at politics. There was also a living room and a kitchen with an old-fashioned coal cooking stove; its red hot coals provided whatever heat our tenement had, and Maine's winters were cold.

The year 1917, which saw the United States enter World War I, also brought the announcement on November 2 of the Balfour Declaration, in which Lord Balfour, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Great Britain, wrote to Lord Rothschild, head of British Zionists, that "His Majesty's government looks with favor on the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine." Several weeks later the Portland Zionist District held a gala in honor of the declaration. My father presided, and our speaker was Elihu D. Stone of Boston, friend of Senator Henry Cabot Lodge (the first). Stone led a large delegation of Massachusetts Zionists to Washington and was largely responsible for the Lodge Senate Resolution favoring the declaration. At the end of the meeting, when Elihu met my mother, they discovered that not only were they both from Meretz but also distant cousins. The beginning

of the meeting was most important to me, because I was permitted to parade in with the Zionist flag, while a schoolmate, son of the prior president, carried the Star-Spangled Banner. World War I news meanwhile told us of the stalemate in Europe.

My Hebrew studies continued. After translating the Pentateuch from Hebrew into Yiddish, and then from Hebrew into occasional English, we translated and studied the entire Old Testament. When I was twelve we began part of the Mishna (the first part of the Talmud, in six tractates); our first studies were in the book *Noshim* (women). Despite my mother's protestations that we were too young to be taught the rabbinic rules dealing with sex abstinence, menstruation and "cleanliness," we continued with our studies and I had sex education in Hebrew school long before some of my friends acquired their information through "dirty" books or actual experience.

I entered high school at mid-year, in February 1918, several months before my thirteenth birthday and my bar mitzvah. It opened up new vistas, with new subjects, especially Latin, French and ancient history; new activities, especially music, dramatics, debating and the school newspaper; new friends; and new horizons.

My bar mitzvah was on Shabbos Hagadol, and my father announced that I would serve as cantor (and not in my customary role of choirboy) for the Friday evening and the Sabbath morning and afternoon services, as well as reader of the weekly portion from the Five Books of Moses and the Haftarah (the prophetic epilogue of the Pentateuch readings). I protested that this would make me a "show-off" in the eyes of some of my friends, but my father, to whom the synagogue was the most important part of our lives, prevailed. He also agreed that I could have a separate party on Saturday afternoon, after services, for my friends; this meant only boys, although I hoped to invite two girls named Jeannette, one from Portland and her cousin from Boston who was temporarily living with her. I had a crush on each but neither knew it. Also, Portland Jeannette's home was in a Yankee neighborhood, not in our mixed ghetto, which included Jews, Italians, Greeks, Poles and other Slavs, and still other ethnic groups.

My bar mitzvah was the longest in my memory; it began with the welcoming of the Sabbath on Friday evening. I acted as *chazan* (cantor) supported by my regular choirmates, ten of them. Saturday included the regular morning service, with *trop* (cantillation) for the Biblical portions followed by *musaph* (the additional service) and *mincha* (afternoon service). My father and both grandfathers were called to the *bihma* to recite the prayers for their Biblical portions which I chanted. Each of them kissed me after his final blessing.

I performed my bar mitzvah evening and day to my father's and grandfathers' pride, orated in Yiddish and English the speech I had written myself (on that I insisted) and saw all the women and girls (my mother, her "mother" Feygel, whom we also called "Bobie" (grandma), my paternal grandmother and all of my sisters, cousins and aunts sitting in the women's balcony) *kvell* (glow with pride). The rabbi, cantor and *shamas* (sexton) gave their congratulations with superlatives, but the warmest praise came from Jack Levinsky, who was later to marry my Aunt Goldie: "Lew, you really ought to be a rabbi. A cantor you already are. And, if we had you instead of our rabbi, that would be a great improvement." My only reply was, "Please, Mr. Levinsky, respect for the rabbi. I could never be a good rabbi." The bar mitzvah parties were *haimish* (family-like) with the emphasis on *mitzvah* (good deed) rather than *bar*. But I would blush whenever I thought how my father showed off my quasicantorial and Biblical reading skill to the congregation, and I never learned whether kissing the *bal kriah* (whatever the relationship might be) was proper.

Two months later, on a Friday evening, my father announced that he was to drive his small Ford truck to Boston on Sunday to keep some business appointments. Because of the sugar shortage during World War I, he would try to buy sugar substitutes for the bottling plant. He also wanted to take his sister Kranie to Boston to meet a man who might become her groom. If I wanted to join them, he said, I could. We would leave very early Sunday, the drive to Boston of about a hundred miles would take about four hours, and we'd all be home by ten in the evening. "Lew doesn't go with you, he has a Latin exam the next day," my mother interrupted. (I had persuaded my parents and friends to stop calling me "Leibel" or "Louie" and to call me "Lew.") Then she asked my father why he couldn't make the substitute sugar arrangements by telephone, instead of driving back and forth for at least eight hours. Wasn't the whole purpose of the trip to prevent Kranie's spinsterhood and to meet a man through a marriage broker? (Kranie was almost thirty.) My father said he had tried futilely to get sugar substitutes by telephone and he needed to persuade the prospective sellers in person. My mother insisted it was Kranie; he insisted it was sugar substitute for the soda factory, a matter of financial life or death. I heard the loud words of my mother and the soft, short answers of my father as I fell asleep.