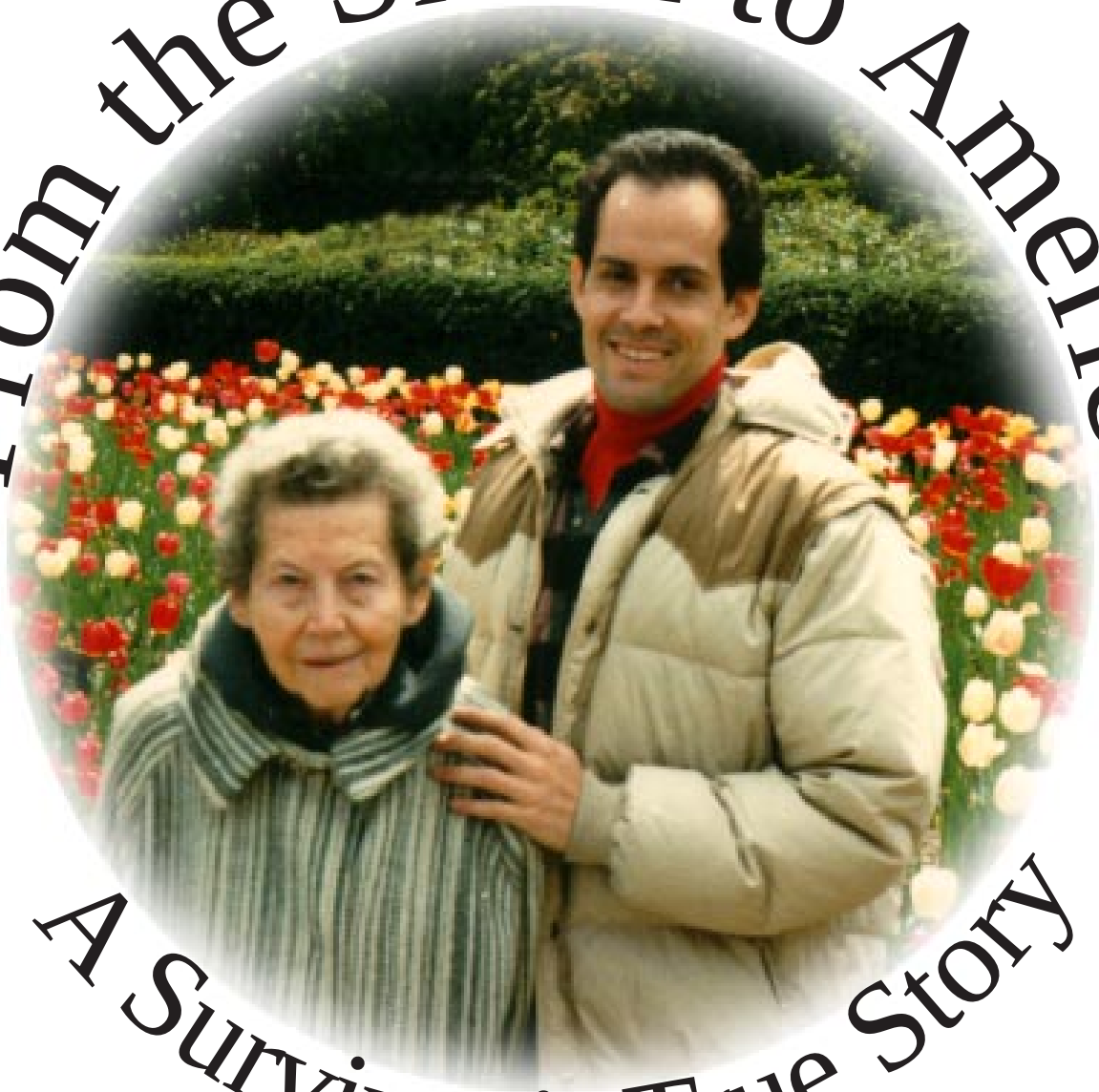
From the Shtetl to America



A Survivor's True Story

As Told to Daniel M. Stern
by his Grandmother, Pauline Monat,
During Their Life and Times Together

By Daniel M. Stern

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Daniel M. Stern

First draft completed July 1987

Second draft completed September 1997

Third draft completed April 1999

Dan Stern
P.O. Box 1972
Santa Monica, CA 90402

After a full, rich, turbulant, tragic, but in the end happy life, Paula passed away peacefully at home surrounded by her family...

For Grandma

Pauline Monat

June 15, 1903 — June 7, 1997

1920

1952

1985

In loving memory

and Grandpa

Martin Monat

May 14, 1901—August 15, 1976

who saved

Grandma Mom and Annette

from the Holocaust

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I would like to thank my family for their love, feedback, and support of this project over many years: my father, Peter, my brother, Billy, and especially my mother, Irene, who lived through what you are about to read, cared for by her parents, and who in turn cared for her parents until the very end.

Thanks also to mom for her very helpful editorial suggestions.

Preface

In the fall of 1982 I came to New York City to live in the same building as my grandmother, Pauline Monat. I'd recently graduated from college and was returning from a job teaching English in Japan. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do with my life, but I was looking forward to living in Manhattan and being near grandma.

I had always been close to her, especially as a child. When I was eight, my parents moved to California, so I didn't have as much contact with grandma, but the feeling of closeness remained. Now I had the chance to get to know her again, this time as an adult.

We spent many hours together at meals, on walks, in parks, and museums. While I explored the city and my life unfolded, the story of her life also emerged: her childhood in Poland, how she and my mother survived World War II, how they eventually came to this country.

In learning about my grandmother I learned about myself. In being close to her I came to appreciate how much older people have to offer, how valuable our time together was, how to cherish my youth, my health, and life in this country.

This book attempts to capture her memories, that time in our lives, and the wonderful person that she was, is, and will always be to me.

Daniel M. Stern
April 1999
Santa Monica, California

Part I

ARRIVAL

305 West 76th Street

September 4, 1982

Just off the plane from California, the bus goes over a bridge and suddenly there it is: New York City. No matter how many times I see it I am always overwhelmed. So huge and grey; impersonal, filthy. A chill runs through me.

But I know this view from a distance is deceptive, for I have a warm place waiting for me in the midst of the frenzied, heartless metropolis.

* * *

Stepping into the hallway of the well-worn townhouse at 305 West 76th Street I'm overwhelmed by the familiar smells of my childhood: rye bread and barley soup, Klops (Polish meatloaf) and baked apples. "Hi grandma!"

From the kitchen comes, "Hi Deanny!" followed a moment later by a small, bent over figure, wiping her hands on her apron. As we hug, her head only comes up to my chest. She looks up at me with clear blue eyes and says, "I think you've grown again."

* * *

Now that I've just graduated from college it's time to find a job. At least I've got a roof over my head, and an apartment in this small, peaceful building. Tenants come and go in the old rooming house which my grandmother has lived in and run for the last 30 years. I help her manage it also, and that keeps me partially occupied.

* * *

Sometimes I think about having had two sets of grandparents who lived on opposite sides of Manhattan. One set lived on the elegant East Side, next to the East River, the other pair on the gritty West Side, near the Hudson River.

My father's parents had a beautiful apartment overlooking the East River. My brother and I always ran to the balcony to watch boats pass by, some of them very large. The apartment was filled with books and antiques. My grandmother, "Big Grandma" (because of her girth), had beautiful blue eyes, blond hair and a thick, musical Dutch accent. A visit with her meant chocolates and Chinese checkers. My grandfather, a tall man with impeccable manners, was always kind, but formal. I enjoyed visiting them, but there was a reserved quality in our relations, like being in a shop filled with very expensive, delicate porcelain.

My mother's parents were directly across town, on West 76th Street near Riverside Drive. They lived in an old, battered brownstone building. Here we did not have to be so careful about what we said or did. A visit to their home meant a bed that we were allowed to jump up and down on, as high and as long as we liked, a couch we could carelessly drape ourselves over. We were free to run the length of the apartment, to touch and explore to our heart's content.

"Little Grandma" did all her own cooking. Whenever we came to visit, the grand old staircase of her house was filled with the delicious aroma of her cooking. This grandfather was a bit rougher than the other one, not so interested in us, but he usually tolerated our presence in a good-natured way.

Whereas my East Side grandparents lived next to a cemented walkway, right down the street from my mother's parents was Riverside Park, filled with playgrounds and lawns, blossoming apple and cherry trees, overlooking the waters of the Hudson and the forested Palisades of New Jersey. The whole character of the West Side, the diversity, dirty streets, immigrants' shops spilling out onto the sidewalks, seemed so much more vibrant and attractive than the tidy, stiff perfection of polished brass gates and white-gloved doormen on the East Side.

* * *

Still no job, but I'm enjoying the city—a stimulating place, people crammed together, overflowing into the streets. I keep thinking about a friend who visited from California. Upon arriving she looked up and said, "All those people living on top of one another!" It really is a strange way to live, when you stop and think about it.

One of the most stimulating things about the city is the mix of young and old, rich and poor. It is painful to see poor people suffering, but it also makes me appreciate so much more whatever I may have myself. I feel invigorated, my spirits buoyed.

* * *

Fall is here.

People tell me I’m crazy when they find out that I moved here from California, but I love the cold weather, the change of seasons. I grew up here until I was eight years old, in Yonkers, not far from New York City. When I was a child, winter meant snow, and snow meant fun!

We lived on Mountaindale Road, next to an underground aqueduct bordered by wild apple trees, forests, rock ponds and swamps filled with skunk cabbage. When winter came the aqueduct was perfect for sledding.

One hundred yards from our house was an incline with sledding routes of every type—slow, fast and suicidal. My brother and I spent hours with our neighborhood friends, warm in our waterproof pants and jackets, skidding and streaking about. The real treat was when our father would come, too, and I would ride the hills as a sandwich—dad below me, Billy on top of me.

On still mornings, after the first snow our small front yard lay white and unbroken. Waiting for the school bus my brother and I made paths through the powder, pretending to be famous explorers, blazing trails for others to follow.

Fall is here—Central Park at 77th Street and Central Park West.

Fall is here—Central Park looking towards Sheep Meadow.

* * *

Fall is here.

The chill air begins to filter in through the drafty old window frames. Outside leaves skitter and dance on the street. The air is brisk, refreshing.

On a walk through Central Park I see young couples wearing sweaters and windbreakers. A bag lady gathers herself and shivers, preparing for the onslaught of winter. More light reaches the ground now that the leaves are beginning to fall. Their colors are changing; deep reds, bright yellows, muted browns, a few remaining greens, oranges, purples. A fiery spectacle.

* * *

I've been finding that grandma especially enjoys books and music relating to her childhood and young years in Poland.

Today I brought home a collection of post World War II Polish poetry, edited by Czeslaw Milosz, the Nobel prize winning Polish poet, as well as Milosz's autobiography. Recently I also brought home several books by Isaac Bashevis Singer about his young years in Poland—he also grew up on a shtetl, around the time grandma did, and speaks of many places that grandma knows. It was one of these books by Singer, *A Little Boy in Search of God*, that grandma actually finished, the first book she read all the way through in many, many years.

She still loves Polish culture—the language, music of Chopin (the music I associate most closely with her), the literature, the poetry and history. I see how comfortable she is speaking Polish with the workers, whereas my mother and uncle Ignatz (the son of grandma's father's brother Motl) don't like to speak Polish at all.

But neither does she live in the past, as so many older people seem to. She only

makes passing references to it from time to time in order to illuminate something of interest in the present.

Seeing her interest in everything relating to Poland, I encourage her to speak more about the past. I'm old enough now to appreciate the struggles she has gone through and overcome in her life. I want to understand her better, to learn the full story rather than scattered bits and pieces.

I've been spending a lot of time with her at meals and on walks. During those times I take the opportunity to ask her about her life before she came to the United States.

"I was born in 1903 in Dzialoszyce (pronounced Jah-lo-shi-tzeh), a tiny community in Poland," says grandma. "It was a shtetl of about 3,000 inhabitants, one of the many tiny Jewish communities that dotted Eastern Europe prior to World War II. Almost all of the population was Jewish, the rest a few Polish-Christians.

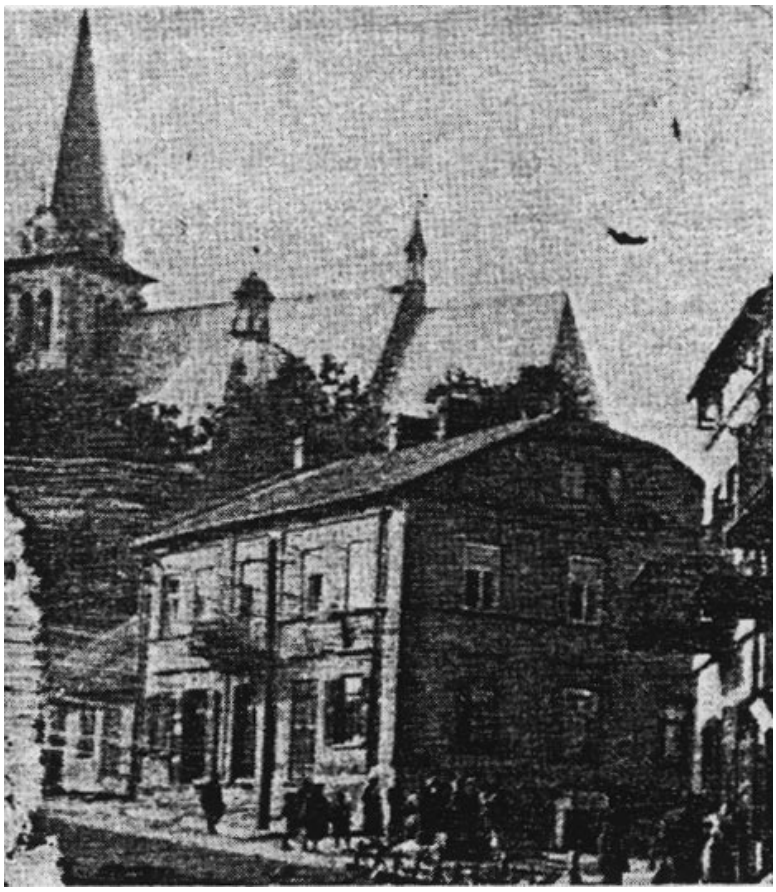

Religious Jews in Dzialoszyce.

"That shtetl was a peaceful, lovely place to live, Most people were friends with each other, there was a market with Jewish stores. The corners of the market were leading to fields and beautiful walks, gardens and estates mostly owned by Jews.

"Shabbas (Sabbath)? Holidays? Very much observed. Beggars? Oh yes. The real shtetl from Sholom Aleichem or the Fiddler on the Roof."

As she tells me this I think not only was it very different from anywhere I've ever lived, it is a vanished world. Yet my ancestors were part of it for hundreds of years. So different from living in a place like New York City...

* * *



Dzialoszyce circa 1918, view from below the church.

Sitting on a bench in Riverside Drive, next to a well-kept communal flower garden, I ask grandma more questions about the town she grew up in.

"Dzialoszyce consisted of a market place, smaller than Washington Square in New York City, with 4 streets branching out and a few houses, private homes, city hall, synagogue, and a church—a few goys who had a beautiful church."

* * *

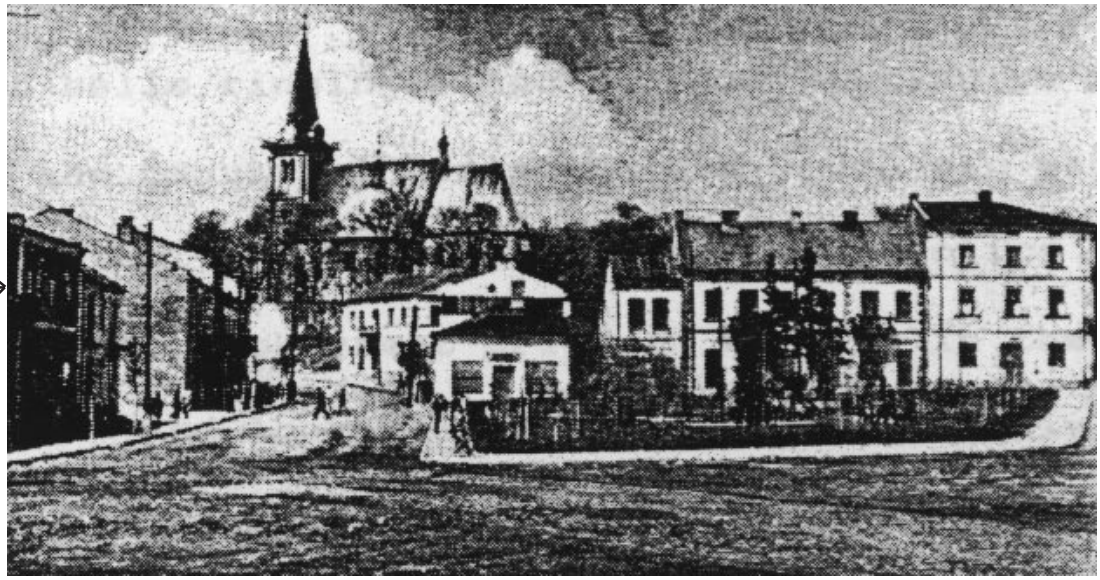
While walking by some tennis courts, grandma mentions that she and her sisters used to play tennis on their front porch or inside their apartment in Dzialoszyce, with rackets brought to them by their mother from Kracow. " It was considered the most elegant sport for women."

"Our house was only about one block from the center of the town, which was the market, square in shape. All around the market were stores and on the second floor apartments—that's the way everybody lived, with stores on the first level. There weren't any buildings higher than two stories, except for the church.

Even though Poles were no more than 10% of the population there was still a

large church. It was a very nice church, a Roman Catholic church, Roman style. Our house was on Zakoscielna Street, which means ‘below the church.’

Grandma lived here →



Dzialoszyce—view from the market place.

From our balcony we could see the whole town. Almost every Sunday and on holidays there were processions, girls dressed in white with flowers and small children throwing petals before the priest as he went, the organ playing and the church bells ringing. We were sitting on the balcony observing the beautiful girls and the young men who were in that procession. All the Poles, who were Catholics (there were only Catholics), took great pride in walking in the procession. It looked to us as something really important.

From the center of that market place, little streets, just wide enough for two carriages to go by, were branching out. First between buildings like the one where I lived, and then, after a block or so, opening into roads along which there were a few houses here and there, poor houses of people who didn’t have much.

Then there were roads outside of that, roads to other towns. The next town, Miechow, (pronounced Mie-chuv), was a half hour away by horse cart. Also a Jewish shtetl, most of these little towns were inhabited by Jews. Alongside the roads were just fields, fields for pastures and growing grain.

Map of Poland—location of Dzialoszyce.

* * *

Saturday afternoon, raining lightly, grandma and I sit at the table. Lunch is over. A cool blue-white light comes through the lace shades. The lamps give off a warm yellow light that makes the deep brown wood paneling glow.

We are drinking tea and listening to Chopin Nocturnes, talking about friends, growing older, memories of days past, our hopes for the future.

A peaceful atmosphere.

We feel at ease together. She has gray-blue eyes which, although behind glasses, have serenity and depth, seeing the present through a sea of memories.

“The fields of Dzialoszyce extended as far as one could see around the town. It was very flat countryside, flat for miles and miles, just fields of grain and pastures for cattle.

Further on there were beautiful gardens, estates with lakes, forests, orchards leading to the estates of Jewish families, Moscowski, Schoental, Ashkel. Whether they had so much money I don’t know, but they were living in these estates like Polish noblemen. With horses and riding and governesses...

We were going to the Schoental’s who had that beautiful garden perhaps half a mile away from town, to the north. Their estate, called Buszkow, was a kind of park for family and friends, growing in a very natural way, about the size of a city block. It had some of the most unusual fruit trees. One of the trees was bearing a delicious fruit called, in Polish, Derenye, (Cornelian Cherry in English), which I never saw anywhere else. It was like a little ‘spunzel,’ like the little gelatin pills that we take. They had that shape, long, they were red, and extremely delicious. A lot of them on that tree. I’ve never seen that again.

On the opposite side of the city were estates of another kind, also belonging to Jews. One, called Labedzie, belonged to the Moszkowskis. The other, Dziekanowice, belonged to Jews who played the role of gentiles, the Aszkiels. They were only speaking Polish, they didn't even know any Yiddish. They had a beautiful estate, too.

The two Aszkiel brothers were good looking men, and they were flirting with my sister Minia (pronounced Minya). Nice people. Those young men were coming to town sometimes on horses, beautiful horses, dressed in that attire like gentile horsemen: woolen jackets and plaids, the hats with the little feather, their special baggy riding pants, riding crops."

* * *

Today I went to the movies with grandma: Mel Brooks' The Two Thousand Year Old Man and The 12 Chairs.

Afterwards we walk hand in hand along Columbus Avenue, talking. I speak about my fear of becoming a hard, uncaring person because of this city, having to say no to people, wanting a girlfriend.

She talks with me about setting up a trust for her sister Mila who is very ill, problems with running the house, not getting anything done.

* * *

"Oh, I enjoy that flower," says grandma about the orange tiger lily I brought home for her. She goes on to tell me that the tiger lily is called smolly-nosy in Polish, which means messy nose because of the orange pollen which smears very easily.

"When I was a child we stayed very little inside the house, either playing in the courtyard or going for walks that were not far from the town. Walking out from our house, perhaps only 20 or 30 meters, we would already find ourselves in the fields of

Dzialoszyce. In those grain fields we gathered the most beautiful red and blue flowers, big bouquets of poppies, bluebottles, buttercups, chammomille, daisies and forget-me-nots.

And that was like a dream. The smell of the cut grass, the beautiful, beautiful flowers in the fields of rye and wheat; white and pink clover, and further on mak, the red poppies. Blue cornflowers, purple flowers, yellow ones, Kaczence (pronounced Katchentze). We were picking the flowers and making bouquets. We also were picking single kernels of grain and eating them while they were soft.

Oh, oh, and forget-me-nots, growing along the stream, lots of them. We would gather them, many, many, and put them on a big plate, all around. We put a little water in the plate and the flowers continued to grow in the shape of a beautiful wreath."

What would those young girls dream and giggle about as they lay on their backs, looking up at the clouds on a warm summer day? I see grandma in my mind's eye as a carefree, unmarked, beautiful blond child instead of a bent-over, grey haired, wrinkled, tired old woman. The child is still there, living within her, still singing and running through the tall, swaying grain fields. But she does not come to visit often so her song is soft and hard to hear. One has to listen carefully:

"After walking in the fields of Dzialoszyce we would go in the river that ran through the town, a little river where we would bathe and jump and play around. The water was very clear and it only came up to our chests.

That river ran behind our house, at the end of a long, long courtyard. Upstream a little, in the middle of the river, was a mill with a big horizontal wheel that turned round and round.

There was a lot of sand and you could make ‘platski,’ cakes, out of the sand. Nice sand, like sand at the beach. The maids were coming there to wash dishes. You could not wash pots and pans in the house, there was no such thing as scrubbing with soaps or creams, but with sand. The sand was serving for cleaning the pots and pans. People were also coming to wash their linens there, with soap. Soap for the clothes, but not for the dishes. Soap was not kosher. Nowadays they have kosher soap.

And what an excitement it was when a rain came, in summertime, because then the river was full of fish! Fishermen were coming, bringing out masses of fish, and it was very interesting to watch. Somehow after the rain fish always came, nice fish. They were like carp and there were little ones called ‘Karasie’ which I don’t see here, but which are a very good small fish. Very tasty.”

* * *

Such a contented feeling to sit here in the big red armchair after shoveling snow, listening to the Mendelssohn violin concerto as it continues to snow outside. While grandma is at the table, munching away on a piece of bread, steam rising from a warm bowl of barley soup, she continues her story:

“The mill on the river behind our house belonged to somebody whose son was a redhead. The reason I think of this young man is because in the city there was a crazy girl called the Meszugene Chaiaye (pronounced Meshugena Chaye). Chaiaye was her first name probably. And he supposedly made her pregnant, that young man. He was a redhead, and she was a redhead. But what was the end of it, I don’t know. In any case, it was a disgrace and the whole town knew about it.

Meszugene Chaiaye was roaming around. She was walking around, talking...really insane, badly dressed. Very young, not very pretty but a white complexion, might be 18 or 20. We did not know if she had a family or not. It was pitiful when we saw her getting bigger and bigger.

Another character in town, Kudelski, was always hiding in the stairways at the entrances to houses and when he would see a girl passing by, he would throw open his clothes and expose himself. A Polishman, blond hair, might be 25 or 30, no hat, typical Polish looks, not handsome. He would go after you and catch you by the dress...I was always afraid of him. Sometimes he stood in the stairway to our house and would just 'flop, flop.' He was crazy.

Meszugene Shimele

Another man was coming and stealing light covers. We had no electricity yet so there was no bulb, but a cover for the lamp (we had first petroleum in the lights, naptha, and later on electricity was introduced). So he would steal that every time, inside the stairway. One day he came to several houses for people to offer him money so that he could go to America. And everybody did give money and he did disappear. His name was Hitlemacher, (literally, the one who makes hats). That was his name, not his occupation. He wasn't a 'macher' (maker) of anything, except stealing."

A bagel seller in Dzialoszyce

* * *

As we eat millet for breakfast on a rainy Saturday morning, grandma tells me how people used to prepare millet to fatten the geese that they kept in cages in Dzialoszyce. "They were to be eaten?" I ask." They weren't for decoration!" she replies.

“We had horses, too. We had cows, we had chickens...”

“Pigs?” I interject (just kidding).

“No. Jews didn’t raise pigs.” (She didn’t get the joke).

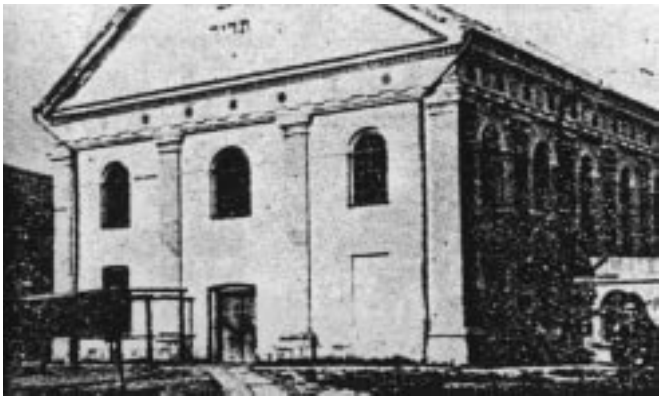
“But every day fresh milk was brought from our estate. Not an estate really, but my father had a mill, a nice property, not far from Dzialoszyce, about half an hour by horse. Every day fresh milk was brought in for us from the cows. A young driver would come with it, and the children would go for a ride.

In Dzialoszyce there were a lot of children around. There was a big, big social life. Children used to go from house to house whenever they wanted, they always had somebody to play with. Everything was close, only about 50 steps or so from the house.

So we were going into the fields surrounding the town, playing dominos in the evenings, playing cards, playing chess. We could go out in the evening, or stay in the same building, mostly downstairs, unsupervised. We had a full time.

On the first floor of our two story house lived another family, with many children. They were almost the same age as us, every two years another child, so we had friends. That family was the Eisenbergs. They had a remnants and fabric store in the front of the building, and they lived in the back.

When the parents would go to the synagogue on Saturday, the room with remnants was ours! And there we were creating all kinds of things, dolls and clothing. We had a great time.



The synagogue of Dzialoszyce
(view from the west).

Also on Saturday mornings we girls went over to my uncle’s house to dance with our cousins. Motl, my father’s brother, had inherited his father’s business, a store, and he and his family lived in the back of this store. I still remember exactly the outline of that apartment that used to

be my grandfather's. While the parents were out to synagogue we were singing and dancing, practicing dances of that time— 'Balancee'— some things where there were rows of two girls here, two girls there, imitating those dances that you see in the 19th century, dances in the Polish courts. We were dancing waltzes, polkas too, and other dances where eight people were reaching out hands and going under.

Our best times were spent in the courtyard where we had sand. There we had a ball to play with and numerous children. Four or five children would be playing at one time, it all depends who was ready to play. We were never hesitant to address one another and we had friends from other houses, too.

In the evening we were going for walks around the sidewalk of the market. For a long time, sometimes all evening, back and forth, talking. After the Sabbath, on Saturday evenings there were vendors in the street selling hot bagels.

We were going with a friend, with a boy, with a girl. Older people, married young people, were going out too in the evening with friends. There were many people walking around the market at night, and everybody knew each other. And that was really very social, a congenial entourage. It was a peaceful, nice life."

As grandma is talking, I think: what a bucolic country scene. How terrible to see in retrospect the horror that was advancing on them so rapidly. It makes me want to reach into the story and shake each one of them: "Can't you see? Run! Leave! Take what you can, but go! Misery and Death are flying towards your door, swirling in the peaceful country air."

* * *

Last night I went on a date to the theater. It was snowing lightly in the early evening on our way to the play. When we got out it was still snowing, now much harder. There were very few cars on the street, and when I finally was able to hail a cab it got stuck and I had to push it out of a snow bank—in the middle of 42nd street!

Finally we got back to her apartment. She had a bottle of champagne which I proceeded to open (nearly losing an eye in the process when the plastic cork I was struggling with shot up to the ceiling). With music playing softly in the background and drinking champagne we sat next to the window, high above Manhattan, watching the snow come spiraling down. It was a ferocious storm, and the snow swirled in violent, dense bursts, lashing the window, creating a spectacle of unforgettable intensity. Then we retired to the bedroom. It was a wonderful evening, thoroughly exhilarated by champagne, music and the forces of nature.

The next morning was a clear, cold, sunny day. I began the walk back to my apartment and was astonished to find not a single car moving on the streets of New York City. Silence reigned. One taxi was so deeply buried in the snow that all that one could see of it was the little light on the roof.

* * *

Grandma had so many brothers and sisters. I have only one brother and a few cousins, most of our extended family having perished during World War II. My brother and I are similar in some ways, but very different in other ways. It would be really interesting to take that theme and expand it to 9 other siblings.

Central Park after a snowstorm—72nd Street transverse.

The view from Danny’s bedroom after a snowstorm.

“Most families were numerous—I was born to a family of ten, six sisters and four brothers, children of a prosperous Jewish man. My uncle, who also lived in town, had about 8 children. My grandparents lived there, too, and they led a very nice life.”

Grandma, what were your brothers and sisters like?

My oldest brother, Abraham, was born in 1892. Abraham was intelligent and musical, playing the violin. He was not going to any school, but to a cheder. At that time there were no schools for boys, a cheder was to study Jewish religion and the scriptures.

But Abraham was reading a lot. He was quite intelligent, with very much initiative and business abilities. He worked with my father who took him into all the businesses.

Then came a child, a boy, who died at the age of four.

I remember you telling me he was your mother’s favorite.

‘The best.’

How did she know that he was the best one if she never knew him really?

She considered him the best because he was the easiest, easier than the older one. Might be he had some talents, I don’t know.

Then came your sister Minia.

Next child was my beautiful sister Minia. She was born in 1896.

She was the most beautiful daughter?

Minia, grandma's oldest sister.

Most beautiful daughter, the most beautiful girl in town. All the boys were admiring her.

Did both Abraham and Mina have blond hair and blue eyes?

Minia was blond and my brother had blue eyes too, but not blond, dark hair. And then came Israel, in 1898, and then came Nathan, 1900.

What was Israel like?

Israel was a musician too, violin. He was small and not so handsome, but a very fine man. He was married to the sister of Alec, you know, Banach (the husband of grandma's sister, Fela. They live in Israel. Banach was also grandma's mother's maiden name, so the Banachs were cousins).

Then was Nathan.

What was he like?

Blond, tall, not Jewish looking. Easy going, very much liked. Nathan was completely bald by the age of 20. He was shaving his head, like the actor Yul Brynner, and

he looked quite good that way. He's the one who came back so disgusted after going to see a famous hair specialist in Warsaw because the doctor turned out to be completely bald himself.

Good sense of humor?

Humor I would not say, no. My father had a great sense of humor and my sister Mina, too, and then Rozka, and Mila also has a sense of humor, but not the rest of the family.

So who came after Nathan?

After Nathan, I come.

So you're the fifth child.

Yes. And then came Sabina, of whom I spoke, that she was studying chemistry, became an engineer of chemistry at the age of 21. She wasn't pretty, but she was intelligent and very capable for sciences.

Then came Rozka (pronounced Rushka), the talented pianist. Rozka also was not pretty, but had a nice figure and everyone was attracted to her because she was so witty and pleasant. Very pleasant.

Then comes Aryeh, which means lion in Hebrew. He was tall, blond, went to Israel when there was no Israel yet, to an agricultural school. Came back because my parents wanted him back, unfortunately, for his military service.

And we lost him during the war, of course.

Then came Fela and Mila, who survived the war and who you know. My mother was 52 when she had Mila.

So there were 10 children altogether: Abraham, Mina, Israel, Nathan, you, Sabina, Rozka, Aryeh, Fela, Mila. And what were their age separations?

More or less two years.

And seven plus your parents were killed during World War II.

Yes. Abraham died before the war, but otherwise only Fela, Mila and I survived.

Fela

Mila

* * *

Lying on the couch after dinner, I stare at the lamps, one at the foot of the couch, the other next to the dining table. Sentinels, guardians, warm and glowing. Such warmth in this room. Grandma is straightening up the table after dinner. My senses take note of the smell of good food, my contented belly, the whoosh of the air conditioner. Muted brown tones from the tall wooden doors, the carved fireplace and old paneling add to the sense of comfort and warmth.

I am tired, yet ready and willing to do the dishes. Grandma says, “Use your strength to fight others, not to fight yourself.” She is right.

I don’t always appreciate her wisdom, but it came home to me the other day in speaking to a friend. Her grandmother is very senile at this point. She wishes she had a grandmother who is all there, whose every word “seems to be a pearl of wisdom.”

I do appreciate my grandmother. Images and memories of her are thoroughly woven through the fabric of my life. And so is this room, this building of warm brown tones and wonderful smells.

* * *

After fixing the balcony this morning with a workman, I come down with tar all over my hands and ask grandma for something to wash the tar off. She suggests Petrol.

“You know how it comes that I know that Petrol will do the job?” she asks.“ In Dzialoszyce young orthodox boys, primitive, behind the times people, kind of religious hoodlums, were throwing tar out of a can on the girls’ white dresses when they were going out on walks on Saturdays or holidays. Those zealots thought that such immodest displays of the older girls (wearing white dresses and looking too aggres-

sive, let's say) would bring misfortunes onto the Jews. One day my older sister, Mina, came home, her skirt all covered with tar, crying. We cleaned it off with Petroleum and that is how I know.

* * *

May Day, in Riverside Park with grandma:

Spring is here
for all to see.
Such a day!
Beneath this tree.

Though low with cold
The scents come through
My stuffy nose
From blossoms who

Grace the trees
in pink and white,
Bringing joy
to my sight.

The wind blows by,
grandma's asleep.
I keep a watch
as she lies deep

Amidst her dreams
in pink and white?
In joy or sorrow?
Who knows what might

Be found within
her pale blue eyes
And soft white skin.
She heaves a sigh,

I look, I wait,
a false alarm.
No, she's up!

C'mon, let's go!
We'll spend two hours
To see more trees
and smell the flowers.

Grandma, Danny and apple blossoms in Riverside Park.

* * *

I finally got a job! I'll be working as an editorial assistant of children's books at Doubleday, a large publishing house. I had actually been looking for work in the broadcasting field, but a friend was working in publishing mentioned this opening, half in jest. I thought to myself, "Hmm. That sounds interesting." I've always loved books with pictures: medieval illuminated manuscripts, children's books, comic books, fine illustrated books. I even took a course called Topics in Book Illustration in college, but I hadn't thought about children's books when looking for work. I applied—my mother said, "Don't send in your resume, go in person!"— hit it off well with the head of the department (a gorgeous blond), and got the job.

To celebrate grandma treated me to lunch at Tavern on the Green in Central Park.

* * *

I often question grandma about the religious life of her youth. She remembers many religious scenes from my childhood, traditional holidays. Everybody going to synagogue on Saturday.

"Girls were learning how to read and write Hebrew letters, how to write a little Yiddish. Yiddish and Hebrew were for the prayers, how to read and when to read and so on. I also went to the regular Polish school, which the boys in my family did not.

All my brothers went to cheder. Cheder means a room, really. That was the place where the melamed, the teacher, was instructing boys in religion from a very early age, all in the same room, sometimes from the age of four and five till they were at least bar mitzvah age (13) or more.

My mother used to have morning prayers together with the children. She would take the small children by the hand, walk around the table and say the prayers to-

gether, before breakfast. At a certain time, when the children grew up, they didn't walk around with mother, but they were supposed to say their prayers themselves.

I did not understand the Hebrew, I only knew it by heart. At a certain time I've forgotten the order of it, and then I thought, 'What am I saying? I don't understand, I might say things that are not normal, not understandable.' And I was ashamed to ask my mother, to tell me how to continue the prayer. And I stopped saying the prayer...and then I dropped it entirely. This was at the age of 13 or 14.

I really began to learn Hebrew later on with teachers in Kielce. I was reading Peres, Sholom Aleichem, in Hebrew, translated by Bialik, who was the greatest Hebrew poet. A Russian Jew, I think. He is celebrated in Israel. I was also reading Nietzche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* in Hebrew.

Passovers were unforgettable. Everything had to be cleaned and there could be no trace of bread or any product of flour. We cleaned the house until the point where one couldn't find even a speck of dust. The meal was prepared with greatest attention, and the table was prepared with the finest tablecloth and silver. Father and my brothers, everybody had new clothes.

The girls had white embroidered dresses, those Eilet fabrics. My mother was bringing our dressees from Kracow, from a specialist of children's dress. These dresses were snow-white, big white satin bows on either side. The embroidery was white, everything was white, pure white dresses.

The men were wearing their new outfits. White shirts, ties, and father was in that white shirt with golden embroidery. My father was wearing the white Kitel with golden lame and a golden yarmulke. Lots of candlesticks and lights, well illuminated.

We each had a place at the table where we normally sat. The table had to be next to a couch for my father to lie down in between prayers (part of the ceremony). We were sitting according to age. In between meals there were songs and prayers. It was a very pleasant evening, the most beautiful holiday in the Jewish religion.

Father and mother were dressed like a king and queen. It was a solemn and joyous occasion when Jews were freed from Egypt. We sat around a huge rectangular oak table with beautiful inlay that was especially made for us in our factory, as were the beautiful solid wood bent chairs. My father was a partner in a furniture factory, a place that he had given money when it was in trouble when we came to Kielce.

At the meal the whole family was together. The meal was delicious, there were a lot of songs that we were all singing. The youngest boy was reading the Haggadah, asking the questions, there were the answers, songs in between dishes, good, sweet wine. It was a truly joyful, beautiful evening."

* * *

I have had absolutely no education in religious matters at all, and neither my parents or grandparents were religious. My father's grandfather even said once, Why should your children suffer for something they don't believe in? Yet my parents have always emphasized their Jewishness. I think it relates to the persecution they both felt when they were young, especially my mother who suffered greatly during World War II.

Lately I've been going to various synagogues, by myself or sometimes with a friend, exploring Judaism, joining Jewish choirs at the 92nd Street YMHA and the Hebrew Arts School. I find many of the ritual aspects and mannerisms of Jewish life repugnant, yet I am continually drawn back to it. I want to understand what it is that will always set me apart, what always lies in wait as a source of possible persecution.

As grandma pointed out to me the other day, whether I believe in Judaism or not, even if I convert, even for several generations from now, I and my descendants will be considered Jewish—just as they were considered by the Nazis.

* * *

As I lie down on the couch in the dining room I pause to reflect; this building has been a home to me for my entire life, one of the few things that has remained a constant since my earliest days. I feel so comfortable here, so at ease. Memories flood back to me, scenes of childhood: running through the apartment with my brother, jumping up and down on the beds, the smell of good food, the smell of grandma, a tenant, Mrs. Espinoza, who used to live upstairs. I used to play chess with my grandfather—I especially remember the time he won and said over and over, "I beat you! I beat you! You are nothing! Nothing!" He was laughing as he said it and I ran out of the room, crying.

Now I pull grandma down next to me as I lie on the couch. Hugging her I become aware of her looking at me. I look up into her time-worn, wrinkled face.

What is she thinking?

* * *

When grandma sees me caught up in my own thoughts at the table, often with a sad or pained expression, she quotes her mother: "A horse has a big head—so let it think!"

Don't think too much.

What was your mother like?

"Tall, striking. They said she looked majestic, beautiful posture. She had a fine, thin face, blue, blue eyes, dark, almost black, silky hair. She was not too thin and not too heavy—a beautiful figure.

In spite of being quite attractive, my mother was extremely shy and had some inferiority complex—not sure of herself at all. In those times to be heavy was fashionable and my mother used to envy so much women who had big double chins.

My mother was the one who was spanking. A good spanking!

Did I tell you what she once did to me when I was seven years old? I came to school, it was cold outside, during winter, and I hadn't put on my overalls, such 'rythuse' it was called. The maid came with a bottle of hot milk and my overalls to the school. That school was one room for all the grades, 6 grades in one large room. And so the teacher took me, put me on the table, put on the long pants and had me drink the milk in front of all the other children. I was so unhappy! (laughing) The most terrible thing that happened to me. I was so ashamed. That was the most terrible day in all my schooltime."

* * *

Every morning when I wake up to go to work, grandma has breakfast laid out for me on the table: the soft-boiled egg, the orange already cut up, slices of bread in a little basket, orange juice, milk and butter. A little bit later comes warm cereal, usually farina, with blueberries or raisins.

When I come home from work, wearing a new yellow tie, grandma stops to look at me. "You look so handsome. Clean! Good. Mmmhh!"

At the end of each day we are both quite battered. We collapse into exhausted slumber.

* * *

Transcribing the tapes of my conversations with grandma is like painting: people and places from grandma's past emerge, as if from a mist. First vague outlines, then colors, details, nuances spring to life! I piece it together, a bit from this tape here, another detail from that tape recorded at a later date. Slowly, like a mosaic, a forgotten world appears.

Speaking about grandma about her father, I learn his name, Joseph David Friedman. He was short. He had a wonderful sense of humor, blond hair, balding, blue eyes and a red beard. Another day grandma finds for me the only remaining picture of their father, a Nazi ID card saved by Mila (see p. 191).

"Jokes, he only had jokes, and they were not just typical jokes, but appropos for the particular situation and moment that called for it. He had a very good sense of humor. Not necessarily jokes about religion, but every day living. Small and inconspicuous physically, his warmth and inner qualities attracted everyone young and old.

He was very good to my mother, always brought her the tea with milk into the bed. 'And don't get up and don't work so much,' he would say to her.

Even though my father came from a family of modest means he became quite well-to-do, all on his own: he owned forests, buildings and flour mills at that time of my childhood. He started out with only 600 rubles that he received from his father-in-law as a dowry, but grew in success and prosperity continuously. As soon as he earned his first 1,000 rubles he returned the 600 to grandfather.

With no formal education whatsoever, only Talmudic instruction, with a scarce knowledge of the Polish language, with no other transportation than a little pony, he commuted back and forth between the Polish nobility of the region, purchasing crops from their farms, and re-selling them to mills and merchants. As my mother used to say, 'Whatever he touched turned into gold.'

I remember looking out at the market from my window where every morning the businessmen were gathering. My father was getting together with his associates, at 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning he was there already. And they were conferring when the families were still asleep."

* * *

Each night I press grandma's back on the floor, trying to straighten it out.

Talking with grandma about her teeth, I say they look better now that there is no gap between them (they were capped by a dentist). She disagrees and says she liked her teeth better before. I ask why. “Because they were mine!”

* * *

Today (June 15, 1983) is grandma’s 80th birthday. To celebrate, I bring home a small cake and light 80 candles on it, but the candles are so close together that they join into one huge flame several feet high! I ruin the cake putting out the fire, but at least I don’t burn down the kitchen. Grandma is amused.

* * *

Sometimes grandma makes references to her grandparents, especially her mother’s father, grandfather Banach.

Thinking of her as a grandchild and a grandparent simultaneously, makes my concept of time run in both directions at once: forward to when I (hopefully) will be a grandparent, backward to when my grandmother was a grandchild:

“My grandparents lived in that same town, my father’s parents nearby and my mother’s parents in the same house with us. None of them were alive by the time of World War II.

I remember vividly both my grandfathers. They were contrasts in every way.

David Joseph Banach, my mother’s father, was a tall, majestic man with a long white Tolstoyan beard, smoking a very long curved pipe, blue eyes, bushy eyebrows, strong, broad shoulders. He always went out for walks by 6:00 a.m. every morning. He liked to be on the fresh air, in wind or snow or cold with his coat and big hat.

He lived on the same floor as us with my grandmother, in their own apartment. We had a large apartment, seven rooms, and they had three rooms. He loved children,

especially the small ones and he would come in every day to play with us whereas grandma Banach did not come in very often. On Saturdays they would both join the family.

My grandpa was really giving us a great time. He was jolly and outgoing, he wanted to play with the children. In the living room there was a large kind of couch, that we called a ‘canape.’ We were waiting for him and he would have the children jump on that couch. We would take turns. He would hold us by the hand and sing to the tach (beat) of our jumping: ‘Bum-bara-baum-bum bim-bum-bum, Bum-bara-baum-bum bim-bum-bum, Na-na-na-na na-na-na...’

My grandfather supposedly was well-to-do, but had no real estate and nothing else than the money that he had earned before retiring at a very early age, about 40. He had four daughters and two sons. He took care of the family, of all the cousins and nieces and nephews who had no money to get married.

And children took care of their parents when it came the time that they could no more work or so. He lived till he was 92. That was about 1918 or 1919. One day he went to bed with an infection in his toe and never got out again. He must have been diabetic, he died of gangrene.

He was very much missed after his death; his rustic image, snow covered Russian fur hat, big eyebrows, fur collared coat on his tall, majestic, almost athletic body had brightened every place he came to with his agreeable presence.

I’ll never forget our outrage when during the First World War, the Germans caught him in the street and made him shovel the snow from sidewalks and streets. At the age of 86! He came home terribly exhausted and it took him several days to get back on his feet.

That was a kind of a prelude to what we have learned about Germans later.

His wife, my grandmother Banach, in spite of being lame and on crutches, always liked to be dressed beautifully—velours, on Saturday to put on all the gold she

had. Then people were coming to visit her or she was visiting us. She was wearing a golden chain that was exceptionally beautiful, very much like an antique, made out of thin, wide links.

We children liked to get close to it, and pull it, and try to tie it up in different ways, and one day our grandfather told us the story of that chain. At that time, at the age of sixty or so, my grandmother was already hard of hearing. My grandfather maintained or made a joke of it that she was always hard of hearing, but that he hadn't known about it before they got married.

In those times people were married through matchmakers. But before my grandfather got married, he said he went to the place where my grandmother lived with her family. They were from the town of Wislica (pronounced Vyslitza), where a famous battle was fought during World War I. He wanted to make sure whether it was true, as he had heard, that she is hard of hearing. And so her mother called her in, but instead of just calling, Golda, she called, Golda, Sarah, Rifka... all the names, and the children all showed up at the same time.

And so my grandfather felt very uneasy, but, as he said, 'I didn't want her to feel bad, so I offered her that chain.' He didn't want to show that he had any doubts about her. 'Deaf she was always, so it's not a new thing.' He didn't say it in a serious way, he was joking.

And that's the end of the story of the chain, of the golden chain."

(That reminds me of a story I heard on the radio the other day about a man celebrating his 51st wedding anniversary, crediting his long marriage to frequent separations when younger and gradual hearing loss as they got older.)

"My grandfather on my father's side, Alter Chil Friedman, was physically a complete contrast of Grandpa Banach. Very small, delicate features, rather frail and weak looking.

His deep interest in religion and Talmudic studies kept him away from the needs of every day practical life. It was my grandmother, Mala, who carried the burden of making a living. They had a store where one could buy from groceries to needlework to souvenirs. Grandpa was helping in the store only in the later hours of the day, while morning hours were devoted zealously to his spiritual needs of learning.

When they became older and weaker they gave the store to their son, Motl, my father's brother. They went to live with their daughter, Malka Bachmayer, and her family as was the custom in those days, just as my mother's parents lived with us. She also had a store, furnishings for dressmakers and so on. And upstairs was the apartment. I don't recall much of our relation to the Friedman grandparents.

I do remember vividly the day grandpa Friedman passed away. It was on the eve of the holiday after Passover, Shevuoth, around 4:00 or 5:00 o'clock in the afternoon of a long summer day. My father was next to him, and he said, 'I want to see all the family and possibly my friends to say goodbye.' He knew that he was dying.

There was a procession of people who came and waited in line to see that well-liked, respected parent, relative, friend for the last time. And all the grandchildren, who were numerous because there were three children of his in Dzialoszyce, all with big families. We were coming in one by one to his bedside and he was blessing us.

Do I use the right word, to bless? To me he said, and might be to the others also, to remain a Jew in creed and deed.

After everyone left, grandpa remained in some kind of meditative state, with only my father at his side. His mind was lucid even though his body had shrunk so that he looked almost weightless. Only the eyes were shining with some unearthly radiance. He kept praying to God to allow him to die before sundown so that his family could be spared seven days of Shiva. He wanted to die before the holiday comes in, so that the children wouldn't have to sit Shiva.

Do you know what Shiva is? Shiva is when a parent dies and the rest of the family is supposed to stay in the house. They sit on low stools, praying, eating little,

receiving only people who are bringing condolences. They are not to go out, no business of any kind to be conducted while they mourn for seven days. That is the religious way. But Shiva was not to be observed if the parent died on the eve of a holiday.

And so it was: he died at sunset in the arms of my father. He was close to 80. It must have been near the start of World War I."

And you didn't have to mourn at all?

"No. According to the religion we did not have to sit Shiva. We thought that he really was kind of a tzaddik, a man who is very virtuous. He was so small, so shrunken. It's an unusual thing to know when one is dying."

* * *

Last night grandma and I were talking. She said, "Sometimes, as I go to sleep, I think to myself, 'Wouldn't it be nice to die in my sleep, not to wake up in the morning?'" I agree with her. That is the best way to go. I sincerely hope that is how grandma dies, that she will avoid the long, slow decline that she fears so much. Above all she does not want to become a burden to her family.

"I'm afraid of living too long."

* * *

Often I sit grandma down on the couch next to me and hold her close, my arms around her belly and her back. My hands feel her strong biceps, caress her stomach, straighten her shoulders; I call it an injection of affection.

It is so good to hug—for me, for her, probably for all people— to hold, to caress. No words needed, just rocking together making sounds: Ahhhhhhhhhh,

Mmmmmmmmmm.... Talking about little disappointments, little happinesses, the main thing just to touch, to be close.

* * *

It's a Sunday afternoon in Damrosch Park at Lincoln Center. Grandma and I are at one of the free concerts, listening to a wind band.

This reminds her that during World War I the Austrians occupied Dzialoszyce. "Every Sunday they would play this kind of music in the marketplace—it was almost beautiful. They were very courteous, with Jewish officers among them. A certain Kupferman, a Jewish Austrian officer, was living in our house. Every time he passed the kitchen he would say to our cook, who was so primitive, with such worn out, heavy hands, 'Kuss die Hand.'

Later the Germans came through. The German Commandant, who was quartered in my parents' bedroom, came with a bouquet of white lilies for my mother when Mila was born in our drawing room. On the other hand, they also forced my grandfather to shovel snow when he was over 80 years old.

But it was very different from World War II where they treated Jews like cockroaches or rats—things to be exterminated."

* * *

During World War I the Germans who lived in grandma's house called her "Die Grosse, die Stolze" (the tall one, the proud one) because she was tall for her age and always holding her head high, proud, standing very straight (and maybe not talking to anybody).

Grandma told me that while we were doing a back stretching exercise to help her very curved upper back—arms behind her back, hands together and lifting up

while looking to the ceiling, tilting her head back. I told her to look up with her eyes and how nice it is to see her looking up because she looks down so much these days. This reminded her of the above anecdote. She has very clear, bright, grey-blue eyes.

"In 1918, when the First World War was over and all of Poland was liberated, we had a robbery. Bandits came to three Jewish families in Dzialoszyce: ourselves, the Merins and the Silvers. We heard them come in, shooting in the air. I don't know how they treated the other people, but at us it was very drastic.

We knew they were coming, but we let them in; they were banging the door with the butt of their guns, and we opened. They had us open the cabinets, show them everywhere if there is anything of value.

I was going with a candle—there was no electricity in those days—and showed them the glass cabinet where we had the silverware and silver objects. In the office they had my father open the safe, we had such a tall safe. They didn't wait for my father to open it, and instead they tore it out and all the money to pay for the house that we had purchased in Kielce came tumbling out. We were about to move to Kielce, a larger town. I don't remember how much it was in rubles, but it was the whole payment for the building. They took that money and my mother's jewelry. Then they put us all in the bedroom and told us not to budge from there until a certain time had passed, and closed us in the room, shooting and banging as they left.

When we came out, the cabinets with all our clothes were empty. Everything was empty in the house because those bandits had let in the whole population, the underworld, the Polish scum. And they took out our linens, our coats—it was wintertime—everything!

Now, in Dzialoszyce was a habit that the poor people, the beggars, were bringing whatever money or jewelry they had to people whom they believed are honest and who had a safe to hide these things. So there were several people who had hidden in our safe pearls, in a secret compartment, little objects of jewelry in little bags. What

made my parents happy is that the robbers did not take the beggars' things, they only took the things that were ours from the safe.

You know for the poor it was very difficult, but in well to do homes it was...we had three people working for us, servants, so we did not feel it. Also, a woman was coming in to wash the linens every month—apart from the three maids—a washer woman, would come in. Ironing wasn't done by the maids. It was a comfortable life.

There was a lot of poverty, much more than now. What's now considered poverty, in the U.S., was a luxurious life in Poland at that time."

* * *

Grandma also told me how every Thursday beggars came to their house and were given food, and that her father would bring home a poor person from the synagogue once a week for dinner in their home.

I've never heard of people bringing beggars into their homes here. It must be partly a reaction to the anonymity and fear bred by a big city environment, but there is really no excuse to become indifferent to the suffering of others. I wonder if religious people in New York City take poor people from their own congregation into their homes?

* * *

Some of grandma's nicknames for me:

Dandy
Danush
Danilee
Danalush

* * *

As I enter the door after work, I immediately detect the aroma of good cooking, trapped in the stairway, spilling over into the halls of the house. Coming in I find grandma and her Polish helper Christina busy in the kitchen, raw vegetables in piles and large pots bubbling away, their tops dancing and steam puffing out.

Grandma at the table in her bedroom/dining room at 305 W 76th St.

* * *

“In 1918 we moved to Kielce. My father had lost all that money prepared for the purchase of the building in Kielce during that robbery, but he must have had much more because we moved anyway, directly into that building.

Kielce was nice, too. It was not as small as Dzialoszyce, but it was also not big and surrounded with beautiful fields. Fresh air, good air was coming in. Kielce was 50% Jewish, 50% Polish, and we did not live in the Jewish quarter, rather in the best part of town.

There we had a beautiful house which had belonged to a Russian general who fled Poland after the war. The house had a beautiful garden, not big, but it had everything: trees, bushes, fragrant honeysuckle and flower beds, berries and strawberries. Wonderful fruit, heavy pears and plums, hanging so a child could pick. Everyone in town wanted to be invited to that garden.

We lived at Szeroka 16 (pronounced ‘Shiroca Sheznaschye’), on the outskirts of town, but still close to town because everything was close. Beyond it were just fields. There was only one house nearby, across the street, and a gardener, Mr. Gierowsky, who grew flowers and vegetables nearby for a living. The roses of a special red he called ‘The Friedman Rose.’ (Grandma’s maiden name was Friedman)

There was a little forest in Kielce, Karczowka (pronounced ‘Kartushka’), and a garden. A large garden, like a park. Mmmhmmm, mmhmm.”

Grandma
(Perla Friedman, her maiden name)
17 years old in Kielce, 1920.

* * *

Coming home after a long day's work to a warm, well-lit house, dinner almost ready, the smell of good cooking permeating the entire building, creeping, seeping into every crack of the house.

After the meal I collapse in the large red armchair. I watch grandma sitting at the table—she always takes longer than I do to finish the meal— contentedly munching on her vegetables, back curved, peering out over her eyeglasses.

* * *

This afternoon grandma and I were having an argument about whether I will go to work tomorrow or not—I'm recovering from a cold. I said yes. She said, "I say as the woman in *Antigone* does,'I am here to say no!'" (from a play by Sophocles).

* * *

Grandma is constantly claiming famous people are Jewish, at every opportunity. People in the news, on TV, everywhere.

This morning at breakfast we are listening to some music by Tchiakovsky which supposedly made Tolstoy cry. Grandma mentions that there is a book by Tolstoy, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, which she has only heard about. So she looks it up in the Larousse dictionary and finds a famous violinist by the name of Kreutzer, a Frenchman; "Probably Jewish." (to have a name like Kreutzer in France).

Then, later on, we speak briefly about the recently deceased pianist, Glenn Gould. "Jewish, you know." I look at her with a raised eyebrow and we both laugh.

I've noticed that my mother does this quite a bit also.

But when it comes to dealing with Jews in business, grandma tries to avoid

them at all costs because they are so shrewd and can cause a lot of trouble. “Such a Jew!” she says with vehemence.

* * *

Grandma is complaining while I do her back on the floor. “All I do is sleep these days.”

* * *

Another superb dinner: 3 lambchops, salad, rice with parmesan cheese (risotto), chicken vegetable soup, then ice cream to top it off. I am going to write a story called, The Grandson Who Lived Like a King.

I’m spoiled...but at least I know it.

* * *

Grandma speaks of literature and poetry almost daily, quoting from the famous Polish poets, as well as French and German poets, most often Heinrich Heine.

Speaking with grandma after dinner, I say I’m in a lousy mood for no particular reason. Her response is to recite the beginning of a poem by Heinrich Heine:

“Ich weiss nicht vas soll es bedeuten,

Das ich so traurig bin.”

— Die Heimkehr, 1823-24

Which is to say: I am so sad and I don’t know why.

* * *

Grandma, let's have a conversation. I want you to talk about how the world has changed since your youth. What are the differences between today and when you were young. What strikes you most?

(long pause)

Good question?

Very good question.

Just off the top of your head, what do you think is the most amazing thing that's occurred within your lifetime?

In private life?

No, I mean more in general. Technology...

Enormous changes. I remember when the first car came to Dzialoszyce. It must have been 1911 or 1912, and the whole town came running out into the street as a large, smoking, smelly car came roaring in. It was such a big event, it was so surprising...you just cannot imagine. We have seen with our own eyes a machine that goes by itself, without horses and without a driver.

Had they ever heard of a car before?

No.

You had never even heard of one?

No, there were only horses. Trains already existed, but there were no cars.

There was no record player as it is today. Rather there was one gramophone in the town, where one played records, music of Caruso...It had a big tube where the sound came out. Only one in the whole town.

Who had it?

The father of one of my friends. From time to time children were invited to listen to the gramophone.

That was a big treat?

Mmmmmm! Something very, very unusual and interesting. We had one of the first telephones in Dzialoszyce; very few people had a telephone. The telephone was used mostly for communication with our other properties, in the country. I was about 10 years old at that time, about 1913.

What about radio, and television?

There was no radio. I think radio appeared much later. When I got married I listened to a very good radio. That was in 1930...Your grandpa, my husband, bought for me a wonderful Horniphone radio. I don't think we had a radio before I was married.

Do you remember the first time you saw an airplane?

I don’t remember the first time I saw an airplane. It must have been during WWI, but I don’t remember exactly. I do remember the first time I heard about one, though. It was in the theater where a so-called conferencie was delivering a monologue, describing aviation as ‘a good career for your son: when he will fall down he’ll have a beautiful funeral and you’ll get a good pension.’ It meant, at that time, that almost every airplane was dangerous, doomed to crash.

Oh, those were excellent theaters in Poland, in Kielce. They were coming from Warsaw. Great theater, not traveling troupes, they were established in Warsaw but would make guest appearances. In Polish mostly.

There was also a Yiddish theater established by Esther Kaminska. She came, I think, from Russia. An elderly woman who, probably without any schooling, without any special preparation, was a famous actress. And then was her daughter, Ida Kaminska. They mostly played dramas or tragedies, Yiddish, and they were excellent, excellent actors.

The first cinema?

I think in Dzialoszyce they came with a machine and a screen and it was showing a man sleeping and snoring and a fly on his nose, and he was shaking off the fly. A silent film. And it was in somebody’s stable or something of that kind. Also showing two people fighting with each other. It was very impressive.

And, photography was also very primitive. On a big stand, the photographer his head under the black cover.

* * *

The rain patters gently on the air-conditioner outside the window, the light is low. As I bend over grandma to straighten her back I look at her face, creased with age

and fatigue, and I am saddened. Sometimes, especially at these times, she looks as though she's already a corpse.

What makes me sad is not so much death itself, rather that she has willed her body to science. I think of medical students dissecting her as an object, probably joking all the while. Very distressing. How could they ever know the beauty of this woman's soul?

* * *

During the day, while I am at work, grandma often goes to a nearby center for older people. There she takes classes in French and Spanish, gets discount tickets for cultural events and goes on trips with other older people.

She's also taking an exercise class there with an attractive young woman. It is actually closer to aerobic dancing than exercise. Often the students can't follow her, but they enjoy watching her vitality, exuberance and exotic outfits.

While the instructor is jumping and stretching and dancing, she talks very openly about her personal life.

What was she talking about today? I ask.

Her latest lover left her. 'Can you imagine?' she said, 'He said he was bored! Bored!' It is a little bit not so normal to talk about these things in front of others.

Interesting though.

She just can't seem to find herself. And so attractive and really talented. She should be in the movies or on television.

It’s amazing how open she is in front of an entire room of people. But at least she has a sex life to talk about.

Maybe you would like to meet her?

Maybe...Is she really attractive?

Very! Very.

Sure, we could try.

Grandma got her telephone number for me, and I called her up.

The first time I took her out for lunch after her exercise class to a casual eatery near by the older people’s center, Bagel Nosh. Grandma didn’t think it was so appropriate to take her there, but I didn’t feel like spending a lot on her right away.

The next time we went to a comedy club. In one of the routines two women are talking to each other about men they had gone out with recently, and at one point one of them says to the other, “And can you imagine, on our first date he took me to Bagel Nosh. Bagel Nosh!” —as if that were the most boorish, inept thing one could do on a first date. I did not think that was very funny; I felt like sliding under the table and out through the floor. But my date didn’t seem to notice the joke and we went on to have a nice time anyway.

* * *

Walking through the East Village with some friends on a Saturday night. As we approach Astor Square and Cooper Union, punk fashion begins to dominate the crowd: men with Mohawks, women with brightly dyed hair, orange, pink, purple. Two

little boys perform rap music with a crowd gathered round. One, about ten years old, plays a drum, while the other, no more than eight and quite small, raps and dances, delighting the crowd with a skill and self-assurance far beyond his years.

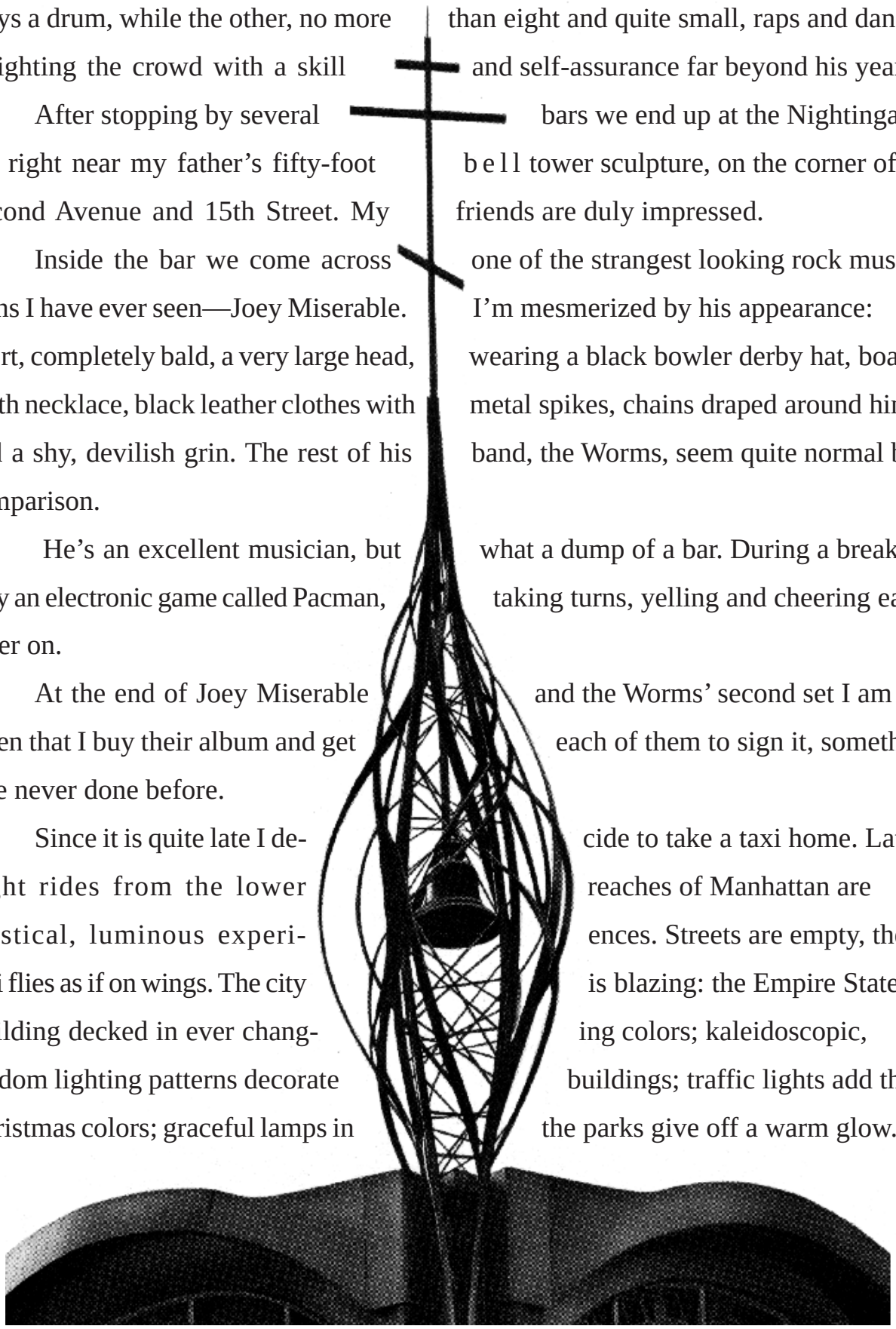
After stopping by several bars we end up at the Nightingale. It's right near my father's fifty-foot bell tower sculpture, on the corner of Second Avenue and 15th Street. My friends are duly impressed.

Inside the bar we come across one of the strangest looking rock musicians I have ever seen—Joey Miserable. I'm mesmerized by his appearance: short, completely bald, a very large head, wearing a black bowler derby hat, boar's tooth necklace, black leather clothes with metal spikes, chains draped around him, and a shy, devilish grin. The rest of his band, the Worms, seem quite normal by comparison.

He's an excellent musician, but what a dump of a bar. During a break we play an electronic game called Pacman, taking turns, yelling and cheering each other on.

At the end of Joey Miserable and the Worms' second set I am so taken that I buy their album and get each of them to sign it, something I've never done before.

Since it is quite late I decide to take a taxi home. Late night rides from the lower reaches of Manhattan are mystical, luminous experiences. Streets are empty, the taxi flies as if on wings. The city is blazing: the Empire State Building decked in ever changing colors; kaleidoscopic, random lighting patterns decorate buildings; traffic lights add their Christmas colors; graceful lamps in the parks give off a warm glow.



Fify foot bell stainless steel bell tower by Jan Peter Stern at the corner of 15th St. & Second Ave. in New York City

My father’s other outdoor sculpture in Manhattan, on Third Ave. between 41st and 42nd St.

Another day traveling through the city, I unexpectedly come across another of my father’s large outdoor sculptures, on Third Avenue between 41st and 42nd Street.

It’s such a good feeling to see it—startling, as if he’s actually there.

“Hi, dad,” I always say when I see his sculpture. He has pieces all over the country. Whenever I go to another city he says, “Can you see my sculpture there?”

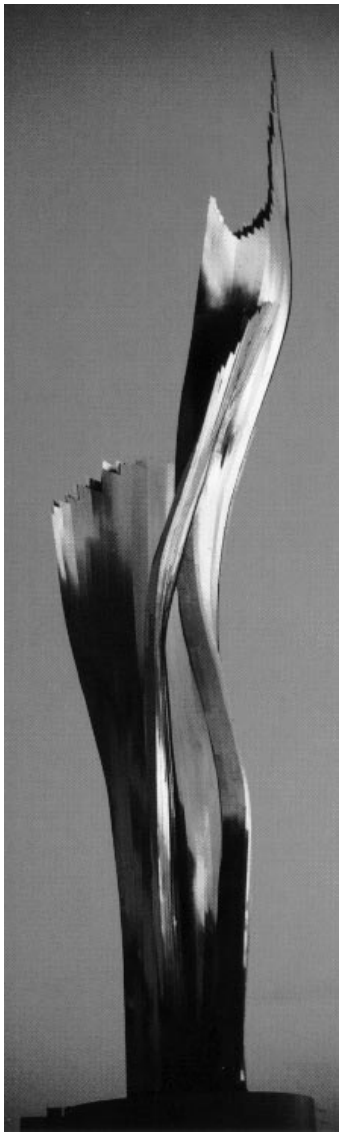
When I was growing up I helped him. He worked with metal, usually painted and stainless steel. I found it difficult to work with, the metal stiff and unyielding, but it blossomed under his touch...

Maritime Plaza, San Francisco

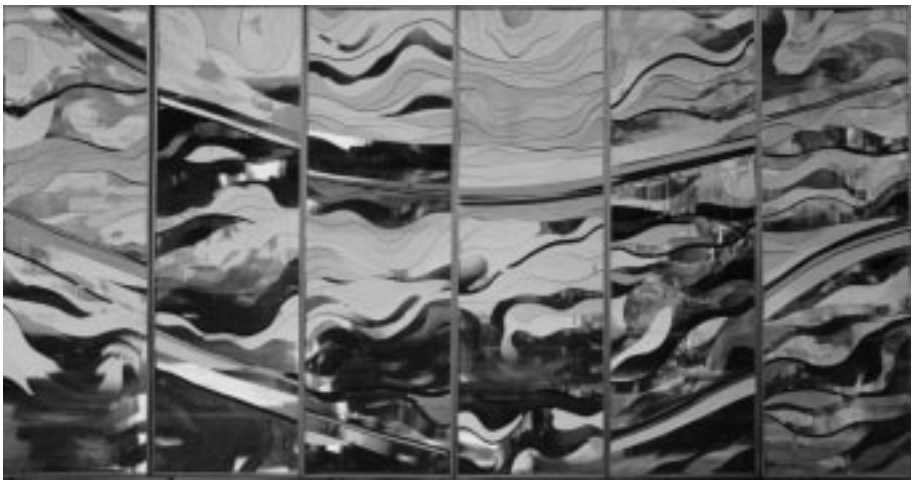
Century City, California

Storm King Art Center,New York

My father, Jan Peter Stern.



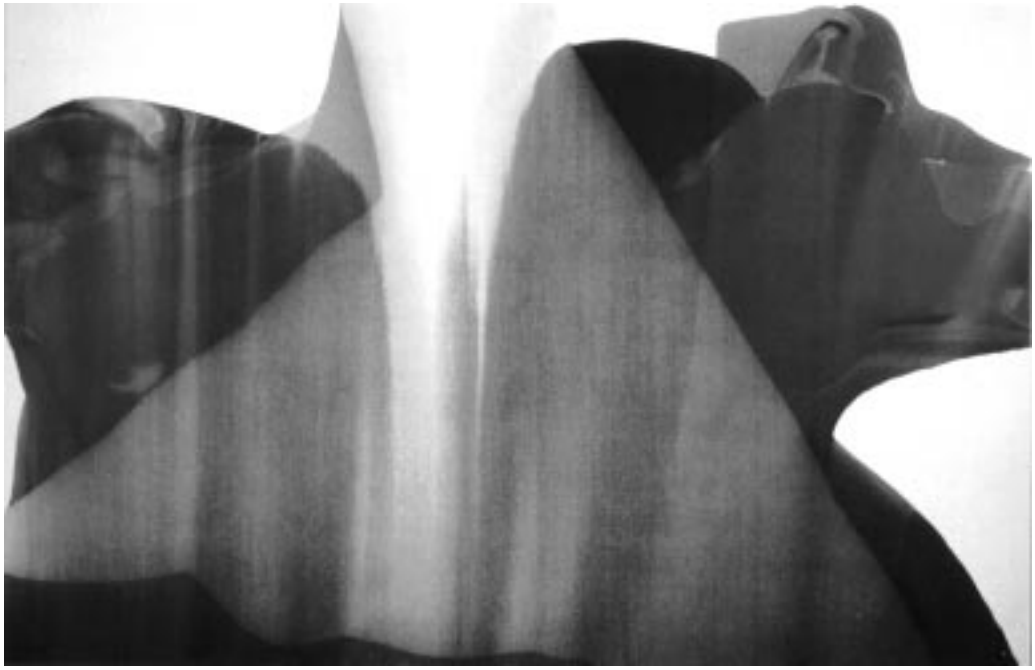
1964 Worlds Fair,
New York (35 ft)



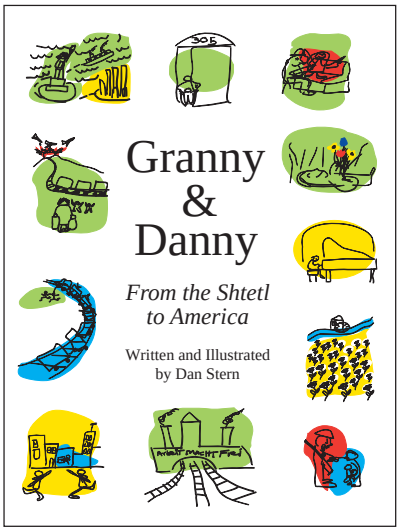
Alcoa headquarters, Chicago (12ft x 25ft)

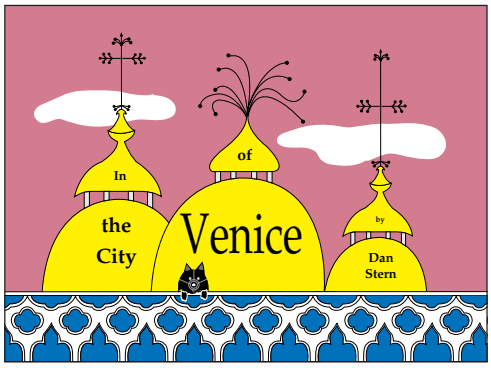
Irene Monat Stern

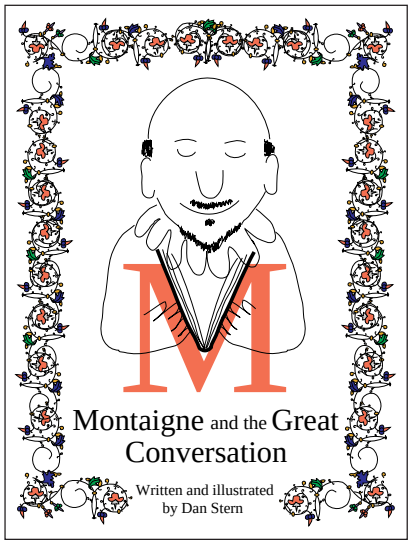
My mother is also an accomplished artist, with works in public, private, and corporate collections across the country.

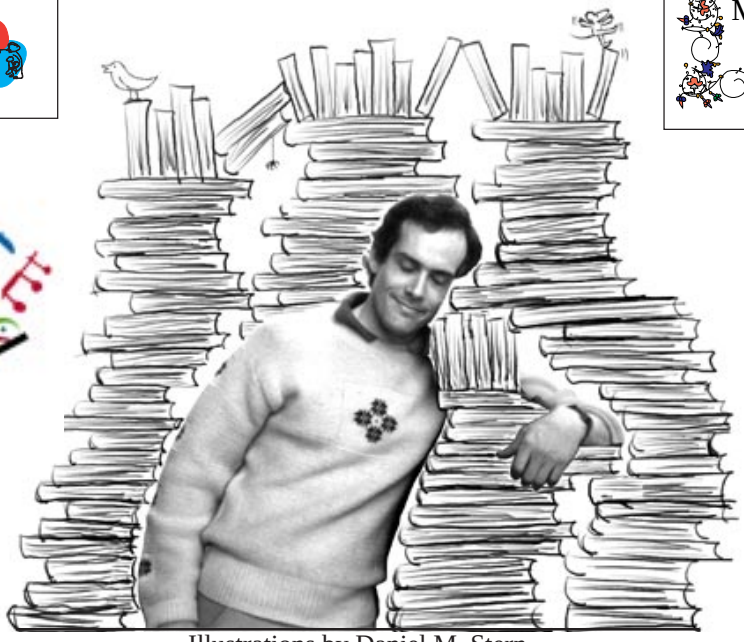


Paintings by Irene Monat Stern

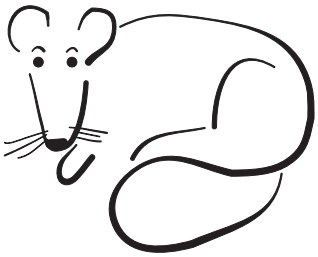




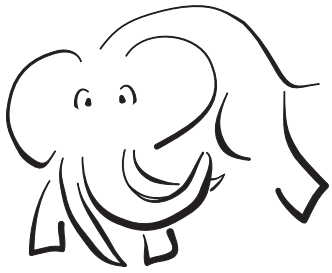


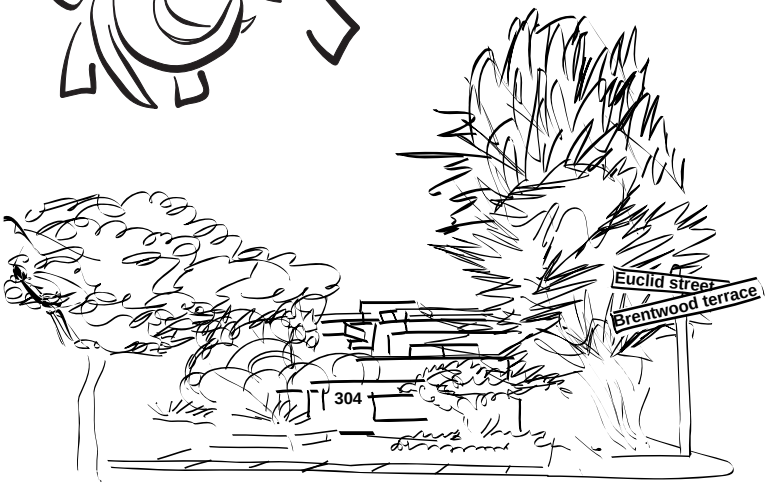


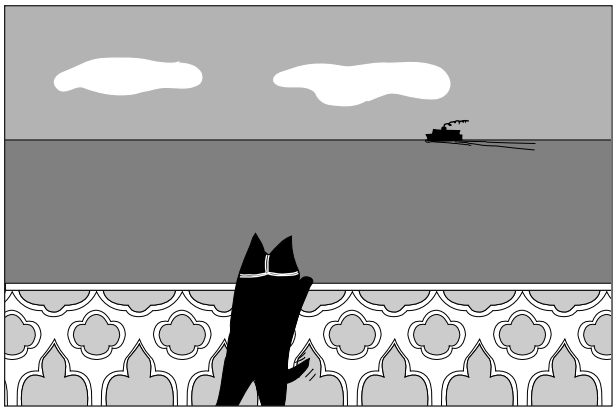
Illustrations by Daniel M. Stern



I've always enjoyed making things, too. Words and images. I love books, writing and illustrating. That's my medium! Books, children's books, publishing, graphic design...







* * *

At dinner. In speaking about how I should really learn to cook more, but I don't show an interest, grandma quotes from a play, The Wedding, by Wyspianski, "Tylko oni nye chca chciec,"—a passage where a peasant says that aristocrats could change things if they would 'want to want.'

* * *

Amazing as it may seem, grandma and I virtually never argue. When we do, though, this is about as bad as it gets:

Grandma says, "Those nuts that you bought a second time are no good again. Do you think you might return them on your way out today?"

Grandma, I really think it would be better if you did it yourself. Every time I choose them they're no good. And I don't even like nuts.

"They are very important. Your father has them all the time and I don't know when I will be able to get there. It is not such a big deal to go in, return them and choose some other kind. What are they called, these large, smooth ones?"

Grandma, I think you should do it. I returned them the last time and they won't take them back so many times from me.

"What is the problem? You just go in, give it to them, and choose some others."

Every time I choose them they are no good. I don't like nuts.

"So. Okay. Go ahead, I will do them some other time."

She is irritated, I am irritated. We go to our separate living quarters for awhile and apologize to each other later. And that's about the extent of our most serious disagreements.

* * *

I am so proud of grandma: 82 years old, doing all the shopping, cooking lunch for me and Teresa (the cleaning woman) , taking care of me when I am not well, running the house.

* * *

Sounds come from the kitchen as I wait for dinner: ticking of the timer, then the ding; clattering of dishes; water rushing from the faucet; clanging of pots and pans.

And the smells, oh the smells! Artichokes hearts with melted butter; baked apples; soups of every kind—chicken, beets, pickles, barley, vegetable, miso; salad with vinaigrette dressing; lamb chops, steak, fish, chicken.

The aroma of grandma's great cooking fills the house and probably drives the tenants crazy.

* * *

At meals we usually listen to classical music, records from a huge collection that was left to my grandmother by a former tenant (he had so many records in his room that there was just a narrow path to his bed) Each time I put a new record on we go through our usual music quiz:

“Whose music is this?” asks grandma.

Guess, I say.

I don’t know.

Come on. Just one guess.

I really have no idea.

Anything. Pick a name. What period does it sound like to you? Baroque, classical, romantic?

Might be...Mozart?

Not too far off. Listen to the music for a moment grandma. Do you hear that motor-like, steady, driving pulse? And the intricate contrapuntal lines, the melodies in each instrument that weave around one another? That’s baroque music. Try again.

I just don’t know. Have no idea.

One more guess grandma, anything, and then I’ll tell you.

Could be...Vivaldi?

Close. That's a good guess because Vivaldi is a baroque composer, but it's Bach.

That's what I wanted to say, but I just wasn't sure. Beautiful, beautiful music.

We also listen to the music of Brahms, the Serenade #1. This reminds her of a radio program which she heard earlier today about Jean Jacques Rousseau, the French philosopher. She tells me about his life and about his famous work on education, *Emile*; also about his involvement in the French revolution.

Later we talk about a book she read 40 years ago by Jean Paul Sartre in connection with the issue of homosexuality (featured on the cover of a recent issue of Newsweek magazine). All the while she deals with the practical aspects of day to day life, cooking, cleaning, supervising our maintenance man/plumber Chris who is working here this evening.

After dinner I do the dishes, but still have enough energy left to play classical guitar a bit.

* * *

Waking up from a night that is not long enough I lie in bed, staring at the smooth white ceiling. Time to get up...stretch, groan, roll out and begin the usual routine of a shower and shave, ignoring the dull ache at the back of my head that cries out for more sleep.

Carefully checking to see that I have everything before going out, and then locking the door to my room I step out into the hallway of the old townhouse. The beautiful wooden bannister and paneling tell of an elegant past, now sultried by the

The stairs by Danny's room.

cool white glow of the naked fluorescent lights on each landing. Three steps down, landing, turn right. Fifteen steps more, stop to examine myself in the mirror that hangs in front of an old door no longer in use. Landing, turn right, two steps down, turn right, six steps more and I'm at the entrance to my grandmother's apartment.

Hi Grandma. The door slams behind me. Classical music is playing softly in the background. From the kitchen comes "Hi Danny!" A quick hug and then I sit down, groggily, to eat the breakfast that has been so beautifully laid out for me.

Most people wake up, dress and dash out the door to get to work on time, and only then grab a doughnut or some coffee at the office. I get a hearty meal each morning: sliced orange or grapefruit, a glass of juice, soft-boiled egg with a slice of toast, and, best of all, farina with blueberries!

"And don't forget your vitamins."

Grandma is a little rumpled from the night's sleep, but her eyes are fresh and ready for the new day. There is a pleasant shuffle to her walk as she takes dishes back and forth between the kitchen and the table, slightly bent over, smiling, delicate.

In the center of the block is a garden where the sunlight filters through gently swaying leaves and chimes sound softly on the wind.

Suddenly I realize that I'm late. "Got to go Grandma!"

" Take a banana!"

"Can't grandma, I'm late."

"No, wait, take the banana..."

"Bye!"

"Wait, here it is."

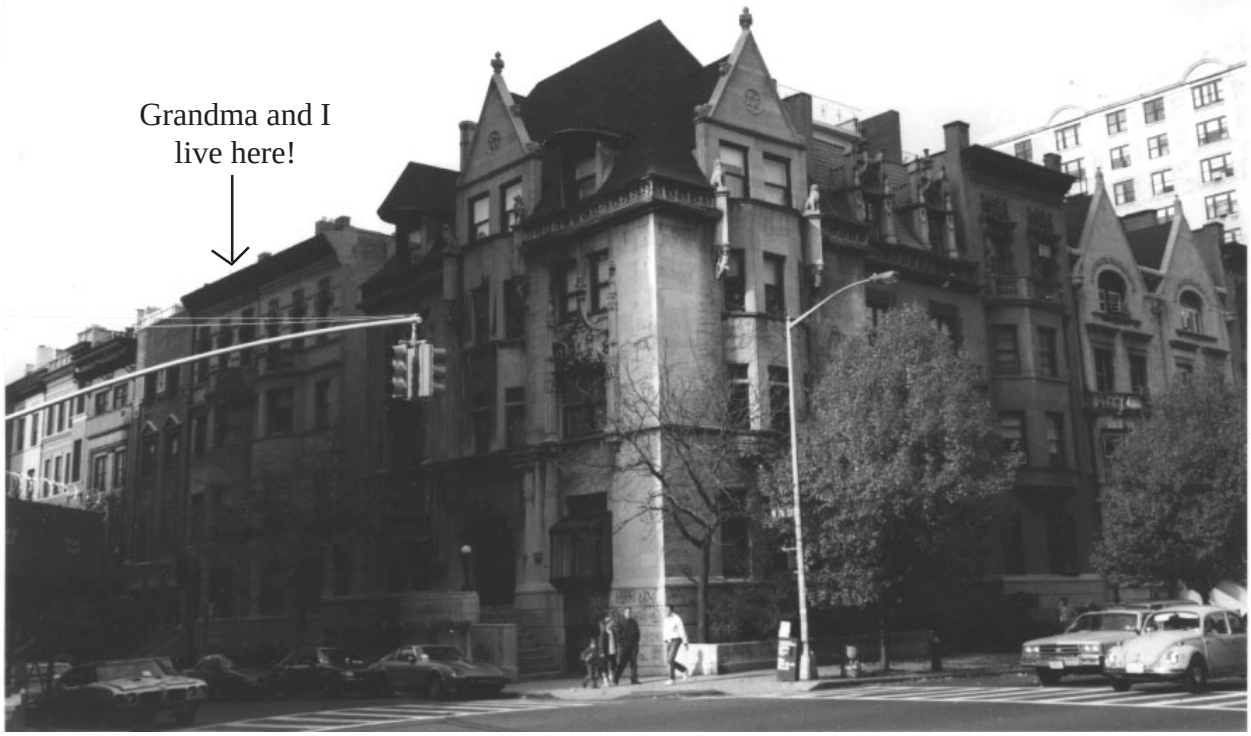
“Grandma, I don’t want it.”

“Okay, bye-bye," she laughs.

“Bye!”

From the darkness of the hallway and vestibule I emerge into the blinding light of a muggy summer day. What a drag to have to wear business clothes in this weather. I take the liberty of wearing running shoes and changing into leather shoes later on at the office. How my life has changed! Growing up in California, the son of artists, I didn’t even know how to tie my own tie until I was 22.

The daily trek across town begins. Historic rowhouses along West End Avenue



The corner of West End Avenue and 76th Street, one of the city’s most beautiful rows of town houses.

gradually give way to large commercial buildings along Broadway, then scale back down again to brownstones as I approach Central Park.

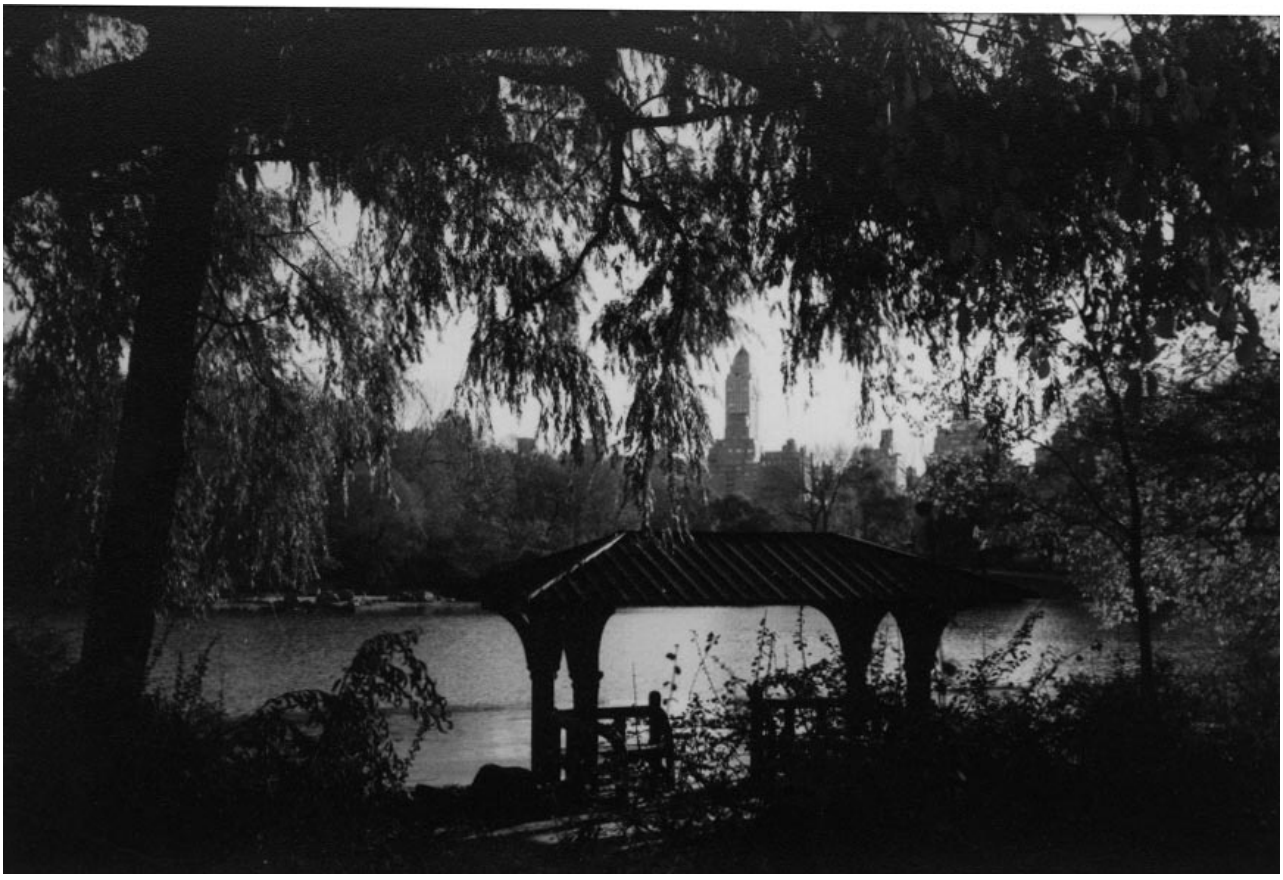
Everywhere I look I see a new ornament, a gargoyle,

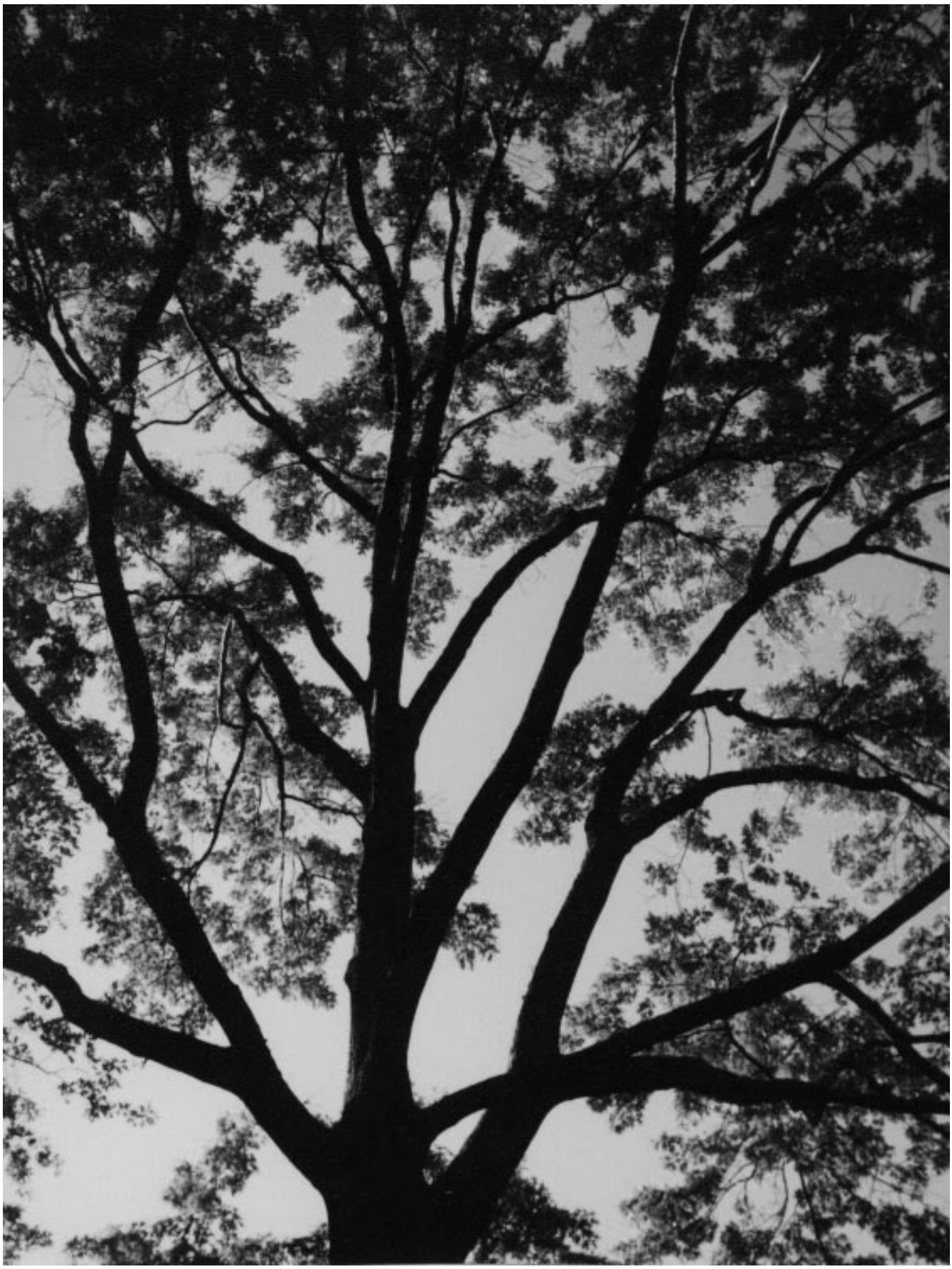
a column, an ornate entrance grill, a beautiful wooden molding within.

Traffic rushes by. People hurry.

As I walk along at this early hour I’m often lost in my own thoughts. My legs are on automatic pilot. My mind takes a back seat and wanders.

Coming upon Central Park is always a revelation, an oasis in the midst of asphalt and concrete. Through twisting paths I make my way across, stopping to admire the view of soaring midtown buildings from Sheep Meadow. Along the path the lilacs are in full bloom, giving off a fragrant odor. Morning glories climb the fence and open to the sun. Along a tree-lined path, statues recline under a canopy of summer foliage.





At the bottom of the park soaring skyscrapers cast long shadows in the early morning sun. On Fifth Avenue cars stream by, a solid metal mass, dominated by blue buses and yellow cabs.

Fifth Avenue and Central Park South.

I have become a connoisseur of window displays: Bergdorf Goodman is the worst. Very, very strange. The designer shoe store on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 57th Street is always imaginative. Saks Fifth Avenue is opulent and occasionally inspired. I take special note of the book stores, what is on display and how they are arranged.

The Chrysler Building.

After checking out Scribner's window—what a beautiful bookstore!—I turn the corner of 48th street and soon I'm at my company's building.

Standing at the elevator bank in the mornings I wonder who I will see. Some of the top executives of the company? Friends on my level? Is my appearance decent after the long, sweaty walk across town? I wish they had showers here.

Stepping out from the elevator, waving hello to the receptionist, Emma, I walk by grey walls that are becoming awfully familiar. What am I doing here?

Ever since returning from my vacation in June, I've been feeling a mounting sense of dissatisfaction with work. The same thing every day, over and over. Forms, more forms! Filing and more filing. When I think about the editor's role of acquiring a book, all I can see is the mountain of paperwork that will be generated by such an undertaking. Or, when I imagine myself being in my boss's job, do I see that as something worth striving for?

I'm exhausted, barely able to keep up with what I have to do as it is. And to advance one really has to do more than just what is necessary.

Where am I going with my life? The old confusion, put to rest for 3 years here, 2 years there, begins to rear its ugly head again. I'm at a crossroads once more, floundering.

Coming home, exhausted after work on this hot, muggy day (a very appropriate word—it is just like being mugged) I collapse on the couch. From the kitchen the smell of good cooking wafts over me, making me realize how hungry I really am. Sounds of dishes, Polish being spoken, and the air conditioner.

At dinner Grandma sits at the head of the table. Christina, the Polish woman who helps us, and I sit opposite one another. We talk, praising the food, inquiring as to how everybody's day went. As the conversation drifts off into Polish, I sit silent, listening to the strange foreign sounds. I try to make sense of it, occasionally asking a question, what this or that word means, then lapsing again into my own thoughts.

Grandma eats, her back hunched over but her thoughtful grey-blue eyes very much alive. She listens carefully to what people say, always responding in her quiet way. Christina talks a lot, but I don't mind because she is lively and pleasant to look at with her nicely proportioned figure, blond hair, brown eyes with eye-liner and high-pitched, melodious voice.

It is an intimate, warm atmosphere. The food is good, the company is good, life is good. As I retire to the couch, stuffed and tired, I drift off to sleep.

* * *

We are sitting on a bench in Riverside Park in the late afternoon, sun filtering through the rich green leaves of late summer. Grandma is reading aloud, very expressively, from a book I brought home for her the other day from work, *The Golem*, by Isaac Bashevis Singer.

The story is about the response of Prague's 16th century Jewish community to the false charge of killing a Christian child and using her blood for matzo.

Grandma tells me how this accusation was still being leveled towards Jews in her own youth. In Poland, not far from the city of Lodz, in a small town called

Grandma in Riverside Park at 78th Street.

Lowicz, she once passed by a little church with a huge old oak, maybe hundreds of years old, in front of it. There, inside the church, she saw a small white coffin, like that of a very little child, with the following inscription on it: This child's blood was taken by the Jews for their Passover Holiday matzos.

* * *

Christina, the woman who was helping my grandmother, is now back in Poland. In a letter to my mother, she says how grandma was sad before I came to New York, but now that I am there grandma talks and eats and is like 20 years old. "Danny is the belly-button of her life."

* * *

Every day my grandmother makes a wonderful lunch for me to take to work—two or three sandwiches with various meats, cheese, lettuce, tomato, and sprouts, some fruit, a drink, and a frozen bottle to keep it all cold.

I am very grateful for this food, made with love. But in some ways it is a handicap because I tend to go out less with co-workers for meals, one of the best times to socialize. On the other hand I stay healthier, getting good nutrition and not getting colds or flu or food poisoning as often as people who eat in restaurants all the time.

* * *

Grandma is smelling a container of Golden Seal vitamin capsules: "Very pleasant," she says. "*Very* pleasant."

* * *

Yesterday grandma dropped a knife on the ground in the kitchen and I didn't pick it up (I didn't notice that it had fallen, really!). She said, A gentleman should pick up when a lady drops something and proceeded to relate to me a poem by Heinrich Heine, Der Handschuh (The Glove). It's the story of how a lady drops her glove into the lions' cage at the circus or theater and she expects the man to get it for her. He does and is unharmed, but he says to her as he walks away, "Den danke, Dame,Brauch ich nicht." (Your thanks, madam, I do not need)

She has proven her character, says grandma.

* * *

"After World War I, my father had many houses, two houses in Dantzig, two houses in Kielce, beautiful houses.

My oldest brother Abraham, he should forgive me, talked him into selling the houses to buy a big object, like a mill. There was a mill advertised, a very big mill, in Klomnitze, near Czenstochowa. They said later, my brothers, that he wanted to have a bigger part in the business this way. My father bought that big mill, with two acres of land, a peasant mill, and gardens, and had to sell the houses.

So the mill took in all the houses, and when it was in operation nobody lived there to watch what was going on in that mill, so people were stealing, the workers were stealing everything, there was no organized anything. Abraham was going there once a week and was coming home for the weekend. But the mill was going very badly. My father decided that somebody has to live there in order to have an eye on it. He decided to move to Klomnitze. That was before my marriage, in the twenties, might be 1926 or 1928.

That was a drastic change, a very unfortunate one. In Klomnice my parents had no company really, nothing like those Saturday night gatherings in Dzialoszyce. But my father had brought already that mill under control. He was making the best flour,

peasants were coming into the peasant mill where they were bringing their grain and they were doing themselves the milling...

Then my father's mill was burned down in Klomnice, set on fire by a jealous competitor. My father was so distraught that he had to be restrained from throwing himself into the fire. He had already been very upset about having had to distance himself from Abraham because of the younger sons' jealousy over the purchase of the mill. Abraham was his dearest child, the apple of his eye, and Abraham also had recently died of a stroke.

On top of that, my father had stopped paying insurance on the mill because it was costing him almost as much as running his entire household for a year, and the mill was doing well.

That was a great tragedy to my father (moral: don't put all your eggs in one basket). I was married at that time, living in Lodz.

But the same thing happened after that mill that was burned down as happened in Dzialoszyce after the robbery. People immediately came to help out my father, to lend him money. He was so well liked."

* * *

Lying on grandma's bed one evening after work, grandma on the floor. We talk and rest and talk some more.

I listen to the reassuring and familiar tick of the clock on the mantelpiece, and the loud, but also familiar and comforting grinding of the old electric clock in the entrance room.

That large, ornate clock in the entrance room makes such loud, grinding noises, yet I don't even notice it at all anymore unless I happen to be really listening.

I have become accustomed to sounds which would probably be unpleasant and intrusive to others upon first hearing.

* * *

Between World War I and II, before she was married, grandma studied French in Toulouse, France. She even got her teaching diploma, but never taught professionally.

Tonight I ask her to translate with me the poem *A Toute Epreuve* (Ready for Anything) by Paul Elouard. It's a facsimile published by George Braziller of a famous edition with illustrations by Joan Miro that I just bought. We sit together on the couch, admiring the illustrations, the poetry, debating nuances of words while listening to one of Handel's Concerti Grossi:

L' UNIVERS - SOLITUDE	THE UNIVERSE - SOLITUDE
Une femme chaque nuit	A woman every night
Voyage en grand secret.	A trip in great secret.
2	2
Villages de la lassitude	Villages of lassitude
Où les fille on les bras nus	Where girls have naked arms
Comme des jets d'eau	Like jets of water
La jeunesse grandit en elles	Youth is growing in them
Et rit sur la pointe des pieds.	And laughs at the tips of their feet.
Villages de la lassitude	Villages of lassitude
Où tous les etres sont pareils...	Where every living thing is the same...
* * *	* * *

5

Le corps et les honneurs profanes
Incroyable conspiration
Des angles doux comee des ailes...

* * *

Plume d’eau claire pluie fragile
Fraicheur voilée de caresses
De regards et de paroles
Amour qui voile ce que j’aime...

* * *

Grandma and I stop for a moment
and look
and listen.

Silent.

Beauty
surrounds us
in every way.

5

The body and the profane honors
Incredible conspiracy
The angles sweet like wings...

* * *

Plume of light water, fragile rain
Cool veil of caresses
Of looks and of words
Love that veils what I love...

Danny in the vineyards (1977).

* * *

What I find in being with grandma, what I've learned from her (and she, in turn, has learned from life) is the ability to find great satisfaction from the simple things: a warm soup, calm music, peaceful conversation, having a roof over one's head, food to eat.

She tells me a story by Sholom Aleichem, "Buntsche Schweig":

"It's about a poor man who was taken advantage of by everyone, a schlemiel and a schlemazel, who dies and goes to heaven. When he comes to God he is received in a very important way. The Almighty says to him, 'You have been so unhappy during your lifetime, so humble, suffering so much, ask what you want, you may have anything that you could wish for.'

And Buntsche Schweig puts his head down and thinks, and, finally, he says, 'If I may, If I might, could I get a hot roll with fresh butter on it?'"

Just as she finishes the story, the record player comes to the delicate ending of a Chopin's Waltz, played by Arthur Rubinstein. A perfect ending.

* * *

This morning I went to wash my hands in the bathroom sink and found grandma's teeth there.

* * *

Grandma is intently looking for a needle in an old carved wooden box. Her whole being is focused on this one small task. Slowly, surely, her hands find their target.

* * *

I’m going out to a party, soon after I’ve had a cold.

“Your mother told me not to let you go out.”

Grandma...

“I said to her you don’t listen to me anymore. She said, ‘He doesn’t listen to me anymore either.’”

* * *

One evening, as I lie on the floor next to grandma, she says that I am like the son she never had—but could have had. I ask her what she meant by that and she said that she had several abortions, one when my mother was only 6 months old. It was very painful in those days, worse than childbirth. But both she and grandpa hated using condoms and instead used the withdrawal method.

We also have a whole long talk about what I use with my girlfriends. I told her about how I smiled to myself when one of my girlfriends, as I was fumbling with her bra that unhooked in front, said, “I bet you’ve never seen one like that!” Grandma uses only that kind and always unhooks hers right before I press her back on the floor.

* * *

Sunday afternoon. Sitting at lunch, listening to a peaceful string quartet by Gabriel Faure, talking to grandma and watching her eat: her face is wrinkled, her head is bowed, her hands are large and a little stiff, her hair is gray. The expression in her

blue-grey eyes, peering out from above her glasses, is deep, brimming with experience. It's a gaze that carries within it memories upon memories, like the layers of an exposed cliff. But these layers keep moving, swirling through one another, migrating from one level of consciousness to another, mixing, melting, merging: Poland, the war, France, her children, the years in this country. Peacefully eating, quietly munching, we talk.

We talk about music, art, flowers I just bought her, my trip to Europe, business matters of the house, sex...

She quotes Heine:

Sie sassen bein Tische und dranken	They sat at the table, drinking,
Und sprachen von Liebe viel:	And spoke of love a great deal:
'Die Liebe musst sein Platonisch,'	'Love must be Platonic,'
Der durre Hofrat sprach...	The bony (gaunt?) Hofrat said...
	(as his wife sighed)

I quote Montaigne:

"And when I consider the ridiculous titillation of this pleasure, the absurd, crack-brained, wild motions...the indiscreet rage, the countenance inflamed with fury and cruelty in the sweetest effects of love, and then that austere air, so grave, severe, ecstatic, in so wanton an action; that our delights and our excrements are promiscuously shuffled together; and that the supreme pleasure brings along with it, as in pain, fainting and complaining; I then believe it to be true as Plato says, that the gods made man for their sport..."

Grandma, did your parents ever talk about sex?

God forbid!

God forbid!

Mmmm! That was taboo.

Taboo...Well...your attitudes towards sex seem pretty liberal. You know we, we talk about it.

Yes...

Is it because of the sexual revolution?

Might be it is because of my drifting away from old...

Religion?

Religion. But, also, there was a revolution in every way, social revolution...

Right, that’s part of the changes that occurred in your lifetime. But I think most people have an image of Jewish people as being earthier, not being so hung up about sex as a lot of Christians are, or Catholics especially.

I couldn’t tell you. It was never mentioned, not a word about it, in my family.

They didn’t have any birth control at all, did they?

I don’t think so.

It wasn’t known at all in those days?

No. Might be there was something like...a preservative. What do you call it?

A condom. Married people used it?

Not in the small town, religious people probably didn't know about it. Papa and I did not use one because we hated the feel of it.

Didn't your mother tell you about sex when you were about to be married?

No.

No instructions or anything?

No, you could look for instructions in books—that were not permitted to be read anyhow. There was a book on sexual problems, sexual...I don't have the right word...

That was only about problems, not normal...

Not problems in the sense of problems really...

Well, did it speak about sex in a good way? Like it was pleasurable or just a function...

Only theoretically, not about pleasures or ways of pleasure. This was something we had under the pillow, we couldn't read openly.

It's still a little bit that way.

In books there were some situations... would they be called erotic?

You mean pictures.

No, no. Even in a novel where situations were described in some way, though not the way it is done now. That was also something forbidden to be read, but secretly we did.

Well (laughing), how did you first find out about sex? Was it with girlfriends, just talking to each other and things like that?

Through some children, heard stories about it. But in reality I didn't know how this was practiced.

* * *

Each night before I go to sleep, I press down on grandma's shoulders as she lies on the floor, to try and straighten out her curved upper back. We wait to hear the cracking of her left shoulder first, then the right. Lately we are doing breathing exercises to try and expand the left side of her chest which has collapsed.

Grandma, let's continue our conversation.

I've got nothing interesting to say.

What?

Nothing interesting...

Why not?

Just don’t know.

This is your typical attitude, which is very wrong. You were talking about women and men being very clear...

Used to be that the children who had well to do parents did not think at all about the future, about becoming independent. Especially women. The only thing they were to do was to get married,...

Have children...

...raise a family. To get a husband who eventually will think of providing. If the husband was the son of a wealthy man he himself had nothing to worry about, because the father would provide or take him into the business, or...Only rarely have children tried...went to schools to study to become doctors. Eventually, a family of doctors. If the father was a doctor he would send his children to school, to become a doctor too. And the women. Girls did not think of any career.

Which do you think is better?

I think it’s better now. But it goes a little bit too far because it does not create a family life as peaceful,...

Congenial...

...as congenial as it used to be. I looked at these two girls yesterday, and both of them working, and looking for other work. And some of them will remain career

seeking. Your friend N., living with a man, but all concentrating on her own career. This was very rare in former times, at my time. Unless the necessity called for, a woman was not suited for making a living, to be self-supporting. I don't think these women have the idea that they should work together with a man, both to support the common future life.

Which women?

Let's say N. She is still in some way closer to the old fashioned homemaker. But it seems to me it prevents from creating a really...

Harmonious...

Not only harmonious, but a tightly knit family. Whether it's needed financially or not, the woman pursues her own career, the man his own. Might be I'm mistaken, might be it's not so. This is what seems to me.

No, I think you're right.

What has changed is that we have been leading a much more modest life. We didn't have to have all the time new things, to have everything what the others have. To have so much clothes, to have so many appliances in the kitchen, so much of the new, invented...

Technology...

...technology like videotape, radios, television...It wasn't there, but if it were there I think one would be just happy with one thing, not try to get every time the better one.

Hmmm.

Not so much concentrating on materialistic, on financial matters.

Well your father was, wasn't he?

He was a businessman. First he had to take care of his family, to provide for them. After he had been doing well, people were coming proposing him business easily. He was a man in whom people had confidence, he was liked. So the business was coming like by itself. Not that he wasn't working on it, but he wasn't running after so much.

It was more peaceful life in those days...

Oh yes.

* * *

Grandma is speaking with mom on the telephone. They are talking about the fact that Mom is still having her periods at age 52. Mother and daughter, first teaching about the beginning of the reproductive cycle at the beginning of life, now discussing its end near the end of life.

I talk with grandma later that evening about childbirth. She was in labor for two days with my mother and finally they gave her an injection. Mom came jumping right out and grandma had to be sewn up down there. Grandma says it feels so good to be relieved of the child, that childbirth is the most painful thing she has ever experienced, yet one of the greatest pleasures in life as well.

* * *

I've had a fantasy for some time about making a photographic essay of all the fascinating details on old brownstone buildings in my neighborhood, particularly the iron grillwork. I've been venturing out each morning on my daily walk, camera and notepad in hand, systematically roaming up and down the side streets between Central and Riverside Parks.

Unexpected discoveries turn up. A renowned ballet dancer lives here. Wild, modernistic grillwork on a brownstone there. Once I found a nice old bedboard in the trash; while carrying it home a mother pointed as I walked by and said to her son, "Look, a walking bed!" "Hello Mr. Bed," said the boy.

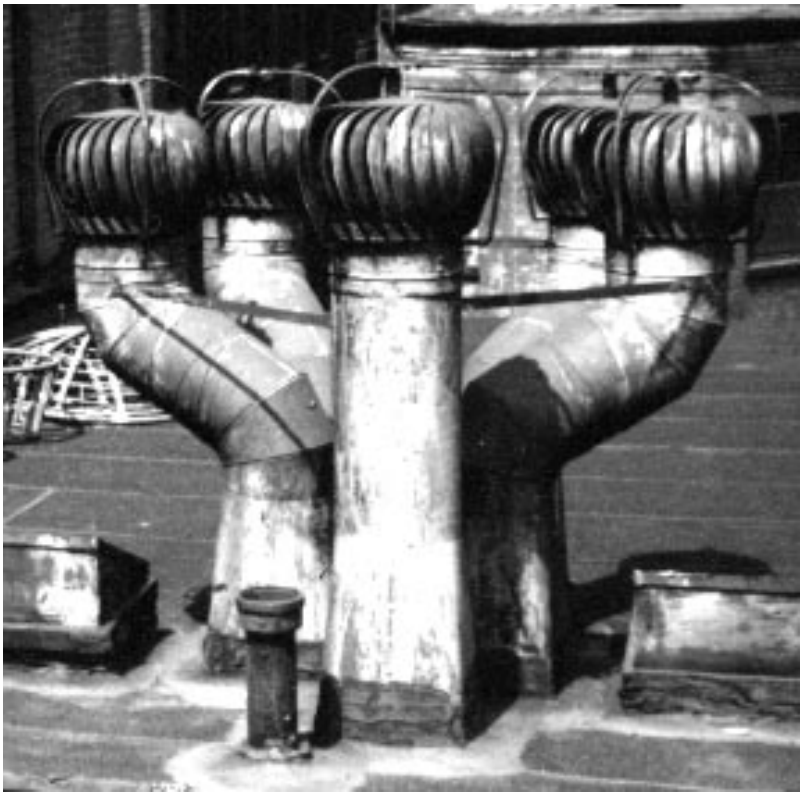
I'm also intrigued by the many synagogues on the Upper West Side. From huge, imposing edifices with arching stone facades to modest brownstones simply displaying a sign in the window saying they are a congregation. Sometimes two on the same street between the Central and Riverside parks. I bet it works out to an average of one synagogue per street.

Quiet, well-kept, tree-lined side streets with lovely old brownstones exist side by side with grimy, tenement blocks and decaying, abandoned buildings. I find the diversity stimulating, a small universe of rags and riches...

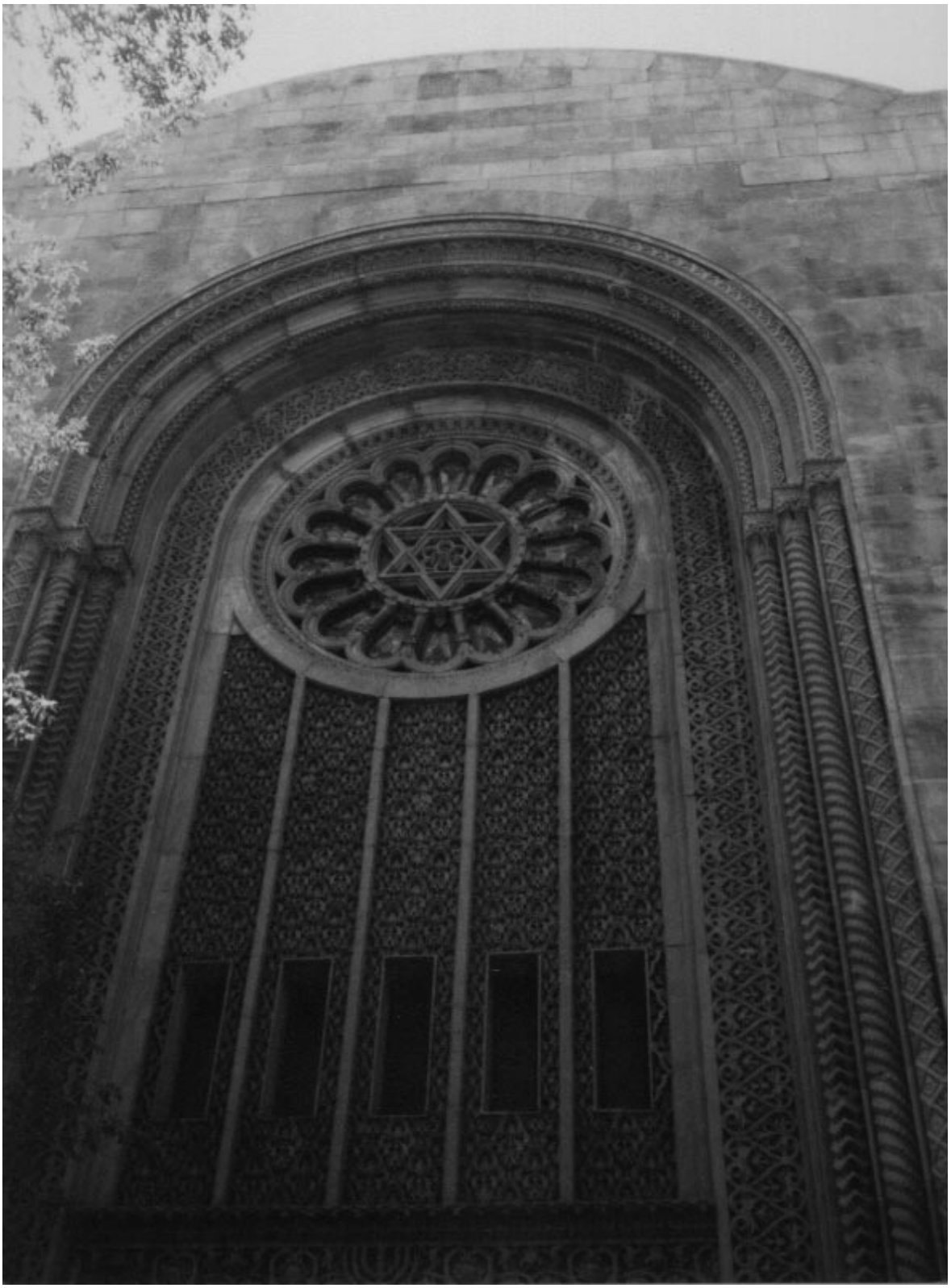
Decay and renewal. Above, brownstones on W 95th between Amsterdam and Columbus. Below, brownstones on W 76th between Amsterdam and Columbus.

I am a camera.

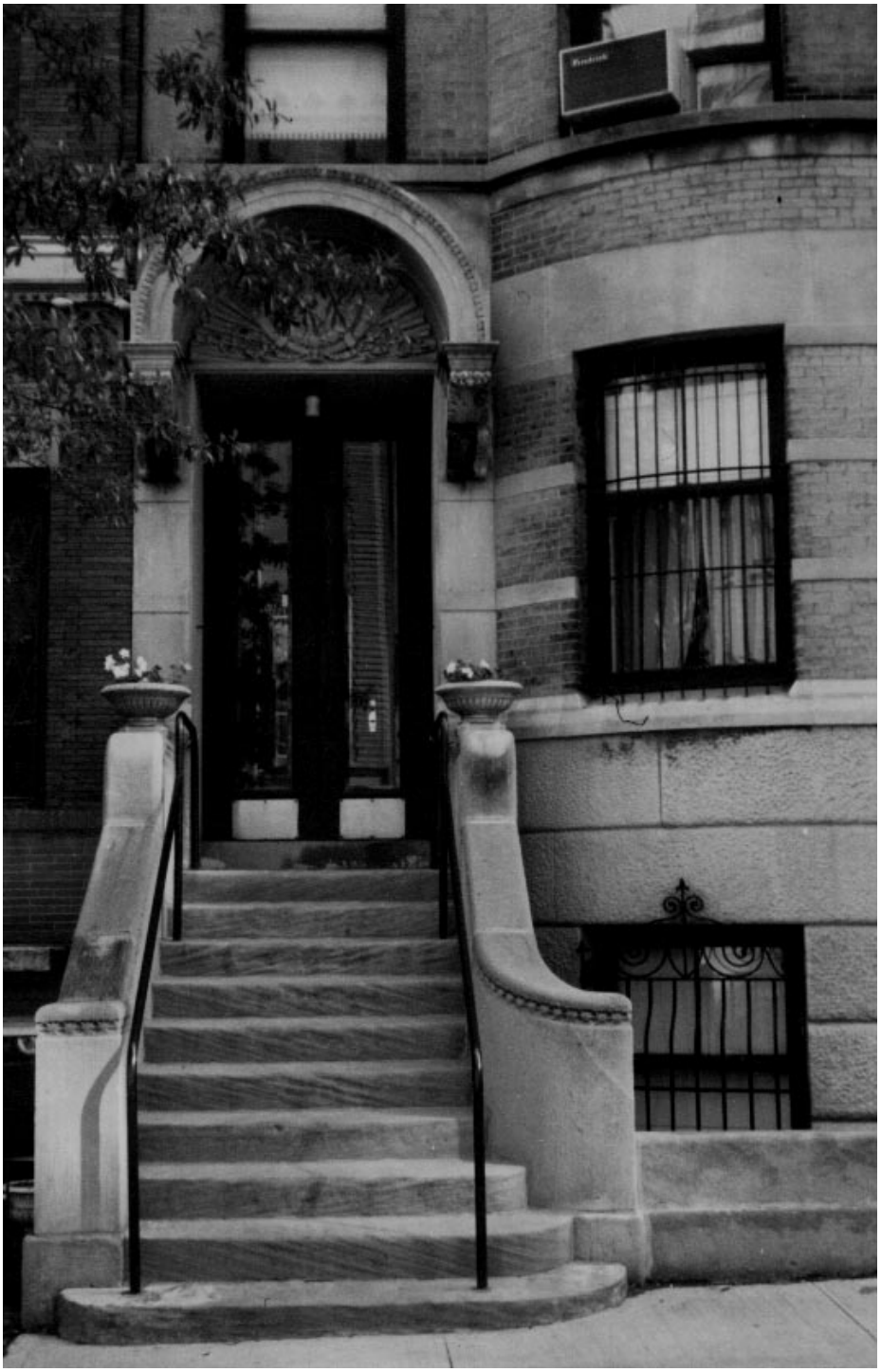
The gate behind the house on the Northeast corner of 76th Street and West End Avenue.



Roof ventilators



Synagogue on West 95th Street between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues.



My floor

Grandma's floor

Grandma and I live here!

The view from my bedroom window onto the gardens in the center of the brownstone block.

* * *

Grandma's languages in action:

Speaking Yiddish on the phone to a relative.

Writing a letter in German to a friend of her sister in Germany. Translating a German catalog for my boss.

Speaking Polish to friends from Catherine Engels Center, to maids and workmen.

Listening to a French television broadcast about modern French literature. Reading French literature. Speaking French with friends.

During a television news clip from Russian TV I ask if she understands. Yes, some.

During a Passover seder at relatives, she reads Hebrew passages from the Haggadah.

And she's still trying to learn Spanish, listening to language instruction tapes and programs at mom's urging, to speak with Spanish workers in California, .

I wish she could leave me her languages.

* * *

Every morning, when I come down to grandma's room, classical music is playing softly on the huge old Zenith high fidelity AM-FM radio she bought thirty years ago (at the recommendation of my uncle Arnold Newton). I also enjoy listening to classical music while washing the dishes.

* * *

Doing stretching exercises with grandma, arms circling in wide arcs. “It’s good to look at you,” she says. Then I have her reach up and I pull her arms up, stretching her entire body like a rack to straighten her bent back. She looks up at me, her clear blue eyes opened wide behind her glasses. “It’s good. It’s good.”

* * *

Delight

To see a tall, strong tree
glistening.

Shimmering light upon a pond,
wild birds glide on reflections.

A fine September morning walk.

Crisp air, cool breeze, brilliant sun
still low in the sky
Bathing trees, lakes and soaring skyscrapers
in a warm, bright glow.

Blue, blue sky.

Delight at every turn.
Delight in every sight.
Delight, the world feels right
on this sunny day.

Belvedere Lake in Central Park, looking towards Central Park South.

* * *

A quiet evening at home with grandma after an exhausting day in Brooklyn. After dinner she tells me about what she has been reading in French lately: *Maximes* by La Rochefoucauld and *Aux Centre du Desert* by Saint Exupery (also the author of *The Little Prince*). “Saint Exupery writes so beautifully, so simply...”

* * *

Walking through Central Park with grandma on a warm, windy fall afternoon.

Old people sitting on benches stop their conversations to watch us as we walk by, arm in arm. We pause to admire a huge old fruit tree with shiny, extraordinarily smooth reddish bark and dried sap, still springy, running from an old wound.

“Wonderful,” says grandma. “Wonderful tree.”

We pass a statue of the Polish King Jagiello, and grandma tells me the history of the battle of Grunewald (Dog’s Field), how Jagiello united Poland with Lithuania.

Yet, she points out, “Czeslaw Milosz calls himself Lithuanian, not Polish, and the greatest Polish poet, Adam Mickiewicz (pronounced Mitzskevitch) began his epic poem ‘Pan Tadeusz’ with the lines:

‘Litwo, ojczyzno moja,	Lituania, my fatherland,
Ty jestes jak zdrowie.	you are like Health.
Ile cie cenic trzeba, ten tylko	How to prize it, one only knows
sie dowie, co cie stracil.’	When one has lost it.

* * *

Statue of King Jagiello in Central Park near Belvedere Castle.

Unlike most elderly people, grandma does not speak of the past unless asked about it, or reminded of some anecdote by a present situation. For example, when I do not go to get the water for her when she asks where it is, that prompts her to tell the story of a man in Paris who picked up a coin with his foot to give to grandma's traveling companion.

She looks towards the future mostly and tends to the present: finances, the house, cooking, health, family...

* * *

At breakfast some farina drops on grandma's lap while she is eating.“ I'm like a baby, getting senile," she says. “My grandparents used to wear bibs."

A few days later bibs arrive in the mail from my mother.

* * *

Grandma absentmindedly touches my arm lightly with her fingers as we wait to cross Riverside Drive at 76th Street.

I walk behind her at the market as she moves slowly yet gracefully up and down the aisles, feet pointing outward like a dancer's.

Grandma is ripping and sorting through bags of bananas, puncturing corn, prying open artichokes. On to the next vegetable!

The black check out girl breaks out of her bored, irritated, faraway expression to give grandma a fond smile.

Grandma sits while I stand in front of her on a crowded bus. A woman smiles as she sees grandma adjust my jacket.

* * *

Sitting on a bench with grandma in Riverside Park on a sunny Saturday afternoon. I begin to read to her from a selection in the second year of my Great Books reading program, *Agammemnon* by Aeschylus. I introduce the dramatis personae and one of them is Cassandra, daughter of Priam, now slave of Agammemnon. To my surprise grandma proceeds to describe Cassandra in great detail from memory, how she was an oracle, a soothsayer, usually of bad tidings.

Grandma must have read a lot when she was young, she remembers quite well. Yet these days she falls asleep after only a few minutes of reading the newspaper.

* * *

This morning I saw a nun jogging in Riverside Park, in full habit, rosaries swinging, wearing jogging shoes.

* * *

Sun flecks press
through layered green.

Mist hovers on a lake,

A tree stands proud
against bright blue sky,

Delicate, twisting clouds
dance among skyscrapers.

* * *

“A young man!”—Grandma’s comment when I tell her that the winner of the 1985 Nobel Prize for literature, French writer Claude Simon, is 72 years old.

* * *

Speaking with grandma about troubles with my love life, she responds, The first Polish poet (the first Polish poet to write in Polish, not Latin), Karpinski said:

I nie milowac ciezko	Not to love is difficult,
I milovac marna pociecha.	and to love is a poor consolation

That reminds me of something I recently read in one of Montaigne’s essays:

“Socrates, being asked whether it was better to take a wife or not, said,

‘Either a man will marry well or he will become a philosopher.’”

* * *

From the first Polish prose writer, Mikotaj Rey, in the sixteenth century:

Let the world know
That Poles are not ducks
But have a language of their own.

* * *

This morning grandma picks up the phone to find a real estate broker calling with the usual, “Are you interested in selling your property?”

She answers, “I want to buy!”

* * *

Grandma is very tired this evening. I point for her to go on the mat so I can do her back. She goes down, first on one knee, then the other, slowly, pausing at every point. Finally she is down, her eyes half-closed. She unhooks her brassiere and I proceed with her back pressing-rocking-straightening session. Crack. Crack.

* * *

Walking down to a lumber store on 9th avenue this afternoon it began to rain hard. I had an umbrella, but was still getting wet, so I ducked into the very narrow doorway of a dilapidated building.

Moments later, a small, elderly white-haired man, hugging a violin close to his chest came walking up the street. He came into the same doorway to stand under my umbrella, next to me. He was all wet because he had no umbrella.

I began to talk to him and found out that he played in the Queens Symphony and the American Symphony orchestras and he was on his way to a rehearsal. He was a quiet, gentle soul; frail, shivering, wet.

He had a very definite, familiar accent And finally I could no longer resist asking him, “Are you from Poland?” “Yes, from Lodz.” The same town my grandmother lived in when she was married before the war. He did not know my grandmother there, but we spoke of the pianist Arthur Balsam whom grandma and I had recently heard at the Scarlatti Saturday concert.“ A great musician,” he added.

Soon the rain began to let up and we parted, each in opposite directions. He was so unusual, so out of place in that decaying neighborhood, a gentle brush of old world charm, a real gentleman.

I hope he didn’t catch a cold.

* * *

After work, after a night course on book editing, after dinner, grandma talks about the war in Poland. My parents, Irene and Peter, are visiting from California. My mother sits and listens, punctuating the conversation with her own memories. I am very tired, but I want to record as much as I can:

Grandma (G): In 1930 I married a young man from Lodz. I was married, after my parents had already moved to that village where they had a mill near Czenstochowa (pronounce “Chenstohova”), married in a tiny Jewish community where we had to bring 10 people together to make a Minyan. (laughing) They had to bring the people from the cemetery, so few Jewish men lived there.

Danny (D): Mom, in Klomnice, do you remember your grandparents at all? And their family?

My mother, Irene (M): I think I remember your father as a small man with red hair, but it could be from your description. It could be that I don’t remember him really, but everything that I’ve heard about him. And your mother I don’t remember at all.

Do you remember if you ever brought me there to visit with them before all this happened?

G: You were there in 1936 when you were four years old. We went to Marienbad for a vacation. And we brought you to my parents. We went for 6 weeks or so. When I came back to pick you up you didn’t recognize me.

M: This was done in the olden times. I think Peter’s parents also were leaving their children.

D: (to mom) By the way, who are you?

G: It is supposedly a sign that the child is very disappointed to be left alone.

M: Yes, I would think so.

G: And pushes away the memory of the people who did her harm.

M: Not harm, but abandoned...

D: Grandma, so you left Klomnice?

G: In 1930 I moved to Lodz where my husband came from. Lodz again had many Jews, some 200,000 or 300,000. It was a big city, but Jewish life was similar to where I lived before. Jews were mostly industrialists or businessmen.

I was raising a family, helping my husband in business. I didn't have much of a cultural life, except reading or listening to radio. We weren't going out much...

M: My earliest memory is that wooden duck in the apartment in Lodz. Remember that toy, the wooden duck that I had? A huge wooden duck that was stored under the windows where there were cabinets for toys.

The apartment was big and dark, several large rooms, and I remember just playing by myself. I don't remember anybody else really. That must have been before my sister Annette arrived.

G: You had nightmares, you were afraid of fish...

D: Everybody's afraid of fish.

G: ‘Take away the fish!’ you would say. And you were crying.

M: I think because I saw the fish being prepared in the kitchen. I was always watching the Polish maid preparing the fish. I must have had nightmares from it.

G: ‘Take away the fish!’ (laughter) We would take her into our bedroom, but she wouldn’t stop crying and Papa, in desperation, was throwing pillows at her.

D: Do you have a lot of memories before the war started mom?

M: Not many, darling. Just a few images, like these maids cleaning up the fish...

D: And the fish and the fish, and the fish and the fish and the fish...(lots of laughter)

G: You don’t remember the dog and the cat?

M: You brought me a dog and a cat?

G: Yes, we wanted you to get used to animals. We bought a little dog, a little Doberman, and she was terribly afraid.

Then we tried a cat, and then the cat jumped all of a sudden (grandma imitates a pouncing cat—everybody is laughing hard). She was jumping!

M: I was terrified of skating on ice, that I remember. They tried to teach me how to ice skate and I was terrified of it, I never learned at all.

G: But then she had a nice teacher at the nursery school, Pani Ania (Miss Ania).

She taught her dancing and singing and I still remember how you looked and how you danced (Here Mom and Grandma begin singing together) ‘Zasiali gorale zyto, zyto...’ (A Polish nursery school song. Nice melody.)

M: That means that the mountaineers have sown wheat.

G: (hums the melody again) Irene had a white dress with pink polka dots and a little kerchief here. And she was dancing, holding out her dress with her hands.

M: That I remember. But then you thought Miss Ania was so nice that you sent me away with her and her son to the mountains by the lake, one summer. And then the son tried to drown me...(general laughter again)

D: The most popular girl in the class...

M: He just about drowned me.

D: Seriously tried to drown you? Why?

G: Must have been jealous.

M: I didn’t know how to swim. So you just about lost me there.

G: She resented that, that we sent her alone with the teacher.

D: So, soon after that the war broke out?

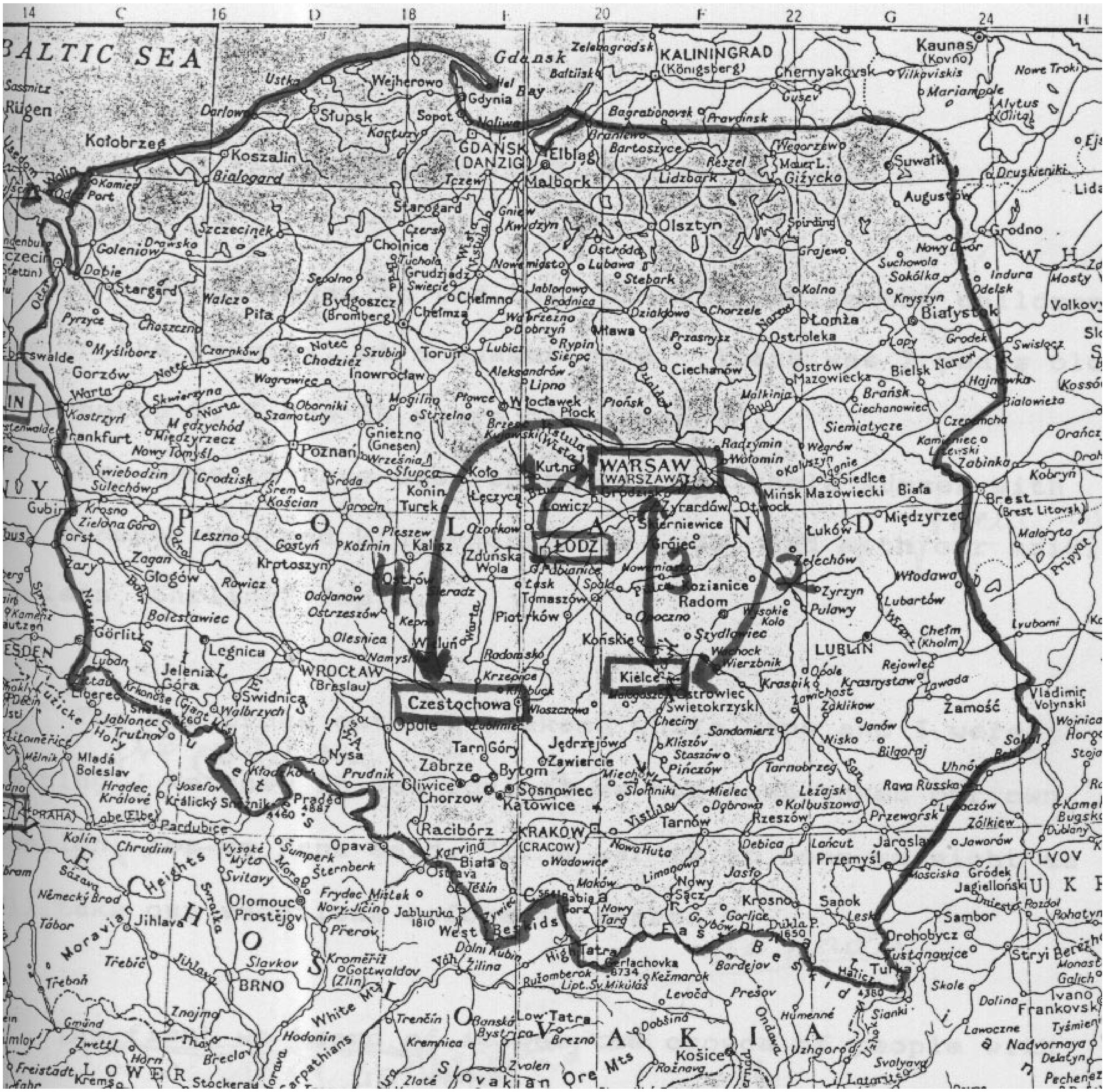
G: Yes, soon after war was upon us...

PART II

WAR

“What joy it is, when out at sea the stormwinds are lashing the waters,
to gaze from the shore at the heavy stress some other man is enduring!
Not that anyone’s afflictions are in themselves a source of delight;
but to realize from what troubles you yourself are free is joy indeed.”

—Lucretius



The Monat family’s route of escape during World War II.

I: THE INVASION OF LODZ

G: The war began in the fall of 1939. Irene was 7 years old and Annette 3; I was 36 years old, Papa 38. We knew it was coming. We had just taken our own vacation, for as Papa said, 'If a war is to come we might as well take our vacation before it starts.'

It broke out one weekend while Papa and I were visiting the children. The children were in the country, at a summer camp.They were to have been there for the whole summer with that teacher who had a kindergarten in Lodz, and with our maid, Fraulein Elly.

The first we heard of it was the crowds of people with their belongings on the roads that night. Peasants with cows and horses, aiming towards the city, Lodz, fleeing. The roads were full of people, an exodus from the villages back to town.

We also left that night and walked back to Lodz, Annette on Papa's shoulders and Irene by my side.

As we arrived in Lodz there was another exodus. The radio had announced that all Jewish men would be killed. Again the streets were full of people, dark with Jewish men leaving for Warsaw. They were following the Polish Army which was retreating to Warsaw in an attempt to stop the Germans.

Papa didn't want to go, he didn't want to leave us alone. I insisted that he should go because of the rumors that all Jewish men will be killed. The radio had said that only the men would be killed, not women and children. But the rumors turned out to be false, spread by the Germans to cause panic and disorient people. I was sorry Papa had gone.

He wasn't home for about a month and, in the meantime, the Germans came. There were new laws. Jews mustn't have more than 2,000 zlotys in their house. That was the first announcement. Zlotys weren't really worth much at that time. We had some 200,000 zlotys, which was about $150. At the outbreak of the war all of a sudden the value of money became almost nothing. I took the money to try and buy some passports, only about $200, but couldn't afford them.

A few days after Papa's departure, Germans came into the apartment while I was gone. I left a baby sitter with the children and when I came home our wonderful Viennese Horniphone radio, my Rolleflex camera, and oriental carpets were all gone. Some of them came in and said they had been ordered to do this.

Several weeks later the doorbell rang. I went to the door and looked through the peephole. I saw a poor doroshka (horse carriage) driver.

'Who are you? What do you want?' I asked.

'What's going on? Don't you recognize me?' said the man.

'Oh! Papa!'

We went inside together and Mieczyslaw (Martin, Papa's real name, in Polish) told me what had happened:

'In order to come home there was no other way than droshka cart. I made a deal with the driver that he took the place of the passenger and I became the driver. We exchanged clothes and so I drove the cart home from Warsaw.'

Doroshkas were like the carriages in Central Park. They were used for going to the railway station, for going to a suburb, they were the means of most transportation—cars were not used very much yet. But they were for short trips, not for going from Warsaw to Lodz, quite a distance.

When he wasn't working, Papa used to love to lie in bed as much as possible. He was very upset about what was going on and was lamenting the situation from bed:

'This is incredible,' he said. 'No Jew can have more than 2,000 zlotys, no access to one's bank account or safe deposit box.'

But I had sewn into his coat 2,000 zlotys in order to have extra money.

One day, when we had gone out in the morning, as I was coming back a woman from the house, our next-door neighbor, told me, 'Don't go upstairs, the Germans are there.' But I had the children upstairs, so I went.

There was a search. The Germans were throwing out books and everything from cabinets, everywhere, looking for money. They didn't find anything (a bit of amusement in grandma's voice). The search went on for hours. My friend, the woman downstairs, saw my husband coming and she didn't let him go upstairs.

But they did, finally, find something. On the door was hanging my husband's coat where I had sewn in the 2,000 zlotys in case we need some more money, and they got hold of that. They also found more money in a drawer, so I was breaking the law.

'Where is your husband?' asked the Germans

‘I don’t know.’ I answered.‘ He never tells me where he goes.’

‘So, until your husband comes you will be with us for questioning.’

They took me, to the Devisenschutz Commando, the foreign currency beaureau.

It was late morning. Towards the evening Papa couldn’t wait any longer and came to get me out. They let me go and held Papa for three or four days in prison, together in the same cell with murderers, alcoholics... About 8 men in one cell. They were lying on the floor, one next to the other, on piles of straw.

After a few days the doorbell rang. There was Papa with two German officers from the Devisenschutz Commando:

Papa said, ‘These gentleman ask me to pay a ten-fold fine for having had more than 2,000 zlotys. Now, we are not allowed to have more and where am I going to get the money? So I have come home to ask perhaps you have an idea how I can comply with this. Might be you, Pola, have a way of helping that I can get out from prison?’

The Germans were sitting in the living room waiting for me to say something. We did have the money, ‘beschragnam,’ in the banks. That’s what they called it when they closed up all our accounts.

And here they sit, the two officers and I, and I am wondering...so I said, ‘We have so many notes from German industrialists, some 25,000 zlotys from our banking business, and they might be due. Let them cash the notes. Good. They accepted.

The Germans went with Papa to the safe, where he took out the notes that were

due already. Then they took Papa by car to all the businesses that were due to pay.

While they were driving along together in the car, going from place to place and cashing the notes, Papa had an idea:

‘Might be you cash some for me too...and we’ll share it.’

‘What a Jewish concept!’ said the Germans.

(Grandma is laughing really hard here. I can just imagine the two Germans looking at each other, sneering with disdain. But think of the irony—those Germans were doing something far worse than what they conceived of as Jewish behavior.)

And so I got my husband free for some time. The Germans let him go after that.

M: Next thing I remember is that we were sent away with this one maid who wore your coat.

G: Kasia.

M: Yes, she was one of the maids who was doing the kitchen work. I remember going in the park with this maid, seems like a private park, and she was wearing my mother’s Persian, grey fur.

G: It was black.

M: And Kasia, dressed like my mother, took us to my mother’s family, in that little town where they had the mill, Klomnice.

G: You were both or only you?

M: I don’t remember darling. Annette is completely blanked out from my memories as a child. I don’t remember many scenes where we were together.

G: I remember that you were told not to reveal who the maid really is, that you were to call her Auntie. She looked very good in my Persian fur coat.

Danny: Did she keep it?

G: No, she was very decent.

D: This is the German one?

M: No, that was the Polish maid that cooked.

D: You liked her?

M: I liked her a lot. That’s why I was always around her in the kitchen watching those fish!

D: So you sent Mom and Annette to your parents?

G: I’m sure that Annette was sent there, too.

M: I think it was just me, but what did you do with Annette?

D: Annette! Oh no. I just remembered...

G: She might have stayed with us.

M: You see. They did that all the time.

* * *

G: Lodz became right away a German town, so-called Litzmannstadt. And in Lodz we had to wear from the start the star of David, a yellow star.

One day I was hurrying to get home before 5:00 p.m. because after 5:00 Jews weren't supposed to be outside. As I dashed across a street I was caught by a German. He threw me to the wall and he said, 'You wait, you don't rush.' This was his way of admonishing me. But here the minutes counted. Nothing happened to me though, I went home and I arrived. But, that was the way of dealing with us.

This was about October or November 1939.

A few weeks after Papa's release from the Devisenschutz Commando, late in the evening, close to Christmas of 1939, we were sitting in the house when the Germans rang our bell again. Two officers, seemingly of high rank, tall and handsome, beautifully dressed, appeared in the house asking us where our jewelry is, announcing that we were going to be deported the next day. They told us to hand over all our valuables. They came, supposedly with an order, to pick up our jewelry and valuables and to prepare us for being deported the next day.

I heard all of that from the dining room, while they were in the living room, so I rushed to the drawer where I had the settings of my jewelry. I picked them up and ran to the bathroom to flush them down the toilet. The stones, diamonds, had all been

removed and I was afraid that the officers might ask where the stones were: we had taken the diamonds out to have a dentist put them in our teeth. This eventually spoiled our teeth.

They said that we should prepare ourselves and make bundles not to exceed a certain weight. We believed them, so we gave them what we had handy. And that again was not part of a program, not instruction from above. These officers were robbers who were doing it all on their own, on the whole block.

The next day we thought that we have to leave, but heard from others that it couldn't be, that we must be the only ones who are to leave. But we decided that we will leave Lodz anyhow, because the Germans knew us too well and we were already being persecuted before the program was even developed. We decided to leave Lodz and go to Warsaw the next morning. This was the end of 1939 around Christmas time.

A few days before I had sent the children to my parents in Klomnice, near Czenstochowa. We were alone and free and went to my husband's parents and told them what has happened to us. They said, Do go away, it is too dangerous for you to be here, it's gone too far.

So that same day we left for Warsaw.

* * *

By learning grandma's story I am beginning to see how my mother's attitudes towards authority, laws and rules were shaped.

The Nazis were making laws that were totally unjust, all the while stealing for themselves—hypocrites of the highest order. When grandpa suggested to the Nazi's,

who were in the process of extorting money from him, that they cash in some of the German industrialists' promissory notes (which belong to grandpa) for him, too, they said, What a Jewish concept! While they were in the middle of robbing him!!!

I understand my mother much better, where many of her attitudes that have influenced me come from.

Also, grandpa's statement, "If a war is to come we might as well take our vacation before it starts," shows how most Jews chose not to believe Hitler's threats. Yet grandma told me that she was pleading with grandpa that they should leave Poland, that they had enough money, but grandpa was very worried about what he would do in another country, he did not want to start over again (especially since this was his first really successful business after many failures). They had heard about what was going on in Germany—this all comes up while watching Abba Eban's HERITAGE segment on World War II (on PBS, 2/15/87), on the rise of Hitler in Germany. In hindsight it all seems very obvious, but there were some signals at that time about what was to come. Grandma saw the signs.

Actually, they had planned to go to the United States for the 1939 World's Fair in New York, but they would have had to leave the children behind and grandma was against that. If they had gone they would have been safe, but Mom and Annette certainly would have perished.

It is also an interesting paradox that many of the poor Jews of Eastern Europe survived because their poverty acted as a stimulus to emigrate to the U.S. earlier, while it was still permitted, especially around the turn of the century. Most well established, successful Jews could not bring themselves to leave their comfortable life until it was too late—my mother's father included. But hindsight is easy, I'm not sure that I would have had the courage to uproot myself either just as I was finally getting established.

My father's father and grandfather did have that foresight. They left Germany in 1933. Very fortunate, very unusual and very wise.

II: ESCAPE TO WARSAW, THEN KIELCE

G: So Papa and I left Lodz and went to Warsaw. There it was bombed out. The Polish army had fought the Germans, a fierce fight. In Warsaw nobody knew us and Jews there were not persecuted as much as in Lodz.

We stayed for some time in Warsaw. I had a sister there, Rozka, the pianist. She was living with her husband's relatives because her house had been bombed out. They rented a room to us, also. It was a bombed apartment house, but it still was livable.

Jews were not supposed to travel at that time, but my husband went to my parents in Klomnice anyway, to get something after we were deprived of everything. On the train a German military man asked him how many Jews there were in Lodz. He said about 300,000. The military man then said to the other one next to him 'Imagine, 300,000 nichtsdoers' ('do-nothings'), because to them we were parasites. So my husband was not respecting the new laws and was traveling when needed (he spoke German well because he had lived and worked in Germany as a young man).

We were not comfortable in Warsaw so from there we decided to go to Kielce where my sister-in-law Yentele had invited us to come stay with her. There we had a very nice apartment, spacious and comfortable.

In Kielce, except for things that one had to be very cautious about, under the so-called general government, the laws were not yet strict as in Lodz which became right away a German town.

We stayed for about two years in Kielce.

D: The sister-in-law who invited you was the wife of your oldest brother Abraham?

Yentele, grandma's sister-in-law.

G: Yes. Abraham died of a stroke in 1939 and their four children were already grown up so there was room for us...Yentele was a lovely person, everyone in our family loved her. An excellent cook, a specialist in baking.

M: We were in this beautiful apartment of my aunt and her son was a very spirited, lively person. He tap danced and was red-headed, he was singing Danny Kaye songs, and was a really charming, delightful person. Who was that, darling?

G: Mayek (Meyer).

M: He was an extraordinary person.

G: A little light-headed, liked to play cards...In Dzialoszyce, when Mayek was only about 4 years old, he already wanted to have sex with girls in the cart that brought milk to grandma's family each morning. Eventually the driver refused to give Mayek rides anymore.

M: Like a playboy, but...

G: Very pleasant. A little bit the type of our Billy. The older son, Schyiek (Joshua), was a lawyer, married and had a child.

One day, Annette came down with Scarlet Fever. Mayek wanted to cheer her up, so he began singing something in jazz, dancing—he was a good tap dancer—imitating how the jazz singers do it here in America. It was two o'clock in the afternoon.

Soon somebody came banging on the door. It was the German officer, named Geyer, who lived below us with a woman. That officer was the head of the town, a kind of mayor. He was Einguartiert (quartered), they didn't have their own houses. It was a time still when the Jews were not yet in the ghetto.

The officer yelled, 'I was having my afternoon nap! And you disturbed me!'

He threw Mayek against the wall. Mayek's head hit very hard against the wall. Annette burst out crying. Mayek fell, unconscious. The officer left. It took some time until Mayek regained consciousness.

The same nephew, Mayek, was caught in the street by a German with two dogs, and the dogs were set on him. Right in the town square. The dogs were catching the ends of his coat, and that's the way the German was playing around with him until he let him go.

That was a way of dealing with us.

M: I also remember the Germans' dogs. I was very afraid of the dogs, they were chasing Jews in the streets. I was mostly staying inside the house.

This was before we went to the ghetto. I remember Germans with their big dogs, and I was afraid to go to the park because I thought that these dogs would attack us.

G: The program of persecution was not outlined right away, it progressed as time went on. I don't remember at what point we were to wear the band, the ribbon, in Kielce. In Lodz we had to wear right away a star, a yellow star. But, in that general government in Kielce, we have been wearing armbands which we could easily take off and put back on. In Lodz the star had to be sewn on.

Papa never wore the armband that would designate him as Jewish. He said, 'Who is Hitler to tell me what to do? To decide about my life or death?'

We stayed in Kielce peacefully for some time, might be a year.

III: THE KIELCE GHETTO

Then we learned that soon a ghetto will be formed.The Kielce ghetto was established in 1942 I believe. There was that Jewish committee, that took all the instructions from the Germans and was telling us what to do.

One of my father's ex-business associates became the head of the Jewish community. Unfortunately we have known him. I say unfortunately because he was taking his role very seriously, giving out all the orders, acting all of a sudden like he was a king. When all Jews were to turn in their fur coats and I brought mine he said to me, 'One coat? I know you have two.' So I had to bring in the other.

But we knew a few days ahead that we can exchange apartments so we got a room and a kitchen in the prospective ghetto and went to live there.

D: Why did you go to the ghetto?

G: Everybody had to. It was established in the part of town where poor people lived. In order to get a place to live there, we exchanged our beautiful apartment for a tiny, one-room apartment that had a small kitchen. The poor couple we exchanged with came to live in our beautiful modern apartment, and we went to a primitive little house. We did this just to have a roof over our head. My sister-in-law, Yentele, went too. She exchanged her apartment.

D: There were Poles living in the ghetto as well?

G: No. This was the poorest part of town, which was designated as a ghetto. The Poles had to move out, and the Jews moved in. Those who moved out exchanged.

It was difficult to get an apartment because that part of the town was very small.

(No wonder most Poles were so enthusiastic about doing away with the Jews!)

D: So it cost a lot even for very small quarters.

G: For very small quarters. Whoever could give those Poles something better could get a small apartment from them. So now we were four people living in one room. We had one room and a kitchen.

D: The four of you all slept in the same room?

G: Yes. In that room we felt very comfortable. We took with us all the beautiful things from that apartment that we had, like carpeting and those Polish tapestries called ‘Kilims.’ In Poland the mountaineers make tapestries called ‘Kilimi.’

And we had a view on the fields, greenery all around. We felt satisfied. There were many Jewish families in that house. People were coming to us, to visit with us.

Papa was mostly in bed because he was getting gout attacks. He was well-liked by the neighbors, and they were coming to visit us. Everybody congregated in our apartment.

There we had a long yard. In that yard one of the neighbors had the idea that we make ourselves a garden so we can have vegetables of our own. The garden was perhaps as big as this room (grandma’s dining room), but narrower. And everybody had a parcel that was like half of this table, perhaps two feet square, to plant vegetables or parsley. We were growing good vegetables there that we could use.”

* * *

Upon my arrival home from work a lovely dinner prepared by grandma waits for me: goulash, broccoli, salad, potatoes, topped off with white grape juice.

I put on a record, Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto, and immediately grandma perks up. "What's that? Tchiakovsky? Rachmaninoff?"

Right, Rachmaninoff.

"Oh, that's beautiful. That was the music most played in my youth, the music played at gatherings in my home. My brothers were violinists and my sister was an excellent pianist. Other sisters also played the piano. We were getting together, cellists and pianists, violinists, trios in the house. This was in Kielce, before I got married.

But even during the war, in the Kielce ghetto, we were having little concerts with talented people like a singer, a friend, who would get together in a place where somebody had a larger room and might be a piano too.

There were many musical people who knew classical music and we had a friend who had a very beautiful voice. We would listen to arias from operas by Rossini, Puccini, Bizet and Verdi, gathered together for tea with other people.

(Intriguing image: high culture in desperate times, hardship and culture existing side by side)

I didn't play the piano anymore at that time. My sister Rozka went to the Warsaw ghetto because of her piano, because she couldn't separate from her piano. She

was a concert pianist. She had students who wanted to hide her, but she decided to take the piano with her and to go to the ghetto, and she was one of the first that was gathered...

What were you doing inside the Kielce ghetto? Were you doing business?

Grandpa was doing business.

From bed?

He was in bed, occasionally he was going out. People were coming to him. He made good contacts with Polish people.

What kind of business?

He was selling things. The Jews had quite a bit of business in the ghetto. They needed money and were selling what they still possessed to the Poles outside. So Papa was selling merchandise from the Jews in the ghetto to the Gentiles outside. The Germans allowed people who were working, who were useful to them in some way, to go out from the ghetto. They gave them green armbands and called them ‘Nützliche Juden’ (‘Useful Jews’).

But Papa didn’t work for the Germans. He worked for friends who incorporated him in their businesses. So he had that right to go out. He began working at a place where they were gathering and storing raw materials for the Germans. At the same time he was selling to the Poles hardware, manufacturing goods, etc. He made some interesting relations that proved helpful later when we had to escape from the ghetto.

I was just at home taking care of the children. Annette was ill again, this time with jaundice. She was very ill, so that we did not know whether she would survive that hepatitis. But eventually she did. She was to be taken to the hospital, then came that 'Felcher,' which was kind of not a doctor, but what used to be in the Polish towns, a 'sub-doctor,' somebody who was practicing everything. He was very experienced and he said, 'Don't give that child to the hospital because you won't be able to see her when you are in the ghetto, and you don't know what they are going to do with her.' And he helped us out, I think with a very simple diet. He kept her in bed, not to move and keep warm, and to use a hot water bottle. And I think with chamomile tea. Eventually she recovered.

Annette went through very much. She had been poisoned by bad milk at the age of six months and was also ill with scarlet fever in the ghetto. Later, outside Warsaw in the convent, in Chotomov orphanage, she had a very severe ear infection and had to be taken to the hospital where I couldn't see her freely. And the jaundice she had in the ghetto was very serious.

Otherwise the children were happy in the ghetto. One of the neighbors had a very capable young daughter who was having a course with the children, like in a nursery school, and she was teaching them songs and exercise. But it didn't last long."

D: Mom, what are your memories of the Kielce ghetto?

M: I think this was a happier time for me because there were children...

D: Yes, it seems like it was a pretty stable time for everybody, doing business...

G: It looked like we established ourselves, adapted ourselves to the new circumstances, to the small quarters, people living together...

M: There was more interaction between people than in Lodz where I was alone with the governess. In the ghetto children met in the streets and played and I learned all about sex from the kids...

D: How did you learn about sex?

M: They were writing things on the walls, you know...

G: Wasn't it that Goldcorn boy? There was a boy with whom you played...

D: Just from drawing things on the wall?

M: Yes, they were explaining what was written there. And then there were some boys that were collecting stamps and they wanted me to undress myself so they'd give me some stamps...

D: Did you do it?

M: I don't think so.

(laughter)

G: There was an attic where you played, the children played, and you washed the floor. Don't remember it? How you washed the floor...she liked to work.

M: I liked to wash the floors it seems.

G: She made the floor white, not in the apartment, but upstairs in the attic...Children had really a good time there...

D: You had a lot of friends there?

M: Yes, because there was closeness of people, not much separation, so kids played in the street. I remember another girl had something and she was not supposed to meet me—typhus or some contagious disease...but we met anyway.

D: How long were you in the ghetto?

G: We went into the ghetto in 1941, and in 1942 I believe we left the ghetto. We lived perhaps a year in the ghetto and we thought the Germans will let us remain there. We stayed in the ghetto until the Germans came.

But we did have an idea of what was going on.

In 1942 we were notified that the ghetto is going to be terminated—not notified officially, but from Warsaw was coming news to get ready, to do something about it.

A few weeks before it happened a man came with a letter from the Rabbi of Warsaw. This letter said not to believe that we were to be deported for work as the Germans said, but rather to be murdered. ‘People should do what they can to get out from the ghetto.’ There were rumors that we will be deported to go in the ovens, but nobody believed it. There was always hope.

Papa and I believed that we had to get out of the ghetto, that people in the trains were suffocating, from chlorine. Papa prepared false papers for us to get out. And then we lived from day to day. We did not know when it would end, we had to make a living.

IV: ESCAPE FROM THE GHETTO

Then one night they came...

From my window, I have seen the Germans outside setting up their guns on triangles and waiting there, until dawn. They surrounded the ghetto.

The Germans were not around the ghetto normally, there were only Poles in those navy blue uniforms, policemen. But now there were Germans and they came in, in the middle of the night (Grandma is speaking quite rapidly by now) and I've seen that. I felt what was coming.

But there I was.

I was desperate, looking how and where can we get out from here. Papa had prepared Polish Ausweis (identity) papers. I asked people, the neighbors—there were many people in our building—Might be you have a way to get out?

M: It was a terrible night. I remember very vividly, that we were sleeping and right under our windows we kept hearing German voices. They were planning something sinister...

D: They were talking in hushed voices?

M: I think quite loud in German.

G: They came in the night and sat there to invade us.

D: They were right outside your window in the garden?

G: Our house was on the edge of town, there were fields where they've set up their guns...

M: The sentries, the guards were on the outskirts of the ghetto and we were not too far from it. We could hear that something was being planned in the middle of the night and I could see that my parents were very anxious about something bad that was about to happen, so I think at that point I was saying, let's get out...

G: No. In the morning we were ready to go as everybody would...

M: To go where?

G: To be deported. In the morning they started to deport, to take out people to the concentration camps. We knew that they had come with trains for cattle, supposedly filled with chlorine gas, to make people suffocate. They separated men from women, women from children, and this was going on for about a day and a half. Two thirds of the people had been taken away already.

But it did not start yet in our part of the ghetto. There was a pause because they did not have enough trains.

I wanted to stay in the Kielce and share the same fate as everyone, but Papa said, "No, you're not going to stay. You're going to take the children and get out. There is always a way!"

(What a drive for life grandpa had. A real survivor. But not just for himself, also

for his wife and children. That last sentence also reminds me very much of my mother's approach to life. Never take no for an answer. There's always a way!)

Through his relations with Poles outside the ghetto, Papa had prepared false papers for himself and for us. He started to insist that I should leave with our two children, that I should find a way to get out from the ghetto, now that there was an interval where there were not enough trains. On that day there was a standstill, no more action.

Also Irene was insisting, "Mama, let's get out!" I tried. At this point, I tried to get out with the children by going to an exit from the ghetto.

D: Do you remember that mom? That you went with grandma to the exit?

M: Yes, we went to the gates and we were turned away once.

G: A big gate. On one side was a Polish militia man, on the other side was a German. As I stood hesitating, Irene was pulling me urgently by my skirt, saying,

'Mama, let's get out. Let's get out!!!'

So I began walking through the exit. A large gate that I had to push through to get out. But on the other side there stood a Polish Policeman. He said, 'What are you doing?'

'I went into the ghetto to do business here, and they closed me up, locked, and I'm here with the children, I've got to get out.' That's what I said to the Polish militia man, and he replied,

‘Go back inside right away. The gendarme will kill you on the spot.’

The Polish Policeman pointed to the German gendarme who was approaching. I insisted, ‘I’m not Jewish. I happened to get into the ghetto and here I am trapped.’

‘You better go in and don’t talk to me. You can’t get out from here. If I let you out the other one will pick you up.’

He understood that I was Jewish. And Irene, your mother, was pulling, saying ‘Let’s get out, let’s get out!!’ I had to return.

D: What do you remember of that incident Mom?

M: I just remember being terrified, going to that place, trying to get out and being forced back.

G: This having failed, we went back to our apartment.

The deportation took about two days. Most of the people were gone. We heard that some people have been rebelling and that they were shot down on the spot. These were people very close to us, people that we knew.

One of my nephews Schyiek, Mayek’s brother, was married and had a child. When they were surrounded a German came to take away the child, so he grabbed the German’s gun and shot him.

And then, of course, Schyiek and the child were shot. His wife and other daughter had already been separated from them. One of their Polish tenants proposed to hide

that daughter, but she didn't want to leave her mother, so, she perished too, with her mother.

When they were emptying houses, one man didn't want to go and they shot him on the spot. But in general people went off without rebelling.

D: Was the ghetto very big?

G: It was crowded, wasn't that big but a lot of people...

D: How many square miles?

G: I couldn't tell you. The city had about 50 or 60,000 inhabitants and more than half of them were Jewish. So there were about 30,000 Jews in that ghetto. And to take 30,000 people out by train it takes time. So 2/3 of the town was deported already, and suddenly they ran out of trains to take out the rest of us.

So there was a pause.

D: Of a day or so?

G: Of a day perhaps. And Papa had provided for us false identity cards, a kind of passport. A neighbor of ours, who lived vis-a-vis our apartment, said, If you have identity cards, why don't you get out? But how? We were surrounded...

That man was the owner of a sawmill. The Germans had taken it over, but he was still working there, going to oversee the workers. Inside the sawmill was an exit out from the ghetto..

D: He was a Jew?

G: He was Jewish. In that sawmill one entrance was from outside the ghetto, for Polish workers to come in. The other entrance was from inside the ghetto, for Jewish workers in the ghetto to go in. There was a Polish concierge, a caretaker.

Our friend, the owner, said, “Go at noontime. The wives of the Polish workers come with lunch for their husbands and then they leave, go back home. Go there, join these women and go out together as they are leaving. Then you’ll be outside.”

D: Was the owner of the sawmill able to escape?

G: I don’t think so.

A concierge, a caretaker woman, would help me to get out with the children while the Polish women left.

M: She’s the one that was paid to escort us?

G: I gave her something. She didn’t ask for it.

The night before we left the Kielce ghetto I burned all of my photographs of family, friends...

We had to change, to get dressed like peasants. I, in a single skirt, a kind of shawl worn normally by the wives of the workers over my shoulders, the children barefoot, in their worst worn out clothes. We had no belongings with us, just a basket in which there was a pot with remnants of food.

D: Mom, do you remember that incident, when you went walking out in between the Germans?

M: I remember well. It was very scary, I knew it was a very tricky situation.

G: As we opened the gate the German gendarme—a policeman, not a soldier— approached us. He stood in front of us.

‘I haven’t seen you go in,’ said the gendarme.

I said I did. The concierge said,‘ They did come in.’

‘Ausweis! Ausweis!’(identity card)

I took out my false card and showed it to him.

‘Los!’(Go!) he said.

We were free! I can’t even describe how I felt at that moment. Out from the wolf’s mouth....

That concierge escorted us to her brother, a shoemaker. Remember we went to that shoemaker, and we slept on the bench?

M: Yes, the first night when we finally got out, when the German said,‘ Go!’

G: Yes, Los! Los! Go. So we went. We went to that shoemaker.

* * *

After seeing Claude Lanzmann's SHOAH I know very well what would have been their fate if they boarded those trains: straight to the ovens of Treblinka. They spoke in the film how the trains were coming from Kielce and Warsaw at the same time, that the ovens were going 24 hours a day. And that is why there was a pause in the deportation in Kielce, because there were not enough trains to handle so many people.

They came so close (Moral: luck = preparation + opportunity).

V—FLEEING BACK TO WARSAW

D: You know, whenever you remember something Mom, speak up.

M: Okay, darling. So that first night we spent on a sitting bench in the shoemaker's house...

G: The concierge brought us to her brother, the shoemaker, a Polishman, where we were to stay until we could find another way of escaping. He was a poor man. All he could offer us was a bench for the three of us to sleep on, and a goat hide to sleep under. The hide was full of fleas. Ohhh! We were covered with fleas.

M: We were free, but Papa was still in the ghetto. He was going to escape another way.

G: As a 'Useful Jew,' he had the right to stay longer, after all the other Jews were deported. But he didn't believe in his safety there and he looked for a way out...

As soon as Papa learned that we were out, he contacted a woman whose front apartment had windows facing a street outside the ghetto. It was a one story jump to the street. The woman allowed him to open the window and take a chance.

There were still German gendarmes and Polish police marching back and forth, guarding the streets so that no Jew would escape. When they went the other way, Papa caught the moment, jumped out the window and escaped.

D: And he came to join you the same night?

G: He went to a friend first, to one of the friends outside, an engineer. I don't know if you remember him...

M: A Polishman?

G: Yes. A very fine man. He was the one who helped Papa obtain false papers for us. The engineer came in the evening and told me, 'Your husband is in my house. Tomorrow morning you'll go together to Warsaw. You will meet your husband at the railway station.' And that is what we did. The next morning we went to Warsaw.

It was a hot day, late in August. We had no luggage, we had nothing with us except the clothes we wore to escape the ghetto. The children were still barefoot, in their summer shirts and shorts, both looking beautiful.

On the train Papa stood in the aisle, not in our car. He stood between cars in order not to be seen much, so as not to attract attention to us because he had more semitic looks.

I was with the children. Since we did not look Jewish we stayed inside the train. In our compartment, next to me, was an elderly, slim, aristocratic woman. Opposite us a young girl. The elderly lady started a conversation with us.

I told her that the Germans chased us out from our apartment, which happened also sometimes to Poles. She seemed to be very sympathetic, and told me that she is a professor of architecture at the University of Warsaw, that she lives with her sister in a large apartment, and is renting one room.

Then the conversation changed. The young girl started to speak about herself, telling me that her grandmother lives in a small cottage in the suburbs of Warsaw. Her grandmother was about to leave that house and come to her mother to live throughout the winter.

I heard all that, but I did not react.

As we approached Warsaw, Papa asked, ‘So, do you have an apartment yet?’

‘How could I?’ I said.

‘You were talking to those women and you didn’t get anything out of that conversation?’

‘Well, this lady has a small room for rent but I didn’t think she would rent a small room to four people.’

‘Come on,’ said Papa. ‘Let’s try. Let’s follow her!’

We followed her and as we came close to her house, I asked her whether it would be possible for us to have that little room. She accepted. She said later on that we looked so tired that she took pity on us.

M: And that’s where I remember fleas. They had two little dogs and the couch was covered with fleas.

G: After a few days, she started to suspect that we are Jewish. We were uprooted, Papa looked very semitic, and our Polish language was too much like book

language, too literary. She told us to move.

We then went to stay with my sister, Mila. She was staying with her good friends, the Kaminsky sisters, who were Jewish, but had a Polish name. They were very assimilated and pretended that they were not Jews. And they remained outside of the ghetto.

We were there for only one day because I also had information from that other person who said she has a grandmother in Goclawek (pronounced ‘Gotswavik’).

M: Which other person?

G: You remember there were two women on the train? One was old, the archeology professor, and the other one was a girl of about twenty. The young one had a grandmother in Goclawek who was coming for the winter to them to Warsaw and was renting her little house in the country. I had the telephone number of that younger woman. I asked about renting part of that cottage her grandmother occupied and she said yes. So, all the money we had, almost all, I paid for that renting. I had something like 20,000 zlotys, and paid probably 18,000 to take over that place.

Papa was out that day. He was to meet us at the place where Mila was staying. We prepared to leave for Goclawek, but in the meantime something terrible happened:

When we arrived in Warsaw just after leaving the Kielce ghetto, the Warsaw ghetto was still there. Actually, this was already after the deportations from the Warsaw ghetto had started, but, again, the ‘Nützliche Juden,’ the Useful Jews, were being allowed to stay. So Papa went to the ghetto to look for his brother, Jacob, who had been moved with his business by the Germans to Warsaw. He had a workshop where

they were working for the Germans, and, as a Useful Jew he still had the right to keep his family and his workers there.

Jacob had established his workshop there after being deported from Lodz. In that workshop they converted scraps of fabrics into strips of material to be used for cleaning the Nazi industrial machinery. Jacob was allowed to employ about 40 people, so of course he employed the whole family, which consisted of his two sisters, Franka and Sala, and their husbands and children. Sala had a daughter, Halina, and Franka had a boy, Nathan. Papa's second brother, Hula (Henry in English), was there, too.

So when we first arrived in Warsaw after escaping from Kielce, Papa went to the ghetto and found his two brothers, two sisters and their whole families there.

D: The two sisters that he loved very much.

G: Yes. But the very next day he came back and they were all gone. In talking to the concierge of that place he learned that supposedly Jacob had been denounced for taking in more than the 40 people he was allowed. The Germans came and killed them all on the spot, about 60 people altogether.

It was December. The Poles were celebrating Christmas. It was snowing, the streets were covered with ice and snow. Papa was cold, desperate. He went out and got drunk—which he never did—just before we all took the bus in the evening to Goclawek to rent the room from that girl's grandmother.

(At this point grandma is choked with emotion, sobbing, unable to restrain her feelings. But she regains her composure and continues)

On the bus Papa was standing next to us and we sat. He was crying and talking to himself, drunk, tears running down his cheeks:

‘All my family has been killed. We’ve lost everything, my brothers, my sisters...We are alone...’

We were very frightened that someone would hear on the bus—it was filled with people. Fortunately, somehow, no one did hear or cared to turn us in. Eventually he stopped crying. He never cried otherwise.

D: Mom, do you remember that?

M: Yes, I remember. The worst thing was that he was crying and he was saying how the Germans killed everybody in his family. It was in public, on a bus, which was very dangerous. He looked Jewish and was crying how they killed this person and that person. He was deeply shaken. The alcohol opened up a flood of grief and despair in public.

D: Grandpa didn’t see his brothers and sisters dead, did he?

G: No. He couldn’t get in there anymore. That was in the ghetto, we were outside the ghetto.

D: He couldn’t get into the ghetto?

M: He didn’t want to.

G: He could have been trapped there.

* * *

As I transcribe the tapes I see people, relatives, long dead and forgotten, coming to life again. Perhaps their senseless, terrible fate will find some redemption, some meaning in what I am doing.

Hearing all of this also makes me feel that I must do something worthwhile with my life, a life that my grandparents struggled so hard to preserve, a life not given to their brothers and sisters and their children and grandchildren.

VI: GOCLAWEK

G: So, then we arrived in Goclawek, to rent the room from the grandmother of that girl I had met on the train to Warsaw.

D: Where's Goclawek?

G: It's a little village, a suburb of Warsaw. We had a secluded cottage, not far from the bus stop, no other houses nearby.

There was another woman living in an adjacent room on the other side of the cottage. She was living there alone, going to work. A peasant woman.

It was winter and there were empty fields all around us. It was extremely cold, the water was freezing in the room and we had nothing to cover ourselves with at night.

Papa went to Klomnice and got from my parents warm blankets and clothing. He brought it all back to us in the night. He was really, I must say, heroic. It was forbidden for Jews to travel, we were supposed to wear the yellow star armbands. Papa disregarded all of that—'Who is Hitler to tell me what to do?'

M: I remember quite vividly, I was drawing on pads of paper, but most of the time Annette and I spent learning prayers, reciting them out loud for that woman next door, so we would know exactly the Catholic religion. And staying in bed so we would keep warm.

In that little house it was so cold that we spent the whole time in bed, Annette

and I, under big covers. The water would freeze, we couldn't wash ourselves because as the water was running down it became icicles. And I think that's where I got my frozen fingers (the little finger of each of mom's hands cannot fully straighten). I think it was probably in that apartment that my hands got frozen.

G: Not far from there was a school, part of a convent, and Irene was going to that school.

M: Walking to school, a long way...

G: Not so far. She was afraid, but she was doing it. I was going out for the whole day to Warsaw.

D: Annette wasn't going to school?

G: Not yet, no. Annette was staying by herself, in bed covered with blankets.

(It's good for me to remember all this, to keep it in mind as I go through my daily life. I've been so so fortunate to live in a peaceful country).

M: We lived in that house for awhile, and my mother would go into town to sell things, to make a living. My father was not with us, he was renting a room in Warsaw. The three of us were in that little village outside Warsaw because we did not want to endanger the others. If one would get caught, like if my father got caught because he looked Jewish, we should live separately so that we wouldn't all be deported together.

G: Papa did not stay with us, he realized he should not be there. He went off to Warsaw and posed as a Polish officer in hiding. And Polish people were very hospi-

table to their own people. He had found a room with a family and I stayed in Goclawek with the children.

I started doing business. I was going to Warsaw to do something, to make a living. Papa had been doing business in the ghetto, bringing in corks for bottles. And that was imported from Warsaw. He gave me the name of the factory, and I went there. It cost pennies to buy my merchandise and I was selling to stores, going from store to store, hardware stores and pharmacies.

First with corks, then with 'lac,' which is the sealer of bottles, carrying big loads. Nobody recognized me as a Jewess, nobody knew who I was and nobody asked. That was very important because I was the connection between my children and my husband who were living separately.

So I was selling the corks for bottling preserves, and I usually returned home towards the evening, cooking soup for the children.

* * *

We lived in Goclawek for several weeks, but soon people in that village discovered that we are Jewish.

When we first came to live there, the landlady, that grandmother was moving out. She was cleaning off the frames of her pictures, religious pictures. She took them off the walls which were full of bedbugs, insects that suck one's blood at night. Annette was watching. She pointed to the picture of the Madonna and said, 'Who's that?'

There was no reaction from the woman, but she must have told it to somebody; I think that rumors were after that incident with Annette and the picture of the Madonna, that in this house are Jews.

So, one night they came.

I was helping Irene with her homework, by candlelight—there was no electricity in that little cottage. Suddenly, there was banging at the door. Four young peasants, armed with guns, rifles, broke in.

‘Where is your husband?’ they yelled.

I said, ‘He’s not here.’ He wasn’t there.

‘We’ll come back tomorrow morning. He’s got to be here, we want to bring him to the Gestapo.’

And then they said, “Pani ma woz i przewoz,” which means you have the carriage, and you can get out of the carriage, something like that. That meant that I can pay them money and they will go away.

They were doing it on their own. They were not working for the Germans. Many Poles were doing that kind of thing. In Warsaw Papa was attacked many, many times. It was natural for them to do that. There were also Polish people who helped us very much and I would like to give them credit for it. But these were the bad elements.

M: It was blackmail. They knew that we were helpless, there was no man around, just a woman with two children.

G: I went to the other room, and Irene followed me. I had a thousand zlotys. I was to give it to them, and Irene came, tugging at me, whispering, ‘Mama, don’t give them everything! (louder) Don’t give them everything!’ (grandma is laughing) Irene took half of it, and hid it in her underwear. Irene was ten years old at that time (1942).

I gave the Poles the money, but as they were leaving they said, ‘We’ll be back tomorrow.’

I decided that we had to get out from that cottage and village in a hurry. That very same night, around 4:OO a.m., we left for Warsaw. We packed the things we had...

M: Didn’t we have it all in a sheet, like bundles on our back?

G: We had huge bundles wrapped in sheets. And we paid the woman who was living on the other side of the cottage to help us. She did, all the way to Warsaw.

It was winter, a very cold night. We passed a German sentry who stopped us. I don’t know what I said, but he let us go. He only looked at our identification papers and let us go.

VII: BACK TO WARSAW—THE BOMBED-OUT BUILDING

M: When we came to Warsaw with those bags on our back we had no place to go, right?

G: When we came from that Goclawek we went straight to Papa. And where was Papa? He had met a man he had known in Lodz who was the manager of a bank. This man was not in the Warsaw ghetto, he was working outside the ghetto, even though he was Jewish. He was very helpful, he permitted us to stay in his spacious apartment until we found another place to live. I was able to leave the children for a few hours there while I went out looking for a place to live.

He recommended that I go to another Jewish man from Lodz who also lived as a non-Jew. He was a commissioner, a so-called commissar, of the abandoned Jewish houses.

That commissar was in charge of renting apartments in a part of the ghetto where all the Jews had already been deported by the Germans. These were bombed out, abandoned buildings. But there were still other parts of the ghetto where Jews were still living.

D: You mean he was giving Jewish houses to the Poles.

G: Yes. I went there and said that I need an apartment, that I'm with my two children, and so he took from me some 1,000 zlotys for an abandoned one-room apartment.

The address was Tvarda 40 which was within the walls of the ghetto. There were no longer any Jews there and the Germans were not patrolling that area. But it

wasn’t really safe because were Poles scavenging for any Jewish survivors and their valuables.

The apartment was on the fifth floor of a walk-up building, with no stove for heating in the winter. It was very dark, the windows were broken out, boarded up with wood. We were not supposed to use electricity for fear of being discovered. There was no running water in the apartment so the children had to bring water from the court-yard up to the fifth floor.

But we rented it anyhow and went to live there.

And there the children had a terrible time. They were staying home alone. I was leaving them during the day and in the evening coming back. I had to leave them alone, I had to go out to make a living. There was no choice.

We had a bed and Papa brought us a wooden crate which we used as a closet to put our clothes in. The room was full of bedbugs. It didn’t help to put the bed in the middle of the room, the bedbugs were falling on us from the ceiling.

M: Annette and I were alone. We slept in the same bed, terrified of any foot-steps in that abandoned building. It was dark and cavernous, to us a haunted house.

D: There wasn’t anybody else in the whole five-story building?

M: No.

G: It was a house where Jews were forced out by the Germans.

D: It’s like the burned out buildings in the Bronx?

G: Yes, yes. Without windows, without furniture. The tiles in the middle of the stove had been broken out. Jews were sometimes hiding gold and valuables in loose bricks and the Polish plunderers knew that. They were going through these abandoned buildings, breaking out the tiles, looking for hidden valuables. So our stove wasn’t working and we were freezing without any heat.

We had to bring water from downstairs up to our rooms. Irene was carrying big metal buckets of water up five flights...

D: This was during the winter?

G: Yes, it was winter.

M: All I remember is that we were alone and we were afraid of any footsteps in the stairway. We kept the door locked. It was a terrible place.

G: I don’t think it lasted long, maybe a few weeks.

* * *

Recently I read in the newspaper that one out of every three women are raped in their lifetime. Thinking about grandma and the situation during World War II makes me wonder if she was ever raped. I wait for an appropriate moment; it’s not the kind of question I can ask out of the blue. She answers:

G: In that abandoned apartment building in Warsaw, besides not wanting to be

discovered by marauding Poles, we were not supposed to use electricity because there was no meter. We were there anonymously and did not want to lose that advantage by paying a company. But we had to sometimes. So, whenever Irene heard someone coming she would immediately turn off the light.

One evening, when we had only been there one or two weeks, while Irene and Annette had gone downstairs to get water, an inspector for the electric company came up. Somebody must have denounced us, because we were not using lights much. 'You've been using light, stealing,' the inspector said. 'You know what that means!' All the while he was coming closer and closer. He began to press into me, and I was very frightened. In desperation I said, 'I'm not well, I'm sick, I could harm you very much. I can't have sex!' And I had to *push* him off. Then the children came in, too. He went off, in kind of a stupor. He must have been drunk.

* * *

M: Soon my mother found this Polish woman, Mrs. Piotrowska, who was very well educated, whose father was in charge of the YMCA in Poland. Even now mama is still sending money to Mrs. Piotrowska.

G: Yes, Papa was pushing me to get in touch with Jadwiga Piotrowska. He had heard she was helping Jewish children, taking no money for it. She was part of an organization of Polish women who were helping Jewish children, trying to place them, to save them.

Her sister, a very beautiful woman, was also trying to save Jewish people, and her father had some kind of connection with America and efforts
from there to save Jews.

And how did we get in touch with Piotrowska, who has helped us?

M: That I don’t know...

G: Here is the story:

Papa had met her when searching for his niece, Halina, a child who had been among the workers in the workshop of his brother Jacob. When rumors started that they were going to be killed, Papa’s sister Sala went out from the ghetto to try and save her only daughter, Halina. She placed her with the concierge, the care-taker woman who worked in Jacob’s workshop.

Jadwiga Piotrowska, the noble Polishwoman who helped them during the war.

Then Sala returned to the ghetto and, of course, perished with the others.

Papa found out through that concierge that Halina had been brought to a safe place. The concierge gave Papa an address where he might find Halina. At that address lived Jadwiga. Papa told me to go to Jadwiga, that she might help our children, too. At every step Papa was figuring out what we should do to survive.

D: Do you remember that mom?

M: No. The next thing I remember is that Papa was on a bus and he was drunk...

G: That was when we went to Goclawek, not when we were leaving Goclawek...

(D: My mother's memories of the war are disjointed, the chronology mixed up. I suppose it's to be expected since that is the way memories of childhood usually are. I'm fortunate that grandma is still here, that I can get the whole story on paper while she is alive and lucid.)

M: Anyway, the next thing I remember we were placed with two Polish women outside the ghetto...

G: Jadwiga recommended them because for some reason she didn't want to, or perhaps couldn't, place you in an orphanage. Halina had already been placed by her in an orphanage. Jadwiga sent me to those two young teachers, women, who I paid to take care of my children.

At first we were very happy that this could be done, that I could take my children out from that abandoned fifth floorwalk-up where they were alone, freezing and scared all day.

VIII: THE BURNING OF THE WARSAW GHETTO

G: So they were placed by Jadwiga with these two teachers, but it was not a good situation there either.

D: Why?

G: Those women were not decent at all, fooling around with men and drinking. The children were locked up in their rooms, there were fleas on the blankets...

Also, from their window Irene and Annette could see the Warsaw ghetto in flames. Women and children jumping from windows. Screaming. They were alone in that room, nobody could explain to them what was happening. It was the time of the Jewish Uprising, The Germans were burning the ghetto.

* * *

To me the above scene seems right out of one of Hieronymous Bosch's nightmare paintings.

Hearing these stories from my grandmother does not surprise me, but trying to imagine my mother in that setting is really shocking. Bizarre. My memories of my mother are intimately tied to a very peaceful, happy childhood. It is radically different from the image of her in that wartime setting. I had always assumed her whole life was like my childhood.

When I was growing up I never heard my mother speak Polish. She still understands it well, but whenever she speaks it, it seems strange to me. I realize that even though I've known her my whole life and feel that I know her very well, there is a part of her world that will always be completely outside of anything I've ever experienced—a terrified child in a world gone mad.

* * *

D: Mom, you were staying right on the edge of the ghetto?

M: On the outside of the ghetto, but very near it. I was reading a lot there, I was getting books, reading nonstop. It was my salvation. But the ghetto was burning. I could smell the odor. But in spite of the books, there was no getting away from that nightmare.

Those women weren't home much of the time. We were alone, I was reading and there was the smell of the ghetto burning. I could see something horrible was happening across the street, people jumping off buildings. And I could see the broken glass on top of a big wall and the odor of smoke was coming through our window.

D: But why was the ghetto burning?

G: The Jews were fighting the Germans...

Oh, this was the uprising.

(Mom and grandma together): The Jewish Uprising.

G: The Germans were burning the ghetto. They were demolishing houses, burning, burning people alive...Irene and Annette could see that.

M: And then these women were very promiscuous and men were coming to them. They would lock their door, laughing was going on and they were mistreating us, not allowing us to get near them when...You know, we were just people who pay,

like boarders, but really unwanted boarders.

Once a man came to them when they were not home. We opened the door and he was trying to do something with me I think, sitting on the sofa next to us, getting closer and closer. We got really frightened because the women weren't there, just the two of us.

D: The man tried to rape you?

M: Yes.

D: Do you remember fighting him off?

M: I think maybe these women appeared. I remember sitting on the couch and he was doing some things, I didn't know what was going on, you know.

I knew that it was not kosher and that he was doing something very strange. The women appeared at the door at that point so nothing happened. I told my mother and she decided we better get out of there quickly.

G: Irene and Annette stayed with those teachers for perhaps two or three months. I couldn't take them out until Jadwiga agreed to place them in an orphanage. She said she had to have the permission of the Mother Superior. It was terrible to have them with those women and I kept trying to convince Jadwiga to put the children in the orphanage.

Finally Jadwiga said,'Give me the children, I have a place for them.' And she took them away from those women and kept them in her house for three days. The

children had their only clothes on and Jadwiga bathed them, de-loused them, cleaned their clothes. That wonderful person took them by the hand to the convent, an orphanage run by sisters.

M: And Jadwiga baptized us!

D: Good job!

G: and baptized them, and brought them to that convent...that was a good thing because you felt safe.

M: Yes, I remember kneeling there, both of us, and she was making us repeat after herself the words, 'Now I baptize you.' She cleaned us first, then she baptized us.

G: She was a converted Catholic herself. She was a Protestant before. But her friend, a well-known Polish writer, was Catholic, a fervent Catholic. So she also became Catholic.

* * *

With some of my questions here and the question about whether the man tried to rape mom, I feel that I am pushing the limits of my questioning, pushing against doors that have been locked for a long time and perhaps should never be opened again. Pushing the limits of my intimacy with mom and grandma. Even though we are very close, there are still limits, boundaries, things that people never reveal to anyone, no matter how close, in their lifetime. Perhaps it is best that way.

As I observe the struggle my mother's family went through to survive, whatever troubles I may have recede into the background. Their ability to pick up the pieces

again and again inspires me to face my own troubles with renewed vigor and an appreciation of simply being alive. They were able to persist when there was no end in sight. Not just months, but for years. I live in a country where repression is virtually nonexistent. I am free! Free to follow my dreams and live in peace. What a blessing.

My room is very quiet. It is next to the garden area on the inside of the block. The house is quiet, too. It is a respite from this frenetic city, a refuge from the dislocations and wanderings of my family, my people. I understand the appreciation my mother has for the tranquility and seclusion of her home in California.

IX: THE ORPHANAGE

G: That orphanage was about two and a half hours from Warsaw. Nobody knew who my children were, just that they were children of a Polish officer who was lost in the war. Only the Mother Superior knew our real situation, and she accepted.

This was the beginning of 1943. Irene would have been 11 years old already, Annette 7. Soon, however, Annette became very ill again and had to be taken to the hospital, to Warsaw... Somehow she got better and was brought back to the orphanage.

Irene knew everything, she understood everything. Nobody must know she is Jewish, nobody is to know that she has a father. There were other Jewish children in that orphanage who had Jewish looks really, and it was a wonderful thing these sisters did. I was paying because I was earning some money and wanted to pay. The Mother Superior would say, ‘Leave something for after the war, don’t use it now.’

And there the children felt safe, they finally felt that something very good has happened, even though they weren’t too happy there because they were not fed properly and were severely disciplined. But they felt free in a way. They were together with other children. They went to school and I did not have to worry.

I have known one person, who had a child in the same orphanage, who was Jewish. She kept away from me because we must, might be she was right... because (laughing) two Jews together look more like Jews than one.

M: We were working hard, peeling potatoes, every child...

G: Therefore she peels so well potatoes...

M: A group of children was put for two or three hours in the basement to peel potatoes for the whole orphanage. And there were groups taking turns.

G: But it wasn't too bad because the children felt safe there.

M: Yes, the main thing is that we didn't feel that we were singled out to be killed, you know? That we were among people, like everybody else and that terrible danger that was hanging over us was lifted. And we were treated a little bit better than the other children because...

G: That's what I wanted to mention, the nuns were nice to you.

M: No, the nuns were beating other children, but they did not beat us because they were being paid for keeping us and they knew that there was somebody we could report it to. All the others children were orphans and completely at their mercy.

Mom & Annette during WWII, at the time of the orphanage.

So there we were eating oatmeal that was full of husks, not just the bran, but really rough, like what the grain is enclosed in. It was so hard to eat that you would swallow and it would get stuck in your throat. I hated that oatmeal. And the food was very, very meager, so my mother would come every two weeks or so with a suitcase full of food. I was guarding it!

D: And grandma would come and there would be rotten food because mom was saving it for a rainy day, right?

G: During this whole period I was regularly going to see the children, on Sundays, once every two weeks. I was bringing food for them, food that they were not receiving there. Butter or ham or things that were special and nourishing. Irene would often save the food, lock it up, and it would spoil.

(D: I try to imagine being a child, seeing my mother once every two weeks and not knowing if she would ever come back again)

M: I was disbursing it, but little by little so we would have a little bit here and there and not run out before mama got back.

D: Just between you and your sister?

M: Yes, right. My mother's idea was probably that we eat it all at the same time, right?

G: That you eat, that you eat! I brought it for eating, not for spoiling. It was dangerous for me to travel, it was a long road to go, about two and a half hours from Warsaw.

D: Was the orphanage in a separate town?

M: It was a suburb of Warsaw, Chotomow (pronounced 'Hotomuv').

G: Not considered as a suburb, it was too far to be a suburb. The orphanage was more than two hours from Warsaw.

D: There's still a convent in Chotomow?

G: I don't think so.

M: In the convent I went to school for a year. I was very good at school and enjoyed it. It was really great to be able to be part of the world, to be with other children, to be learning.

Sister Witolda, one of the nuns who cared for mom and Annette during the war.

I was praying fervently, sometimes for hours a day, for God to protect and save my parents. After the war I continued to practice Catholicism for several years and was upset when my parents said I did not have to, and should not, believe in it anymore.

We were in the convent a year and a half. Then the Polish Uprising started. Something bad again. All of a sudden we heard the planes attacking Warsaw, jets and whistling bombs, reprisals for the Polish Uprising.

G: In 1944 the Germans were already losing everywhere, and the Polish people felt that they might be able to chase out the Germans. So they started that uprising, and fought.

D: And you were in Warsaw at that time when they were fighting.

G: Yes.

D: But Irene and Annette were in the orphanage still.

M: My mother didn’t know it, but the orphanage was also bombed, because it was near Warsaw. We would spend hours in the cellars while bombs were screeching and whistling by. Finally the sisters took all the children on trains to go to another town.

G: I lost track of the children during the uprising because Papa and I were captured by the Germans...

* * *

He was very good to my mother, always brought her the tea with milk in bed saying, 'And don't get up and don't work so much.'

—Grandma speaking about her father

How sad to think of grandma's parents. They had shared a rich life together, only to be torn apart in their last years. Subjected to all kinds of humiliation and degradation, each facing death alone, or perhaps with a daughter or son behind or in front of them, as they stepped across the threshold of a gas chamber in a death camp.

For the most part, whenever grandma speaks of her parents or family it is without a trace of sadness, very happy memories. Only when thinking about their fates does she falter.

This evening we are looking at the only remaining picture of her father. It was saved by her sister Mila, a Nazi photo I.D. card taken by the Germans just before their father was deported. He looks miserable, worn out. "Poor, poor father," says grandma, "that golden man. He didn't expect such a thing at the end of his life."

Grandma's father,
Joseph David Friedman.

Rest in Peace.

(the only photo that remains of him, from a Nazi ID card saved by grandma's sister, Mila)

"My parents and family were deported from the little towns. First they deported people from Kielce. Then my family from Klomnice, except for one sister,

Fela, who has been saved by a neighbor of my parents. We had no way of communicating. And then we were so preoccupied with the feeling of danger at every moment. There was no place really for thinking of more than that. We did, but we couldn't do anything.

In Warsaw a friend of my family was the head of an organization helping Jews. He gave us better passports, better papers, from people who have died, so we had original birth certificates. He asked, 'What do you do for your parents?'

We had no contact with them, we didn't know what was going on and we never learned. I mean, we learned after the war because we came to Klomnitze after the war.

We did not communicate with anyone. In Warsaw we were isolated, we weren't really in touch with other Jews. Our sole aim was to survive each day, not to be recognized by the Poles. Papa said, 'Hitler says I should die. Who is he to say I live or die? I've got to defend myself, to do what is right for myself. Nobody can tell me what to do.' He did not wear the yellow star as they ordered.

We did know that Jews were being killed everywhere, but we could not do anything about it. Part of the family was deported to camps, others were just right into the...We learned that later on. It is very hard on the conscience to think about, that one is alive when our dearest are gone.

Most people, and I myself, felt that whatever will happen to others will also happen to us. I didn't feel that I should try to save my skin. But my husband had a very strong survival instinct... really in every circumstance. Even though he couldn't be with us himself, he had the initiative and he had that stamina, he had that push that we are to live! And not to give up.

And he was right, because dying, unnecessarily dying...And there were the children also. That was a tremendous reason to go on, to keep them alive. There was no time to think really. When we were just at the situation we already had to act. Act in as much as possible and later on not to think whether we are in danger or not. We said we had our death sentence in our pocket all the time.”

X: WARSAW—LIFE ON THE EDGE

G: For me it was not as difficult as it was for Papa during the war. I did not look Jewish and could pass for a Polish woman. In Goclawek, I was attacked so I had to get out, but later on I haven't had any such situation.

Papa was attacked in the streets by Poles many times. Everything he had on him taken away, so he finally had to go into hiding. He was brave enough to find rooms for himself. Papa had rented several rooms in different parts of the city, in order not to stay too long in one place. He had four rooms, four different places to live. So he was going from one to another, saying that he was a traveling salesman, because talking too much, or being seen too much in one place was not practical. He stayed for four or five days in each apartment before moving on to the next one.

He also used the apartment in that bombed-out, boarded up building where I had been with Irene and Annette, when we first came to Warsaw. He could go there for a week or so when he felt uneasy at the place he was staying at the time. Papa was following this routine, moving from apartment to apartment for about one year, until the Polish uprising.

So, we manuevered as we could.

Through Jadwiga again I was able to get an apartment for myself. She recommended me to someone where I stayed for the rest of our time in Warsaw, a woman who had been married to a man named Dr. Balaban. He had run an optical clinic in Warsaw. Mrs. Balaban had her mother there and another tenant too, a woman, who I think was also Jewish. We did not have much contact with one another, but from time to time she gave me a facial and during Christmas she invited the tenants for a very

nice reception. Mrs. Balaban worked at a radio station, and she was a singer. She recalled once the name of a Professor Ludwig Urstein who was Jewish. He was announcing and interpreting classical music on the radio. She said, 'I would have saved him.'

Papa was doing business this whole time. When he jumped from the window of the Kielce ghetto he was dressed in his beautiful silver-grey flannel suit, made from the finest fabric. We had a very good tailor in Lodz. And Papa was very handsome. People judge by others' attire. He looked very elegant. He looked like he came from another planet.

Papa had this nice suit when he came to Warsaw, and he was very presentable. He met a Jewish man who had worked with him in a bank in Lodz—that man later perished during the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto trying to escape through the sewers. Papa got clues and was soon working as he always did—wholesale and big. He had the big business and I had the small.

Papa was going to places where Poles had taken over the Jewish hardware stores and proposing them business. They gave him all kinds of things to sell: a wagon of buckets, a ton of carbide (used for lighting when there was no coal), porcelain, metal. He rented trucks to haul these goods. In the evening, after he had sold much of it, he would bring the money to his suppliers and in the morning he would come in again for merchandise.

He left the Kielce ghetto without a penny, but people confided in him because he was so presentable and he looked like a serious businessman. This lasted only a short time because Papa was easily recognized as a Jew and was constantly waylaid by hoodlums.

* * *

This evening I put on the record player a Bach Oratorio, but grandma asks me to turn it off, saying, I cannot stand the sound of a German man's voice.

It is only since World War II that she feels that way. "During the war I heard them yelling and beating and being so brutal to Jews. There was no 'speaking' to us, only yelling orders. But, on the other hand, the language itself is beautiful, a beautiful literature."

The sound of a woman speaking German doesn't bother grandma so much, only the sound of men.

* * *

"During the war nobody ever asked us if we are Jewish. They did not ask but came and accused—'You are Jewish!' From Poles on the streets of Warsaw we would overhear expressions like 'they're still around,' 'not all of them are killed,' or things like that, referring to Jewish survivors.

Often, in the street, Papa was attacked by hooligans, gangs of Poles, who would pull him off the street into the entrance of some building. They would take his wallet, his watch, his stylograph pen. To humiliate him (and to be sure he was Jewish) they would make him take down his pants.

Once Papa sensed that they were following him, so he ran to a German gendarme and said, in German, which he spoke very well:

'Look at these people, they want to steal from me!'

The German took him and put him on a bus. This was a very bold and risky thing to do, for if the German had suspected he was Jewish he would have been killed or deported right away. He had these ideas, how to help himself. Papa was a first class risk taker.

There came a time where he could not go out anymore, because people recognized him in the street. He was being attacked and blackmailed too frequently. Instead he was giving me directions where to sell merchandise and where to bring the money back. I took over the sales and delivery of money to the suppliers.

I still had my other business too, going by bus all over the city selling corks, sealing wax for letters and bottles, silverware, cutlery, manicure and even ice-cream machines.

Once, on the bus, as I was going about my business, I heard a violinist playing for money. He played such a beautiful melody that it has stayed with me to this day, it still runs through my mind.

* * *

Tonight grandma finally learned what that melody was. I happened to play a record from our collection, Antonin Dvorak's Slavonic Dance #2 in E minor, Opus 72, and she recognized it right away:

The melody is very Eastern European, very Jewish in its feel as are many of the Slavonic Dances that Dvorak wrote.

It was beautiful the way grandma related the story to me; the memory is still so vivid and fresh for her. Music and odors recall the past with a sense of immediacy that memory alone is not capable of.

* * *

G: I was working at first with corks, getting them from the manufacturer and distributing them around. I could carry a lot because they were so light. Then people were asking for wax, to seal preserves in bottles. But that was heavy for me to carry and only cost pennies.

One day, while on a bus and carrying those loads of wax and cork, I met two young men. They were sitting next to me and noticed what I had with me. They said, 'What are you doing to yourself? This is too heavy for you. Come to us, we will give you merchandise to sell and it won't be that heavy and it will be bringing in more money.'

So I began a very lucrative business with something that was really needed. They would give me every day a package of silverware, locks, little things, scissors, cosmetics. I would bring in the money next day and they would give me more merchandise again. Somehow they had confidence in me. I made a very good living this way. And through this business I was meeting people, I was making connections.

Those two men happened to live in one of the buildings where Papa was hiding. The men probably were associated with Germans who confiscated Jewish belongings and now wanted to sell them. They never asked me for my name and I did not ask them either. They never asked anything about me, and I worked for them for about two years.

Once, when I was at another supplier of mine getting cutlery, his wife said to me, ‘Hitler gave us bread and a knife’—meaning he gave them Jewish property and a way to get rich off it.

I was meeting Papa every day. We’ve been going to dinner together. He learned about a place where a Russian general’s wife was serving dinners for cheap prices, in her own apartment. It was in a beautiful section of town, Zbawiciela, in a very elegant house. There were usually about ten or twelve other people who ate there. There was soup, with a tiny bit of meat. It was nice. The people were very sympathetic, so we felt safe there.

I was leading an active life: meeting people, was liked in one place, was told in the other places not to come back. I was telling Papa about these things when we got together and he was telling me how his days went by. We wouldn’t stay together long, but we were seeing each other every day.

One day the Gestapo came while we were having dinner there together. One could always tell when they were coming because of the loud siren. The Russian general’s son approached us: ‘Pani (Mr.) Vozniak (Papa’s false name during the war), do you have an identification card?’

They suspected that Papa might be Jewish and wanted to warn him that the Gestapo was coming. Papa did have false papers, but as soon as the door bell rang, he ran to the bathroom, which was right next to the entrance door.

It was at a time of the evening when all the other diners had left already. One of the girls, a tenant who just came in and really did not know that Papa was there, answered the door.

‘There is a Jew in a grey suit (the suit grandpa had worn when he escaped from the Kielce ghetto) that we are looking for. Is he here?’ asked the Gestapo man.

‘No, there is no such person here,’ said the girl.

I was sitting there at the table, frozen. The Gestapo man was dressed in the black uniform with the red and white swastika band on his arm. There were several more men outside. They went in all the apartments in the house and even looked on the roof.

That was a terrible moment.

But the Gestapo didn’t find him and eventually they left. Someone must have denounced him and said that there was a Jew coming into the building.

Grandpa came out of the bathroom. His knees were shaking and his teeth chattering.

We stopped going to that place after that. We found another place to meet for dinner. It was in the same house where my sister Rozka used to live, Filtrowa 16. Rozka had gone to the ghetto and was one of the first to be deported, probably to Auschwitz and burned there.

We were going there for some time, it was already 1944.

XI: THE POLISH UPRISING—CAPTURE AND ESCAPE

One day, in 1944, we heard that the Russians were coming. We became very hopeful, we thought they will come soon and liberate us.

The Germans were already fleeing, we thought this is the end of the war. Seeing the Germans weaker and the Russians behind us, the Poles started an uprising.

The Poles had been told that the Russians would come to help them, but the Russians stopped and the Germans did not leave Poland. The Russians stayed on the other side of the Vistula river to let the Germans kill off the Polish resistance. The Russians did this to create a power vacuum, so they could later take over Poland easily.

One night we heard shots. The Polish uprising had begun. We were having dinner at Filtrowa 16. All around us the houses were burning. We could see flames; Germans were setting buildings on fire.

We were trapped at that dinner place, we couldn't go out. The window in the dining room was shattered by a bullet. Soon more bullets began to fly. Everyone in the house went into the cellar.

Finally, Germans and Ukranian soldiers came to get us out from the cellar, to deport us, as Poles. As we were marching out they were pulling off women's valuables, taking off their earrings, bracelets, necklaces. One of the Ukrainians started to pull my wedding ring off my finger. I told him to stop and pulled it off myself because he would have taken my whole finger!

It was a bright, sunny day. As we were marching, Papa kept looking for ways to

escape, pulling at me, saying ‘Let’s hide, let’s hide!’, pointing to small bushes along the side of the road. The bushes were maybe half a yard high at the most. Maybe he was just sharing his thoughts with me, he certainly couldn’t hide there.

(Grandma has a good laugh with this story. This reminds me of how my mother is always pushing me: try this, go for that, exhausting me with idea after idea. Some of her ideas are quite good, even brilliant, but others are ridiculous! The main thing is to have lots of ideas, because only a few will actually work).

They brought us to a place called Zieleniak in Warsaw, where the vegetable market was usually taking place. It was a round place closed off with a high wall like a ghetto. There they put all the people from that part of the city, waiting to be taken out from there and deported to Germany.

Night fell. It was a bright night, lots of stars in the sky.

Papa said, ‘Look, we are again in big danger. I want to escape from here. Come with me. We can jump from that wall and escape to the outside.’

‘I can’t make it,’ I said. ‘I will jump and break my legs. And what will I do then? If you want to go, go. I cannot.’

(‘You know what kind of a jumper I am,’ says grandma.)

But Papa insisted that I should go with him, ‘I want you to go with me.’ And I said, ‘I cannot jump. I won’t be able to jump! I’ve never done it before.’ He stayed a few minutes longer. Finally he got up to go. He said:

‘So. After all we’ve been through together, now you are abandoning me!’

(Grandma is really laughing now.)

And he left! He went, he climbed up on the wall.

But on the other side the Ukrainians had set up their rifles, had fires going, and they were raping Polish girls. It was very loud. Papa came back. He had thought that there wouldn’t be anyone on the other side.

D: Couldn’t you hear it from inside?

G: We didn’t know what was going on on the other side. It was quite a distance where he went on the wall. We were in the center of that market. It’s a big place, that Zeleniak in Warsaw.

The next day Papa had not shaved and looked terrible. There were only Poles in the enclosure, no Jews—at least not officially. If we had been taken from there to Germany he would have been examined and found out; there would have been an examination of the men, to see if they were healthy, and, as he was circumsized, that would have been the end for Papa. He would have been exterminated.

M: Don’t say ‘exterminated.’ I don’t like that word for people.

(Grandma uses that word because the Nazi’s thought of Jews as vermin, rats or cock-roaches, to be exterminated. Jews were not considered human. It’s even been used for artistic effect in Art Spiegelman’s art/comic rendering of the Holocaust, *Maus*, where the Jews are mice,Germans are cats, and Poles are pigs! Spiegelman uses a quote of

Adolf Hitler at the beginning his book: “The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human.”)

G: Killed. Killed. But fortunately we met there some people with whom I had dealt before. In that holding area there were many, many people, including a family who had been my customers in Warsaw. They had a hardware store and I was supplying them with my merchandise. The young woman had been my customer and was a very nice person.

When she saw my husband that morning, unshaven, she understood that Papa was Jewish, because with the beard grown he looked like a hundred Jews! She realized how much more dangerous our situation was than hers and said to me: ‘You know, we are friends with the conductor of the train that is to take us. He said that he wants to help, that two people can stand next to him at the front of the train. But we are six and we don’t want to separate. Go and take a chance yourself. Might be this can help you.’

When the Germans came to take us to the train, we went and stood next to the conductor. He said he would tell us where to get off. At the first station he said ‘no,’ at the second ‘no.’ The train did not stop at all those stations because its destination was later on. It probably had to slow down a little at each one in case people were on the tracks.

The third stop was Piastow; the train started to slow down and the conductor said, ‘Now! Go!’

We jumped off and at the same time the train accelerated. We ran to the opposite side where there was a peasant’s hut. We heard yelling and shooting, but we did not look back.

D: Did you see bullets flying around you?

G: We didn't see anything because we were running, in the other direction.

D: But the train was going too fast for anybody to jump off? Why didn't the Germans follow you off the train?

G: By the time they realized, the conductor was speeding off with the train.

* * *

That's quite an image, of grandma and grandpa running together, crouched down, bullets flying. Even so close to the end of the war there were such close calls. It seems amidst the constant, hovering danger there were a few intensely critical moments where luck and initiative came together.

Even though Grandma claims that it was all due to Grandpa's initiative that they survived, a lot was still due to her merit. He might not have made it without her, because she did not look Jewish and made connections with people that he would not have been able to do on his own.

They were a good team.

This evening I'm waiting anxiously for MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour on TV for coverage of the earthquake in Mexico. Isn't it strange how people, myself included, are drawn to violence, death and tragedy? Perhaps because it is at those critical moments, when death looms large, that life stands out so brightly in relief.

Certainly in grandma's life it is the harrowing time of World War II that is the most riveting.

XII: THE ROAD TO CZENSTOCHOWA

G: After jumping off the train we started to walk. Eventually we got tired and stopped at a peasant's house; we told him that we are from Warsaw, that we escaped. They knew that Poles were being deported from Warsaw, and so they allowed us to stay there for a little while. Poles were very helpful to other Poles. They gave us food, let us sleep where they kept straw, in the barn. We slept in the barn that night.

But soon they understood that we were not real Poles, because of our way of expressing ourselves, our looks perhaps. They told us that we had to go, that they could not keep us any longer.

D: Grandpa hadn't shaved yet?

G: (laughing) I don't know what was with that shaving later...In any case...Did he have a shaver?

D: He didn't have an electric shaver? (more laughter)

G: He must have had a shaver because we were going among people. It was critical the he not be recognized as a Jew. But even the peasants guessed that something is not kosher with us...

D: Or that something *is* kosher.

G: There was something in our speech, the way we talk. Our language was too literary perhaps, not the simple language of the people. And Papa had Jewish looks. The Poles would say that they have no place for us, that we should go elsewhere. Fortunately, no one informed the Germans about us.

The next day we began to walk in the direction of Czenstochowa. It was the next big town and I had some connections there; it was near Klomnice, where my parents had lived before the war. On the way we stopped in different places, and among others at the steel factory where they make silverware and cutlery. A very famous and important factory in Poland. I had been selling their merchandise in Warsaw. Papa said, 'Let's go in.'

We went in to meet the director, Mr. Gerlach, a very fine man. He took pity on us. He let us have a bath in his bathroom, served us a very nice lunch. Unfortunately he couldn't help us with merchandise—Papa thought he could give us merchandise to sell. The factory was not working, it was closed.

But he gave us some good hints how to go on from there. We stayed there a big part of the day, then we left, towards Czenstochowa. It was about halfway to Czenstochowa.

D: Were you walking at night as well as day?

G: Where we stayed that night I don't remember. We stayed at other peasants until we reached Czenstochowa. When we arrived, my feet were terribly blistered—I was wearing leather shoes and had no socks or stockings. The blisters got infected.

D: Czenstochowa...Weren't you in that town before the war, too?

G: That was near where my father used to live, Klomnice, where he had the mill. We went from Warsaw to Czenstochowa entirely by foot. I don't know the exact distance, but I know it's a big distance.

D: This wasn’t winter anymore, was it?

G: It was summertime.

D: Right, that’s better. (breaking into the Gershwin song) ‘Summer time, when the living’s easy...’

G: It was summertime. Do we have to be so...

D: Grandma, you do have to be so exact because I’m trying to get an idea of what happens where and when. Everything I’ve learned from you over the years has been a story here, a story there, and now I’m finally starting to understand the sequence of events. That’s why I want to be very careful in the chronology of what you are telling me.

XIII: CZENSTOCHOWA

G: In Czenstochowa the people were prepared to help the Polish—not Jewish—refugees from Warsaw. They placed Papa with one family, and I stayed with a teacher and her family. There I slept on the kitchen table the entire time, a period of several months until the Russians came. I did not have to pay to stay there.

That teacher was a young woman who had two rooms and a kitchen. She also gave shelter to other people, several people from Lodz who were among the refugees. They happened to be aristocrats, so they had the bedroom. The teacher slept with her children in the living room and I got the kitchen table. I was very happy.

Papa and I pretended not to be married, as we had done so throughout the war.

Again Papa had to keep moving from place to place because everywhere he was recognized as a Jew by the Poles. Sometimes people tried to blackmail him as did one family he was staying with. They made him promise that he would give a dowry for their daughter after the liberation. But at least they did not turn him in to the Gestapo.

D: And during that time you and grandpa were doing business again?

G: Yes! (mom laughs at grandma's enthusiastic response) Papa had a connection in Czenstochowa. One of his customers in Kielce had given him the address of a certain store owned by a man named Walchinski. He knew that Papa was Jewish, but he employed him anyway.

(D: Note that even though many Poles were very anti-Semitic, there were righteous ones that helped them along the way, some in little ways, others in larger ways, often

at grave risk to themselves and their families.)

The other employee in that store was one of Papa's customers from Lodz, a man by the name of Geyer, a very fine person. Geyer was one of the brothers from a family of Polish industrialists with whom Papa had been doing big business in Lodz before World War II. That family, Geyer, was of German origin, but they did not want to become so-called Volks Deutche, to join the Germans, the Nazis. They considered themselves Poles.

So, he was given some work in that store, as a clerk. And he was able to spend the night there, sleeping on the counter.

He couldn't work in that store during the day because the customers would have recognized him as being Jewish. Instead, he spent the days in churches, reading history books and other subjects that interested him. He thought that that would be the last place that the Germans would think of looking for a Jew! And indeed, it was so.

(What a great idea! Grandpa really was a very original thinker. A genius for survival.)

Mr. Walczynski's store was kind of a delicatessen, and, among other things, they sold candy. As usual, Papa was full of ideas. He said to me,

'I've found a factory of candy. You go out, bring the candy and I will buy the candy from you. Might be this way you'll start to earn some money.'

D: Candy, right. So that's how you got involved in selling the candy.

G: Yes, he told me, 'Go and supply candy and I'll buy them from you.'

(grandma is laughing). He was a salesman there and I was supplying candy from the factory.

I started that business with candy and was selling it, but not much of it. However, in one of the stores I met a man who was manufacturing chocolate in a clandestine factory. He said that I should come to him and sell his goods. Then I developed a really good business with the chocolates; the customers liked them very much.

(D: See how one thing leads to another? Often unexpectedly. It doesn't even matter what it is. Just start doing something, anything!, and it will lead to something else.)

XIV: A SECRET MISSION

Meanwhile, we did not know what had happened to the children. We also did not have any clothing or any possessions with us, we had lost everything once again.

I knew from Fela—my sister who had been hidden by neighbors in Klomnice—that my family had left furs and valuables with the owner of an estate called Nieznanice, about one mile from Klomnice.

Nieznanice was an estate which had once been owned by the Skarbek family, Count Skarbek. It was a real palace. The Skarbeks were a historical family, going back to the year 1,000. Chopin's father had been a tutor to the Skarbek children at Nieznanice, and Chopin may have been born there. But the Skarbeks were no longer there. Instead a whole garrison of German soldiers was stationed there when I came for the valuables.

The current owner's name was Wuensche, a man of German origin. He was a young man who had been going out with my younger sisters, especially Mila, courting them.

I traveled there and Wuensche received me nicely. He gave me a Persian lamb fur coat that had belonged to my sister, and what he gave me otherwise I don't remember. But he said 'Nothing else remains.'

I went back to Czenstochowa and sold the fur coat for some 500 zlotys, and I gave half of the money to Fela. And so we had some money to live on in the beginning.

But this was not enough, so Papa said, ‘Why don’t you go to Kielce?’

In Kielce Papa had put some gold coins in the attic wall of our house in the ghetto, covered up between the bricks with a little string to find it.

We still had a friend in Kielce with whom Papa had done business during the ghetto times. A very fine man, his name was Kolasinski. So I went to him and stayed there over night.

He found a Polish policeman to go with me to the place in the ghetto where we had lived. He told the policeman that I was somebody from the underground, that important papers had been left in that attic, so he should help me to get into the attic.

The policeman accompanied me to the little house. He knocked at the door and a young boy answered. The policeman asked for the keys to the attic and the boy gave them to him. They did not go with me, but gave me the keys. I went up to the attic and found the golden coins we had hidden there between the bricks of the wall.

Later, as I was leaving Kielce, a young boy followed me through the streets yelling, ‘Jude! Jude!’ He must have recognized me from our days in the ghetto there. I was terrified, but, fortunately, the policeman had gone already and nobody else heard or cared.

(D: So many close calls!)

I then went to a woman who had been married to a doctor, the man who had been in charge of the place where ‘Useful Jews’ had been working while we had lived in Kielce. Papa had given that doctor 5,000 zlotys to go to a spa for his arthritis. The

doctor had been very grateful and became good friends with Papa. In the meantime the doctor had died. I had placed with his wife a valise with clothing, for the children, myself and for Papa. She kept me for the night and, of course, returned the clothing to me.

While I was there she asked me, ‘Now that the war is about to end, what are you going to do after the war?’

I asked her why she asked that.‘Because the Polish people have a plan to finish off what Hitler has started. You won’t be safe in Poland.’

I was aghast to hear that. She just wanted to warn me. Her son belonged to the Armja Krijova (pronounced ‘Armia Kriola’), which was organized to take over after the war. They were against the Jews.

I stayed in her house overnight and she was very nice to me. The next day I went back to Czenstochowa.

XV: FINDING THE CHILDREN

Oh! I didn't tell you yet how I got back the children.

I was going out every day with candy and chocolates, and still didn't know anything about my children. I was thinking about them, but had no way of knowing where they were.

The teacher in whose house I slept on the table was often going to the trains that were passing, going to the railway station and helping out the refugees from Warsaw after the Polish Uprising.

One day she came to me, it was about perhaps a month or six weeks since I came there, and said, 'On a dead end track is standing a train with children from an orphanage. A lay woman is directing the whole thing and some nuns, too. And there is no place to put them.'

Not really a dead track, but...'jlepy tor'?

M: Oh, oh. Off by itself, on a rail by itself, you know? Not at the station, but kind of stationed on the rails.

D: Kind of a parking place.

G: Because there was no place to put them. She didn't say orphans, she said, 'a convent with children and with a lay woman director on the...jlepy tor...where it cannot go any further.'

I didn’t even think that I might find my children there. Papa and I had been forced to leave Warsaw, but I didn’t know that our children had also been in danger, that they had left Chotomow.

D: You just assumed that they were still in the convent...

G: Yes, yes. But I was selling candy, so I thought I’ll bring candy to those children...

D: Nice grandma!

G: So I went there with two big bags of candy. When I arrived my good friend the Mother Superior was there. I recognized many of the children, but did not see my own. And Mayerchekova, who was considered the directress, was also there. They told me that Irene and Annette had gone to church and would be back soon.

Czenstochowa is a town like Lourdes in France, a holy place where a miracle supposedly took place. It was in Czenstochowa that St. Mary, the Black Madonna, supposedly saved Poland from the Swedes.

Soon the children came and of course we fell into each other’s arms. Papa had also heard about the train and had come with me to see. He was hiding behind some bushes nearby and I brought Irene and Annette over to him. And the children, especially Annette, said, ‘You’re not our father!’

M: ‘I have no father.’ I’ve been telling everybody I have no father and suddenly he appears to claim us...

G: Not came to claim them, but clandestinely he was seeing them in a corner

somewhere, where nobody would see him because at that time it still was not safe for him. The Germans were still there.

The children did recognize him, but they had been taught to always say that their father had been killed by the Germans. Finally they understood that it was all right to acknowledge him and there was a very moving scene as they fell into his arms.

D: Mom, what happened when the convent was bombed, do you remember that?

M: I remember being in a bomb shelter, really a converted cellar and jets whistling overhead, dropping bombs. It was pretty frantic. But I don't remember how we were loaded into trains, or how we went there, or being parked at that railroad yard. I don't remember any of that, darling.

G: You don't remember you were at that station in Czenstochowa and you came to me...

M: No, I don't remember anything, except the commotion of the jets, the whistling of the jets and the dropping bombs. I do remember not wanting to upset this story about my father being a Polish officer who was killed...

D: But you realized that wasn't the real story, even though you didn't want to admit it?

M: Of course, but it was not safe yet to even say that I had a father, who was Semitic looking, at that point. It was not safe, it was not the end of the war yet.

D: So, then what happened?

G: We had to leave the children with the sisters because the war was still going on. They were placed in a school in the next village (a suburb of Czenstochowa). There they stayed for some time, perhaps a few months, after which they moved to a monastery in town. This was the end of 1944 already.

D: Grandma, let me just ask this. Mom and Annette were living in that fifth story walk-up during the winter. Then you placed them in the convent after their stay with those two teachers. They were in the convent for a whole year, right? So you stayed another winter when you were in Warsaw selling things and Mom and Annette were in the convent? It was winter and then another summer and then another winter?

G: That I don't remember, whether it was one or two winters that I was walking to that convent from the train.

D: But if they were in there for a year they must have gone into the convent probably in February or so, right?

G: Might be one year only, might be '43 to '44...

M: I think it was one year, and I should tell you that my mother was not our mother when she was coming to visit, but you were an aunt or something? There was a story that our father was a Polish officer...

G: No, I was the mother, but the father was a Polish officer and he has been killed during the war.

M: So that's why we were part orphans at least. But we were so indoctrinated that when the war ended and my father appeared, we felt like we're being betrayed, suddenly the whole story changed...

XVI: LIBERATION

G: It was still several months until the Russians came, but it already looked like the war was coming to an end. The Poles were preoccupied very much with their own political problem. They only hoped that after the Germans were defeated, America is going to fight the Russians. And since that didn't come it was a big disappointment to them.

One day, as I was on my way to see the children and carrying my packages of candy, there began shooting in the streets: the Russians were coming in on tanks. Germans were fleeing, creeping and running alongside the walls of buildings.

I put down my candy on the sidewalk and just stood and looked.The war was over. And I said to myself, 'Now I can die.'

I had just wanted to live to the moment when we will be liberated. And that was a wonderful feeling to see the Germans fleeing and frightened, leaving everything. It was exhilarating, and we really accepted the Russians as the greatest benefactors, the greatest help there could be. And they really were, because until the last moment our lives were at stake.

The next day Papa came to me at six in the morning and said, 'There are Jewish men and women in the street. And we are FREE! Let's get out from here!' We've been greeting strangers, joining the people that came out from the camp, embracing and not asking even for any names.

* * *

Transcribing these tapes of my conversations with grandma, I am surprised at how much of what she said I have forgotten already. It is good to be able to preserve all this, like preserving life itself. Once I am gone, if no one writes it down who will remember, what will be left? Like smoke rising, a puff, vanishing, forever...

I am writing and editing on a computer. Letters and words are dragged across the screen, as if against their will. Pulling the ragged text into line feels like sculpting, shaping the living, glowing text.

It is a gray day. Suddenly it becomes even darker outside and the letters on the screen of my computer come alive, burning in the darkness. The words will live on, my spark has passed into them.

XVII: THE AFTERMATH

G: What were the consequences for me? Weak nerves, weak body. My back is such that I cannot carry it with my lower back, it hurts and it's protruding. And emotionally, I am weak. I had a breakdown right after the war. I don't know if it was a consequence of the war, probably.

But none of that compares with what other people went through. We saw many Jewish people, men and women who came out from the concentration camps, the one in Czenstochowa and others, still in their camp uniforms. A terrible, terrible sight. That was going on for several weeks, or perhaps even months, I couldn't tell you now. They were coming from Auschwitz, our survivors, but not many. Very few.

My own nephew Mayek, the one Irene found so charming and who was cheering up Annette in Kielce, was in Auschwitz. We learned that he made it until the end of the war. When they were walking out from the concentration camp he sat down in a ditch and couldn't walk, couldn't go further. His friends wanted to carry him, but he didn't want to have them carry him. And so he died in that ditch. He didn't have the strength to make it from the camp to the nearest place where people lived.

D: Do you know what happened to your parents? Which camp they went to? Anything more about them?

G: No. I know only one thing, that somebody, one of the peasants in Klomnice wanted to hide my parents and the village priest supposedly told him not to do it. The local priest, who was 'a friend' of my father.

D: Another one of your brothers had a family as well, didn't he? Several of your brothers and sisters already had children...

G: My brother Israel had two children as did my sister Minia. They were all deported from Klomnice along with my parents and my sister Sabina.

My brother Abraham died in 1939, before the war, but his wife, Yentele, two sons, Mayek and Schieyek, and grandchildren were all deported from Kielce.

My brother Nathan probably died in Russia, but we don't know where or when. He was last seen in Kiev, 1943. Aryeh joined the underground, but we never learned of his end.

My sister Rozka was deported from the Warsaw ghetto, as I mentioned, because she did not want to separate from her piano, even though her students wanted to hide her.

Murdered:

• Joseph and Netle Friedman, my parents

My brothers and sisters:

• Abraham's family - Yentele, Schieyek and his family, Mayek
• Minia, her husband and two children
• Israel, his wife and two children
• Nathan
• Aryeh
• Sabina
• Rozka

Yentele and Minia

Of my entire family only Fela, Mila and I survived. My story you know.

Fela survived when the rest of my family was about to be deported from Klomnice because the son of a teacher from Kiedrzyn, (pronounced Kejin) a small town near Czenstochowa, came to my father and said I want to save one of your daughters. This wasn't anybody we had known before, but my father was very well thought of and his daughters were known as being very beautiful. None of the girls wanted to go, but father sent off Fela one night on a bicycle with some money.

(D: what must have been Fela's thoughts as she was riding away?)

She was in hiding several years with that teacher's family and joined us in Czenstochowa when that family couldn't hide her any longer. She lives in Israel now.

My youngest sister, Mila, was in Warsaw at the start of the war, studying law. She survived by pretending to be Polish and working in a German munitions plant in Lublin. She lived in Germany after the war until her death last year (1986). She was 13 years younger than me.

Of my husband's family— his parents, five brothers and sisters and their children—only one niece, Halina, survived. She lives in Israel.

* * *

I miss not knowing so many of grandma's brothers and sisters, especially the brothers. I would have enjoyed meeting them, talking to them. At least I have met Fela and Mila.

Sometimes I wonder why it was that grandma survived while other members of her

family didn't. Of course, grandpa was extremely brave and resourceful, but there were enough situations where they narrowly escaped to make one wonder. Does God look at lists of families and then throw the dice? Is it simply natural selection, in the same way that plants make many seeds, not just one or two, in order to get a few seedlings, and then of those seedlings even fewer survive to become full grown plants?

Grandma, grandpa, mom and Annette all survived the war, in Poland, outside the death camps. I've never heard of another case of a whole nuclear family surviving in Poland throughout the war. Grandma's sisters Fela and Mila survived largely because they were female and single. It's only by questioning authority, thinking for himself, and great bravery that grandpa led his family through the wilderness.

"To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

—Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Ulysses*.

It is not as if grandpa knew exactly what the Germans were doing either. As I've seen from the film SHOAH, the coverup was so effective that most people did not believe that they were about to be gassed and burned moments before their deaths, even when they were warned by the Jewish cleanup men. And Primo Levi writes about the guards at Auschwitz tormenting the prisoners by saying that even if they survived by some miracle, no one would ever believe them when they got out. Grandpa only had a feeling, yet he acted on it despite grave and immediate risks that that action entailed.

The actions of people like Jadwiga and the others who helped my mother's family stand out so brightly against the dark background of that time. How many people these days, myself included, would risk their life, everything, for someone they do not know?

PART III

The New World

The “Flower” Mill

I: RECLAIMING THE MILL—ATTACK IN KLOMNICE

D: After the Russians came in, you took mom and Annette out of the convent?

G: Not right away. From Czenstochowa we went to my father's mill in Klomnice, which was only one train stop from Czenstochowa. We wanted to make sure the situation was safe before bringing the children in.

It was wonderful to be in a decent house again, but it also was a difficult time and very strange, too. When we came back to my father's home, there was a statue of Hitler on the desk in the office. The Polishman who had run the mill for the Germans was still there and did not want to leave. The miller who used to work for my father refused to work for us.

We had no money at that time, but we did have thousands of narcissus, a flower like a small daffodil, with white petals and yellow center. They were blooming in the garden, coming back each Spring. My sister Fela, who had joined us, was going to town every day to sell those thousands of narcissus, bringing back the money from the florist. That was the beginning of our money supply.

As soon as the Russians came from Czenstochowa those Poles who had been in my father's house fled. A Russian officer has put Papa to work right away. Papa put the mill in operation, to provide flour for the Russian army. And we could send flour to the orphanage which was very needed and appreciated.

The Russians, among them a Jewish officer, lived in our house. We felt protected, so we took the children home from the sisters. They had been living in very

poor conditions. When we took them back they were full of lice and all kinds of other things. But soon they were in better condition, we just had to bring them to cleanliness again and to regular foods.

But we couldn't stay there long either because finally the Poles threatened us. The Russians said we should get out from there because it was dangerous for Jews. The Russians were going off to Berlin.

D: That was when the Poles came to kill you?

G: Yes. The Poles had not expected us to return after the war. They did not want us there. A few days earlier in that village, a Jew who had been a peddler there before the war, was killed when he came to peddle again.

D: Why did the Poles kill him?

G: Because he was a Jew. They didn't want any Jews.

One night there came a band of Poles who wanted to kill us also. Papa went out on the balcony and yelled, 'Chuykov! Chuykov!!!' That 'Chuykov' was our protector, one of the Russian guardsmen.

M: The Russians had moved across the street to a compound of their own and we remained in our house alone, the house of grandpa Friedman.

G: They did not move to another house, the officers went off to Berlin. They left only a guard in a small lookout tower, two soldiers only.

M: Two soldiers that were not even living in the house with us, but in some proximity. So, when these Poles came at night to get rid of us, my father ran to the upper floor and started shouting in Russian for these soldiers...

G: Papa went up to the top of the building and began yelling for his friend Chuykov, a Russian officer, to come. He knew that the Russian was not there, but it frightened off the Poles.

D: You remember that?

M: I remember very well. It still sends shivers down my back.

G: 'Chuykov!'

M: It scared off the Poles and they left.

G: The 'Ube,' the KGB at that time, told us not to stay there. They said they could not protect us, that we should get out from there as fast as possible. We knew that we've got to get out of there because it was too dangerous for us to live in that small town.

From there we went back to Lodz, a big city where we would not stand out as the only Jewish family in town.

D: Mom, what else do you remember about going back to the mill with grandma and grandpa?

M: I was still Catholic and I had a cross hanging above my bed. I was praying,

trying to go to church which was far away, an hour away. Even though we were all living together and there was no need anymore to be Catholic, I was so used to it and thought that on that belief our lives depended. I didn't want to be converted back to being Jewish. When I had been in the convent I was praying fervently for God to save my parents, prostrated and kneeling in church, sometimes for hours each day.

Now my father was making fun of it, trying in his persuasive, strong way to try to tell me that it's nonsense, what I'm believing in. It just reaffirmed in me the conviction all the more so, that I should hang on to it.

The Russian officer who was living there was also making fun of my religious beliefs. And then, finally, after some time, since there was no one around me going to church at all and I was all alone in this belief, I finally, little by little, gave it up.

D: Annette wasn't sticking to it?

M: Annette, I don't know what she was doing at all. In all these memories I don't remember what she was....What was Annette doing at that time? What were her beliefs?

(D: It's an unusual opportunity that I can ask my mother questions and then she can immediately ask her mother when she doesn't know.)

G: Also the same situation.

M: Oh yes?

G: I think you decided together...

* * *

On impulse today I bought a beautiful edition of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, illustrated by N.C. Wyeth. Bringing it home and showing it to grandma, she said that *Robinson Crusoe* was one of grandpa's favorite books. Grandpa used to say, "Man is alone, he has to find ways to help himself as if no one were around—one has to be like Robinson Crusoe to achieve in life, to discover for oneself."

She also quoted Beaumarchais' *Barber of Seville*— "Qui me sait faire de rien, ne vaut rien et est bon a rien." "Really not translatable," says grandma, "but if you try: 'Who does not know how to make something from nothing is worth nothing and is good for nothing.'"

* * *

At dinner with grandma and Janusz, a nice Polishman who has been helping us with heavy work in the house. At meals I show off what little Polish I know. He decides to administer the true test of Polish language ability by giving me the following sentence and asking me to pronounce it:

"Chrzaszcz brzmi w trzcinie w Strzebrzeszyni."

Kind of a nonsense sentence which roughly translates as, "A cricket sounds in the reed in Strzebrzeszyni" (the name of a town). He and grandma were quite amused by my attempts to pronunce it.

II: CLOSING THE CIRCLE—RETURN TO LODZ

M: Then we went back to Lodz, where there was property of my father's family. Did we sell the mill or did we just leave it?

G: We sold it. For very little money.

M: Yes. It must have been done very quickly.

G: We found somebody, a miller, who bought the mill for 3,750 U.S. gold dollars. A mill that was worth 750,000.

D: 750,000 dollars?

G: It was worth perhaps...No. I say our mill had an estimated value of 750,000 zlotys before the war. A dollar was five zlotys.

D: Right. So it was about 100,000...

G: 150,000 dollars.

(D: See how sharp she is still? Sharper than me!)

D: Yeah. Well, he got a bargain.

G: In Lodz Papa's father had an enormous building which we also had to leave later on. Couldn't sell it at all.

D: You went to stay in Lodz for a little while?

G: We stayed there for three years.

D: Three years!

M: After the war. I think we got back our old apartment?

G: Yes, the same apartment.

M: Our old apartment, same address as before the war.

G: Yes.

(D: The circle is complete. Back to the exact place where they were at the start of the war, six years later. How strange it must have been to be in the same surroundings when their whole former way of life, their world was gone. All their friends, family, gone, wiped off the face of the earth. Like a neutron bomb that kills all the people but leaves the buildings standing.)

G: When we came back to our apartment in Lodz almost nothing of our belongings were still there, but there was still a dress of my mother's that had been made for my brother Abraham's wedding. It was beautifully made, black, with hand-painted flowers and covered with such a transparent marquisette. Later on Annette wore that dress to a masquerade party at school.

Our building was not the best, it was an old house, the apartments had little sun. As Irene says it was a dark apartment, and...

D: So this is the same apartment where you were playing with the duck...

M: Where I had the wooden duck, yes. A very gloomy apartment.

And there I was locking all the doors...

(“And still does,” says my father, Peter, who has been listening.)

...there were heavy doors, and chains, chains and peepholes. I was afraid of everybody that was coming to the door, that they were coming to get us again.

I was going to school again, to the Polish gymnasium, which is secondary school. But all the time I still pretended I was Polish and Catholic and I was still taking religious classes at school.

D: I remember you told me a story about one of your friends being blown up by a mine?

M: Yes, that must have been in Lodz that he got blown up. A very attractive boy, very lively. I only learned later on that he had been playing with an old mine and it exploded.

D: How old were you at this point?

M: I was maybe thirteen, thirteen years old. Twelve, thirteen...

G: Now I’m going.

D: Going where?

G: To sleep.

D: Wait, wait one minute, I just want to get up to when you go to France, okay? So you were in Lodz for three years, right? Why was it safer there than in Klomnitze?

M: Because it was a big city, where you're among many people, other people in the building, and nobody knows you so well. But in Klomnice, in that little town, we were the only Jews in the whole...

G: Not a town, where we lived was a village. We were...

M: the only Jews and the villagers were bent on getting rid of this one family that survived and came back to claim their possessions.

Lodz was much safer because it was a big town and we didn't come to claim anything in particular from anybody.

I was going to school there and I was afraid and ashamed to bring my friends home because my father, at that point, openly admitted he was Jewish. He was talking Yiddish to the few survivors that were coming to visit our house, there were no Christs on the wall...I was leading a double life, at school still pretending to be Catholic, and at home I could have been found out to be something else.

D: Grandma, I'm going to let you go to sleep in a few minutes, okay? Were there any other Jews who survived and also returned to Lodz?

G: Yes. There was our immediate neighbor, Dr. Biebergal, and his wife and child. He was an officer in the Polish army, and he took a different apartment in a new building because Jews who came back early could take the best in town of what was liberated from the Germans.

Then came relatives, Papa's relatives, whom I had never known, who took over the building of Papa's father. They left later on for Australia.

D: They're still living in Australia?

G: Yes, very smart people. They've made a lot of money in the beginning there, and they were very successful supposedly in Australia. They didn't keep in touch...

D: What are their names? Monat?

G: Not Monat. I don't remember the name. I did not know them before the war.

* * *

Lying down after dinner on the couch, listening to harpsichord concertos of J.S. Bach. Grandma is asleep on the floor, on her pad next to me.

The lights are low. There is something about this apartment. It is not wealthy or showy, actually a bit cluttered and in need of new furnishings. It is old. The deep brown, carved wood and paneling impart a sense of serenity, tranquility that only aged wood can bring. It seems to say,"Rest, be peaceful. I have seen many things; what has been will be again. I have been a mansion, I have been a rooming house. I am a home once more. And I am richer for the experience. Do not worry, be at peace; what has been will be again."

It's a parallel to my grandmother's life—from prosperous beginnings to hard times, surviving to see better times again, though battered and wornout in the process. Just as I intend to rebuild my grandmother's health, to straighten her back and extend her life, so too I hope to restore and renovate this beautiful old townhouse, to strip the painted woodwork, to reveal the huge old sliding doors now blocked off.

There is much more here than meets the eye. The aroma of good food, grandma's musical, accented speech. Such warmth! It is warmth, and well-being, security and comfort, peace, and the love that I have always felt in this humble dwelling, since my earliest years. It is the only residence that has remained a constant during my entire life. Home again.

* * *

Riverside Park

What a wonderful day!

The air so clear,
so fresh, so fragrant
with the blooming trees
and blossoming flowers.

The view across the river
clear, unobstructed,
blue water
moving.

Riverside Park at 95th Street

With grandma, walking
hand in hand, arm in arm,
talking about Fela
Mila, music, flowers, fragrance.

Breathing deeply, sitting in the sun,
reading the Sunday Times on a bench
with a panorama of flowers spread out
before us on the promenade.

For me, there is no joy like apple trees blossoming in the spring. Perhaps my greatest pleasure in life is to see trees budding, blossoming, bursting back to life.

Grandma says, “It is good to still see, to walk, to breathe the fresh air, the breath of springtime, to enjoy springtime and to have my grandson next to me.”

* * *

At dinner, while watching the MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour on TV, I look over at grandma. Her head is falling, eyes closed, hand clutching her throat and tongue sticking out.

“GRANDMA!!!!!!”

She was just falling asleep.

* * *

For grandma’s birthday today, June 15, I bought her a pink t-shirt that says, “Old age is not for sissies.”

* * *

Grandma asks me to smell the milk containers on the table to see if the milk is still good. I do, but I want her opinion, too. I give them to her. First she smells one, very serious, in her white, ruffle collared robe, glasses on, age spot on her nose, thin, alert:“ It’s good. It’s good.” Then the other container: “Fine. Perfect.”

I enjoy watching her, so intent and so serious, concentrating every fiber of her being on small tasks.

There is a sense of purity radiating from her, as if life has burnt, baked, boiled and distilled her down to her very essence.

* * *

In the kitchen with grandma. She’s eating some raw Kohlrabi, from our garden. “We used to fight over that when I was young,” she says.

I smile as I watch her move about her chores so peacefully. Slowly, with great concentration, serenity and grace. Putting away dishes, carefully taking some crumbs off the table, peeling a vegetable, eyes intent, peering out from behind her glasses. Thoughtful.

III: LEAVING POLAND—THE ROAD TO BOLIVIA

M: Darling, here comes a long story still. Can we finish it another time?

D: What's the long story?

M: The long story is my mother became ill with depression after the war. My father was out of the country, trying to find another place for us to go, and the communists were after us. Many things happened until we finally got to France, which is another long story...

D: I know, I just want to get up to France.

M: Just to France? It's a bit complicated.

D: You were three years in Lodz, right?

G: I think so, yes.

M: We are both very sleepy...

D: I know, I know. I just want a thumbnail sketch, okay?

M: Well, the thumbnail sketch is that my father reclaimed his brother's factory, a textile factory that was shredding cloth to make a cleaning material for industrial machinery. That was the business of the brother who was killed in the Warsaw ghetto.

But then the Russians wanted to nationalize that factory and the workers were beginning to act as if they were the owners. It was becoming dangerous for anybody who had anything.

We had to hide anything we had. It was not safe to wear good clothes. You had to be part of the people to be safe...

D: Proletariat.

M: The proletariat. The bourgoisie was in danger. My father started thinking of emigrating at that point. He left for France to try to pave the way for us to go. He left my mother with us in Poland while all this was going on, the factory workers rebelling, and the Russians suspecting us for being well-to-do, which was a crime in their eyes.. And it was again a difficult situation for us.

My mother, at this point, had a nervous breakdown, a deep depression. Her theme was‘Where are we going to hide the money?’

G: I was still frightened. But there wasn’t any real reason for it. Everything caused a reaction, things which were not of immediate danger really. Everything grew in my imagination to dimensions that were not anymore appropriate.

Papa had left for France, and then he was to go to America. He did not like the idea of emigrating without knowing the country. He said he is going to see what it is like, what he could do there. We already had passports to leave Poland.

What triggered my illness was this: In Lodz Papa had been imprisoned by the ‘Ube’ (the Russian KGB at that time) because they found at us a passport where a

niece of ours was put on the passport instead of having a separate passport. What a crime! They imprisoned him. He finally got out through bribes. But the bribes were detected later, when he was in Paris. They were coming to find him, that he had given bribes. He wasn't here. This grew in my mind to such dimensions that I really became ill—I couldn't sleep anymore in the night, I was telegraphing and telephoning that he shouldn't come back, things like that, and I broke down.

M: I remember going with mama to closets that had false floors to try to hide the money. My father was gone and I was still going to school.

At that point Fela was living with us, and I think also Halina. I didn't know how to deal with it. My mother wasn't sleeping and she was having obsessive thoughts about where to hide the money. Things were completely out of control. We cabled my father to come back and he did.

Through the same sisters that had us in the orphanage, we found out that there is a new treatment for depression, shock treatment. They said, 'One of our sisters was ill and she was helped that way.' So my father found the doctor who was doing this. My mother had a few shock treatments, and she recovered completely.

D: Quickly.

M: Quickly, very quickly. A complete turn around. And then, of course, all her recent memories of what she was afraid of were erased. It was like a clean slate. Fela was there, cooking and taking care of her.

At that point Fela met Alec, who was a cousin, a Banach. They were getting together, and they got married.

My father's niece Halina (the orphan placed by Jadwiga) was living with us now. She was eating a lot, eating onions especially because she has learned somewhere that if she eats onions she'll be very smart. She was very bright at school, learning how to be a bookkeeper. She had a remarkable memory for retaining facts and absorbed knowledge very fast. She emigrated to England from Poland, and then later to Israel from England. She wasn't happy in England, she never felt accepted there.

For Papa it was already difficult to leave Poland because of the communists, and he could not sell his factory. We also had a corner lot that I don't think they sold. We just left what we had.

Papa paid for some papers with a destination of Bolivia, a passport to Bolivia, with a transit visa through France. I don't think my parents ever intended to go to Bolivia, just to get out of Poland and remain in France, or to go to another place from there.

I remember the trip. It was a long train ride from Poland to France. It was unusual in some way, the porters coming in, talking in languages I couldn't understand. It was an unusual experience for me...

IV: IN TRANSIT—SIX YEARS IN PARIS

M: And then we arrived in France. There we were very warmly and hospitably welcomed by a friend of my mother from school in Kielce: Fela (Fanny) Wartski. She had two children, Louis (Lou Lou) and Rene.

They were well established in France. Fanny had left with her whole family before the war. One brother was very successful, manufacturing sports clothes, and beautiful ski parkas. Another brother was a teacher of violin, and Annette was taking lessons from him. He was giving her lessons for free because we could not pay and Annette was very talented.

Fanny was having us for wonderful dinners. I was walking with her son, Lou Lou, to a park that was near their apartment. We spoke English. I didn't know any French, but I had learned English in secondary school in Poland, so I was able to communicate with him that way.

D: He didn't speak Polish?

M: No, he was born in France. Very modest, very quiet boy, very generous, nice, good natured. And his sister Rene was a good friend of Annette, they were the same age. Rene was...very intense eyes, beautiful green eyes, very dark, very black hair and olive complexion. Looked very interesting. The upper part of her face was very interesting, very intense. An unusual, striking looking face.

They were all very polite, the children probably didn't find any interest in being with us, but still they were walking with us, spending time, entertaining us very patiently.

1948 - To France: the passport photos of grandma, grandpa,
Annette, and mom (with descriptions from the back).

My parents were both working hard, trying to make a living. My father started developing right away a new business. First they were selling illegal nylon stockings from the USA. They had to go to various stores and markets to sell them, but it was not legal for us, as displaced persons, to work in France.

D: Black market?

M: Black market. And that was another tense situation for my mother. She was the one that was doing it, my father was directing it, but she was the one...

D: Why wouldn’t he do it?

M: I don’t know. He was the mastermind of those dangerous things, but my mother was carrying it out.

D: Because nobody would ever suspect her. How could anybody distrust this little lady?

M: She’s fast asleep.

D: I know.

M: So, then, he got the idea to manufacture clothes. One of his ideas was to make a skirt that’s like an accordion, that collapses completely. There are pleats, sewn one way and then the other way, and the belt pulls it together so that it becomes a package, very flat little package for traveling. A very good skirt.

And we made that for some time and my mother was selling it again. We cut it in our living room...

D: It was a big item (launching into an imitation of Mel Brooks's 2,000 year old man when he talks about manufacturing crosses instead of stars of David) It was a hot item, a really big seller...

M: And then bikinis...

D: You were making bikinis?

M: We were making bikinis. Silk bikinis, nylon bikinis...

D: Those must have been easier to make because they were small...

M: Yes, and my father found a pattern, how to make it. He sent me to a school of pattern making...

D: Bikini school...

M: and I hated it. I just wanted to go to school and learn interesting things, like history. He was coming with me too, to that pattern making school, trying to learn.

Then I was put to work at home to cut these layers and layers of clothes...

D: With that assistant of yours.

M: Yeah, assistant, oh God, what an assistant. Pock marked face with a huge nose that was perked up and curly, greasy hair. And a moron.

She was my helper. The two of us were on opposite sides of the table, laying layers of cloth back and forth until there were hundreds of layers. Then I was laying

on top a pattern of all the bikinis so as not to lose much material, to do it economically.

We had a machine that was like a chain saw, only for fabric, smooth, with no teeth. A rotary machine that I pushed on the table to cut these bunches, so thick, of very thin rayon, for hundreds of bikinis at one time. It was really a man's job. Those men were called cutters, and they were working for all kinds of clothing factories.

But I was doing that, getting all the dust in my chest. It was all flying in the room without any ventilation...

(Peter: "Was the saw dangerous?" My father is the resident safety expert.)

M: The saw was dangerous too, but it had a guard and nothing ever happened to me. I got lots of varicose veins from standing up all those hours.

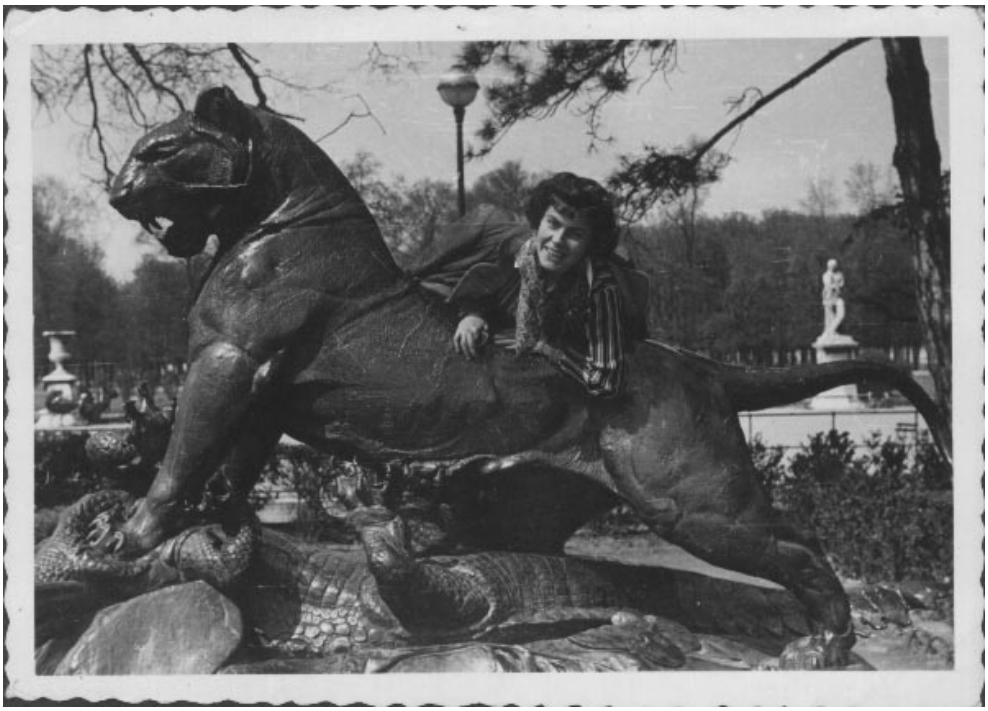
D: You were getting varicose veins at that time, you noticed them already?

M: I think so. My legs were just killing me at the end of the day.

D: How many hours a day were you working?

M: I don't know. A few hours a day. I was listening to French songs on the radio, Piaf, and all those folk songs that kept me going...

My father would often be in bed in that same room where the assistant and I were doing all that cutting. That room was also our living room, dining room and the place where my parents slept. Papa was getting gout attacks frequently with unbear-



Mom in Paris, 1953.

able pain, and he was not able to move. The doctors were giving him cortisone, making him impossible to live with.

G: Let me go and do something, Okay?

D: Sleep.

G: Just makes no sense to stay in bed, to stay sleeping all the time.

D: You haven’t been sleeping, you’ve been talking. Go ahead mom.

M: So, we were cutting those bikinis and my mother was selling them. I was learning French at the Alliance Française, which was nice. I learned a language and made this ‘Diplome de langue’, a diploma with which foreigners could teach French abroad.

I wanted to study more and my father said, ‘All right, after work you can go and study.’ It’s like with you, working full-time and trying to study later on, I just didn’t have the strength to do that. So I didn’t.

D: So you finished high school in Poland?

M: No.

D: You never finished high school.

M: No. I think there were four years of high school and two years of Lycee. Lyceum they called it, which was senior high school, and I went only for three years to the lower high school.

I never went to those grades where they were learning calculus and all that.

In Paris, our apartment was in Les Halles, the market district, at 77 Rue Rambuteau. It was so noisy from the street below. The market was in full swing all night, people dropping cases of food from trucks onto the pavement right beneath our window. I wasn’t able to sleep.

My bed was in a tiny room filled with shelves of merchandise and I had a little window through which I was often viewing the street life of Paris. Across the street all kinds of prostitutes were lined up against a building and they would disappear with men every ten minutes or so. That was my main entertainment. It was a very sad period in my life.

XXII: THE NEW WORLD

G: The entire time we lived in Paris we were on a tourist visa, waiting for permission to come to the United States. Papa had to bribe the police every six months to extend our temporary paper and let us stay longer.

Finally, after waiting for five years, we got permission to go to America. Irene, who had gone on a trip to Israel for 2 weeks, ended up staying six months because she got pneumonia and lived on a kibbutz to recover. She came back to France to join us for emigration to America.

M: That trip to Israel was considered by my father a real luxury, an idea out of keeping with the daily struggle for existencce, but he consented somehow. My mother must have talked to him a lot to get him to understand that I was on the verge of a nervous collapse and that trip might be a good way of changing the climate of my thoughts and the despair that I could not shake off.. I was 21, seeing only a blur of what is ahead, not really having any hopes of a happy, productive life.

I learned of that trip through a zionist youth organization I occasionally attended. A choir of 70 young Jewish men and women was being formed to attend a festival of folk songs in Israel with choirs from all over the world.

A photo/postcard of mom with grandma's favorite teacher from Kielce, Mr. Hirshchorn. On the back, written in Polish is the following letter:

Israel 14 Sept. 1952
Dear Ones,
I am sending you a photo that Mr. Hirshchorn took as soon as I came here. I ask you, Annette, that you send me good pictures that you have in your album of mama, papa andyou to show Mr. Hirshchorn. I kiss you all,
Irka

In Israel we performed at various outdoor locations in Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem where Arab snipers were shooting at us—these were still unsafe times there. We were hitchiking around the country, going to nightclubs dancing, and by day swimming in the Mediterranean. I must have been very worn down because one day after swimming I stayed in a wet bathing suit and came down with pneumonia.

I had no money, nowhere to go. Mama's former teacher from Poland, Mr. Hirshchorn, took me in and cared for me. He was a real saving angel, giving me the one egg a week that was rationed per family. He lived with his wife in a small top floor apartment of a walk up building. In the back of their room was a curtained off bed, where I was lying and coughing all the time, painfully and with fever. I would not have survived without their goodness and extreme hospitality.

By the time I recovered my return ticket to Paris had expired. I was not too eager to return anyway, so I learned from my mother that another childhood friend of hers, Mania Eisenberg, was one of the founding members of a kibbutz. She found a kibbutz for me to stay and work on. I was there for six months and liked it much better than life in Paris. I probably would have stayed and made a life there, but one day a letter came from my mother that we had gotten our papers to go to America. After much reflection and hesitation, I decided to go back to my family. Even though I felt secure and peaceful on the kibbutz, I felt it was not the right life for me. Even though the future was uncertain, I felt America held more promise.

G: After taking an ocean liner to the United States, we arrived in Plainfield, New Jersey. Papa had a distant cousin there who was a dealer in antique carpets. But soon we realized that we could not start any real business in that town. At that point we moved to Washington Heights, near 180th Street, in Manhattan.

Again I was doing various jobs: working in a grocery store; in a sweat shop

sewing buttons on shirts on 42nd St., in the garment district, for several months; translating and sorting Polish and German documents at Columbia University; baby sitting; taking in and doing the wash for neighbors in a machine in the cellar.

Papa tried to work at construction sites doing heavy labor, but he was fired because he was unfit for such physical work. Then, after considering many different possibilities, he got the idea of starting a French lace import business.

He usually made believe he was a Frenchman in order to impress people more about his knowledge of French lace. Once when he said, 'I am French,' to another man in the garment district, the man stood up, shook his hand and said, 'I, too, am from Warsaw.'

Because Papa wanted to be closer to the business district we moved to West 76th Street, first to 303 then 305.

D: And so that's the story of how you came here.

G: Now you know the story of my life.

D: And that's where mom met dad and how I was born.

G: That's right, but that's another story...

Mom and Danny, 1958.

Mom, Dad and Danny, 1958

Grandma, Billy,Grandpa, and Danny in Riverside Park, 1961.

Grandpa, Billy, grandma and mom in our garden in Yonkers, with sculpture/screen by my dad in the background. Grandma's inscription on the back of this photo reads: "Danny's first picture with a camera he received at the age of 7 (1964)."

* * *

As I step out from the bathtub next to grandma's kitchen, I am greeted by warm humid air and the smell of good food. It triggers pleasant memories of childhood.

And grandma is still here.

* * *

I pull grandma down and rock her back and forth on my lap. She quotes to me, in Polish, a line from Ibsen's Peer Gynt. Peer Gynt is holding his dying mother and says to her,

Spij dziecino na moim lowie;	Sleep my child on my shoulder;
Od snow brzydkich cie uchronie.	I will shield you from bad dreams.

* * *

This evening I came into the kitchen to find a towel wrapped around a pot with the flame still going! The towel was burning, though not yet in flames. Grandma had put it on and noticed a burning odor, but didn't know where the smell was coming from. She thought she had turned off the flame.

* * *

A rainy Saturday afternoon. At lunch with grandma, listening to the French chansons of Faure, Debussy and Ravel.

I think these rainy, lazy days are the times together that I appreciate most; relaxed, contemplative, able to fully enjoy the back and forth, the give and take, the ebb and flow of our conversation.

* * *

Just before going out on a walk with grandma, she says, “Oh! A tooth just fell out.”

One of her teeth, completely encased with metal by a dentist, had rotted away at the root and dropped out by itself.

Sigh...growing older.

* * *

Walking along 76th street between Amsterdam and Columbus avenues one afternoon, I notice an inscription in the keystone of a run down synagogue:

And ye shall turn the hearts of children towards their fathers.

—Malachi 3:24

I look up at the old, neglected building that I have passed by so many times before: the ravaged exterior, dark metal gratings protecting the stained glass windows from the youngsters at a public school across the street. There is a window on the community house of the synagogue that has remained jagged and broken for many years. Graffiti is scrawled on the white stone steps.

I’ve passed this building many times before, but never noticed those words. Perhaps I was not ready to see them.

I remember grandma telling me that grandpa, near the end of his life began to go to synagogue again, this synagogue. He had renounced religion completely from a very early age.

I imagine an elderly, ill man reciting the long forgotten prayers on a dusty wooden bench at the back of a dark and empty interior. Grandpa was very close to

his mother, but his father had been a rigidly religious man, and grandpa had hated that superficial, narrow minded adherence.

Now, at the end of his life, in failing health, in a decaying house of worship, he was reaching out to the past.

Reaching out to his father?

The only surviving photo of grandpa's parents, who were also killed by the Nazis: Anna Gutman and Leon Monat, 1932.

* * *

Grandma is sad this evening. She is worried about growing old, that she may "become like a cabbage. Whenever I sit down to do work my head becomes so heavy and I can't continue."

She worries about the future. "There should be a way of helping old people to go," she says, "like the ancient Spartans who used to push their elderly off a cliff."

I try to reason with her, to reassure her that I and my parents won't abandon her. We talk for awhile. I come next to her and hold her hand. Gradually she feels better.

* * *

At lunch playing for grandma a record, Le Tombeau de Couperin, by Maurice Ravel.

"Do you like it?" I ask.

"Very subtle," she replies.

* * *

I went shopping with grandma this evening, the first time she has gone out in a while, maybe two weeks.

As I finish paying at the counter, I look for grandma and see her standing next to the grapes outside, eating them, watching me, waiting.

* * *

A midday lunch of lamb loinchops, rice, artichokes, pea soup, salad, and white grape juice. We are listening to the slow movement of a Brahms trio, Opus 8. It's a sunny fall afternoon. Outside the blazing yellow maple tree in the garden is swaying in the wind.

"Gut Gespeist," says grandma.

Well eaten.

* * *

This evening we are Watching Wall Street Week, a television program about the stock market. The topic tonight is stock options, a very risky type of investment. Grandma says, “I want to do that!”

* * *

Grandma doesn’t go anymore to the center for older people nearby. She hasn’t been there in more than a year. She hasn’t been well enough to go, but neither does she miss it. She seems quite content to be in her house, take care of the household, watch TV and be in my company. She feels no need to meet other people. Yet her mind is alert, she still takes great interest in the world around her.

* * *

Sometimes grandma is so delicate. Walking gently, reaching slowly, frail and graceful, so careful with each step and gesture, each word.

Everyone smiles when they see her.

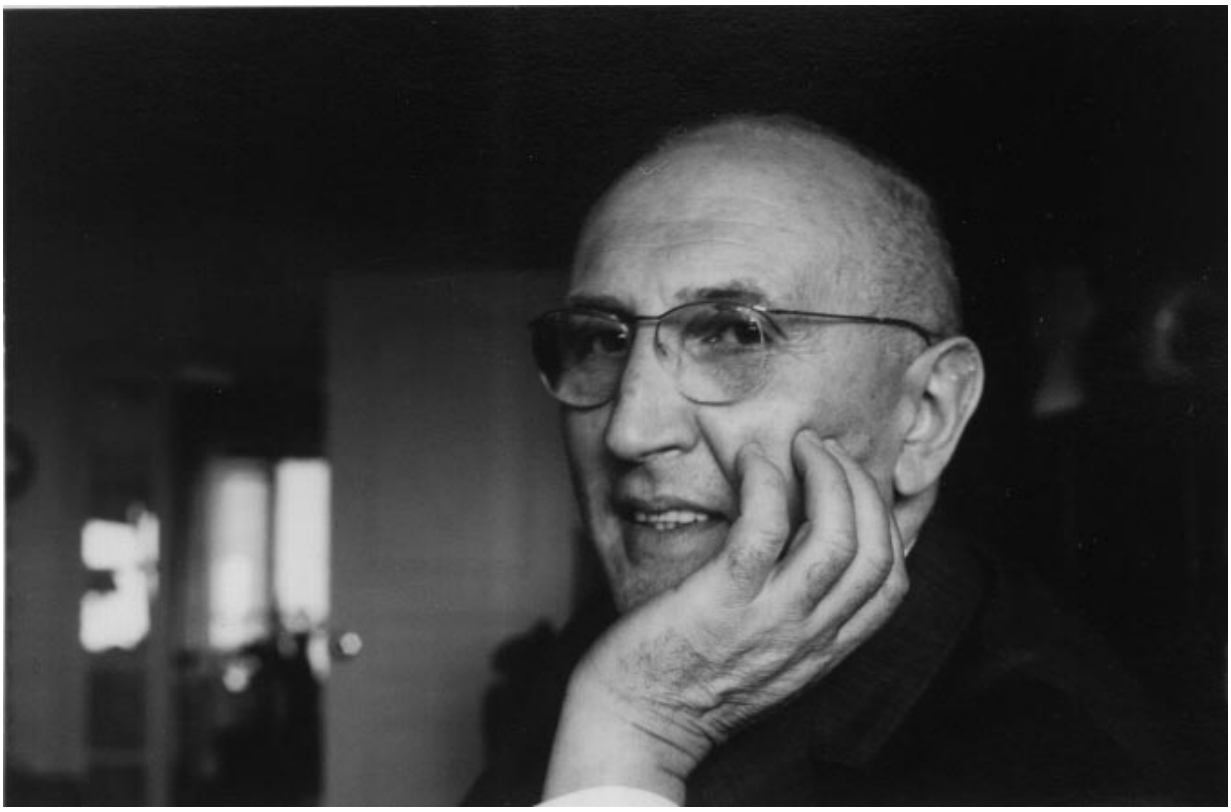
* * *

Walking through Central Park on a cold, clear winter day with my college friend Jonathan. We talk about growing older, the vanishing naivete of student days as we butt up against the harsh realities of the working world.

Dreams evaporate, life becomes more circumscribed, grand visions are tempered. Jonathan thinks that life is enhanced rather than diminished by accepting the hard reality of adulthood, the relinquishing of dreams and fantasies that come with growing up. He feels that his appreciation of everything increases so much: “Wow, look at that highway! All those men who worked so hard to build it.” Or, “Look at this

city, Manhattan, those huge buildings on the other side of the Central Park. So complex, so amazing that men could do this."

Thinking back on his comments I write down my memories of the day in my journal. I think about grandpa, a man who had to start from scratch not once but at least seven times in his life—before World War II, in Kielce, Warsaw, Czenstochowa, Klomnice, Lodz, Paris, New York. He succeeded in providing for his family and earning money in every circumstance. As I grow older and begin to appreciate the difficulty of succeeding in any endeavor, even in my current job as an editor of books. My appreciation of grandpa's accomplishments grows by leaps and bounds. What might he have accomplished if his life hadn't been so disrupted?



Grandpa Monat, hero.

* * *

Grandma in the closet where the washing machine is, reaching for the string that turns on the light.

"Ohhh, I'm getting so short!"

"What?" I ask.

"I'm getting shorter and shorter."

* * *

Grandma grasps my hand as we walk. Her head does not even reach the level of my shoulders. "Ooooooooohhh." she says, "Strong hand!"

* * *

Grandma is sitting in the living room chair, quietly collapsed, absent-mindedly playing with my toes as I lie resting on the couch.

* * *

This evening grandma and I are watching a program about Pronghorn Deer on public television, Marty Stouffer's Wild America. We sit marveling at the beautiful animals. I am particularly struck by two scenes: a baby Pronghorn desperately fleeing a pursuing coyote, and the body of a young Pronghorn buck that has died of cold and starvation just before the coming of spring.

I think about the terror of the baby deer as it was running, the misery of the buck as it lay dying. They are suffering while I sit in my comfortable living room, observing this life and death drama. It's not unlike observing grandma's story from the safety and comfort of the present.

The program makes the point that their suffering is part of a larger process, the food chain. The baby Pronghorn escapes, but even if it was caught it would be okay, because carnivores are necessary to keep herbivores in check. Otherwise the herbivores would destroy all vegetation. The balance of nature is kept.

But I doubt these individual animals are aware of the part they are playing. They are simply trying to survive.

Am I not part of the same drama? I can sit back in this armchair and think, "Ah, the balance of nature," while a Pronghorn lies dying. But if I was running for my own life would I be able to see it as part of a larger process?

Is there a larger purpose to suffering?

Maybe since humans have no natural predators we have to become our own.

I talk about it with grandma. I've always had some of these kinds of thoughts about war, that there are useful sides to it—population control, stimulating influx of new cultures. There was an article in last Sunday's *New York Times Magazine* by the scientist Stephen Gould, where he points out that plagues, like AIDS, are natural phenomena.

This does not mean that war is the best way to accomplish the above or that I should roll over and die because it's for the greater good, but perhaps it is a way of dealing with adversity in a calm, even humorous manner. Perhaps I am too imbedded in the process of life to disentangle myself but for a few moments, perhaps it is by necessity that my vision is obscured in order for the rules of the game to work. Maybe that is where a "leap of faith" comes into play.That there are larger forces, hidden from my view—"God works in mysterious ways." If it hadn't been for the war, my parents never would have met.

Maybe in this way I can better understand and find some meaning in what grandma went through in her life. Maybe her troubles can be seen as part of a larger force, a larger plan or intelligence, a healthy process, even if it is not good for some individual members of that system.

There is a sense of beauty in tragedy, poignancy in the unknowable. A sense of

fullness and richness that comes with experience. Just as excrement and decay provide the fertilizer for plant life, so too the shit life dumps on us, in the proper dosage, can be a healthy stimulus towards growth.

Recently I've gained a deeper appreciation of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, a sense of tranquility in reading passages like this:

"Constantly regard the universe as one living being, having one substance and one soul; and observe how all things have reference to one perception of this one living being; and how all things act with one movement; and how all things are the cooperating causes of all things which exist; observe too the continuous spinning of the thread and the contexture of the web." (Book IV, #40)

"And so accept everything which happens, even if it seems disagreeable, because it leads to this, to the health of the universe..."
(Book V, #8)

Also from Michel de Montaigne, In his *Essays*:

"We must learn to endure what we cannot avoid. Our life is composed like the harmony of the world, of contrary things, also of different tones, sweet and harsh, sharp and flat, soft and loud. If a musician liked only one kind, what would he have to say? He must know how to use them together and blend them. And so must we do with good and evil, which are consubstantial with our life. Our existence is impossible without this mixture, and one element is no less necessary for it than the other."
(Book III, #13)

And from grandma, lying next to her on the bed, after coming back from California:

"I'm happy here," she says. "This house is filled with memories for me, happy and sad...all part of one frame. I've had a nice life."

* * *

I'm looking at branches of reddish-pink apple blossoms on our dining table as I munch on a carrot. The thought strikes me that what is so beautiful in nature is that there is both order and a random quality. The order is the repeating pattern of the same shaped leaves and blossoms, the randomness the unpredictable ways that the branches will turn and twist.

* * *

On the way home from the Guggenheim Museum, walking through Central Park:
Cherry blossoms on bronze bark trees,
Parents and children strolling, frisbees throwing.
A nation at peace.

Passing behind the Delacorte theater,
I walk through a grove of pine trees
and the fresh scent of fallen needles.

Below me is a cluster of apple trees
In full bloom, pink and white.
The perfume!

I am overcome, I am drunk, intoxicated
As I walk to the center of a petaled cloudburst.

Spring, Spring, oh Spring,
I rejoice in your excess.

* * *

I tell grandma about a girl I'm going out with.

"Might be, if you're careful, you could have some fun," says grandma. "Use a preservative (condom)."

My friend Jonathan calls her "Rock 'n Roll Grandma."

* * *

Two seedy looking men came to the door today to return some credit cards of a tenant who had been robbed last night while he was drunk. I opened the door to take the credit cards from them. That was not very smart; they could have pushed their way in.

Grandma said later on that maybe they were the thieves. "Supposedly robbers return to the scene of the crime, like Raskolnikoff in Dostoyevski's *Crime and Punishment*."

She probably was right.

* * *

Watching A Christmas Carol by Dickens on TV, the deceased partner of Scrooge appears, a fearsome specter in chains.

"The influence of Moliere [french playwright]," says grandma.

* * *

With each book I read—the best ones, in which I become thoroughly engrossed—I begin to think and speak in the style of that book.

Right now I am reading *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, about the life of a wild renaissance artist, and I find myself speaking, even writing, in an archaic style. I see life in terms of bravado, nobility, greed, great artistic aspirations, violent confrontation, sudden death—as did Benvenuto.

With each book it changes. Eventually I return to my own way of thinking and my own perception, yet something has been added, the fabric of my intellect has been made a little richer.

* * *

I come downstairs for lunch to find grandma in the kitchen, standing next to the stove in her thin pajamas, back curved, feet pointed outward, one hand on her hip, the other stirring a soup.

By mistake she put peanut butter in the miso soup instead of miso. “Might be we have a new recipe,” she says, “like how they discovered roast chicken when the hen jumped into the fire. I think it is very good. Perhaps a little on the heavy side...”

* * *

“Danny, what would you like? I have two soups: Krupnik (barley) and vegetable.”

* * *

In the subway with grandma.

“Look,” she says. “Look at all the graffiti on the trains. Some is very nice.”

* * *

When grandma gets up from the table or the mat on the floor she often uses a closed fist, her knuckles to press off the surface of the table or the ground.

“I must do it by myself.”

* * *

Walking behind grandma in Fairway as she is shopping. I am carrying her basket. She walks to the bananas and the burly, incredibly fast working young man is there, piling up bananas at an extraordinary rate. “All green today?” grandma asks. “Yep, all green,” he replies, piling away furiously all the while. As grandma steps across the aisle to the bread section, she blocks the path of a dark, curly haired young man with a blue earring. He looks over at me and claps his hand to his head, as if to say, “Excuuuuussse me.” Grandma moves across slowly and the young man finally gets by. Then she blocks the path of another speeding shopper who patiently waits until grandma moves to one side, completely unaware of the trouble she has caused.

* * *

Being with grandma is not all roses.

She can be extremely depressing, her ‘I am good for nothing’ attitude quite irritating, her modesty infuriating.

I feel responsible for her; I don’t feel so free to hang out with people from work or go to dinner with friends or stay out late as often as I might. This dilemma reminds me of the following passage from *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by Milan Kundera:

“The heaviest of burdens crushes us, we sink beneath it, it pins us to the

ground...The heavier the burden, the closer our lives come to the earth, the more real and truthful they become.

"Conversely, the absolute absence of a burden causes man to be a 'luftmensch,' lighter than air, to soar into the heights, take leave of the earth and his earthly being, and become only half real, his movements as free as they are insignificant.

"What then shall we choose? Weight or lightness?"

I would say something in between, a chance to experience both. But, if pressed, I would choose weight, or responsibility, because that weight brings with it its own kind of freedom—freedom from the self. Alfred Kazin writes," I pray to be relieved of so much self: I ask to be extended."

In college I read Martin Buber's *I and Thou.* Buber insists that life gains meaning not by oneself, but through interaction. He uses the examples of the relationship of lovers, of an artist to his/her work, of the human/God relationship. In those cases losing the self in interaction, experiencing an altered state of consciousness called "flow," is a highly desireable state of being. Also note that the word *ecstasy* comes from the Greek *extasis*, meaning to stand outside oneself.

That is how I feel about my relationship with my grandmother. On the one hand it is a responsibility that ties me down, but it also provides a sense of fulfillment, a mission in life, a chance to think about someone other than myself. And that is good.

(joke: What's the definition of a luftmensch? Someone with their feet planted firmly in mid-air.)

* * *

D: Grandma, I wanted to ask you, in all this interviewing I've been doing with

you I've been asking questions, but what are some of the questions you would like to be asked? You know, ideally, if you could question yourself, what kind of things would you ask yourself? What are the kind of things that you want to say?

(pause)

G: I didn't think about. (clears her throat)

D: Anything strikes you...

(long pause)

G: About my life?

D: Mmmhmmm.

G: I'm disappointed with myself...

D: Why?

G: Because, in spite of having been praised at home, and by the teachers...

D: When you were young.

G: When I was young, and by men, who wanted to marry me and things like that...I really gave up all ambition of doing anything, to be independent. To try to emerge, doing things, what I want to do.

D: What would you have wanted to do? Is there anything, looking back, that you think you might have wanted to do?

G: I didn't try to do anything that would lead to independence, financial and physical independence.

D: But is there anything that you can think of that you would have done, if you had tried?

G: I didn't aim at, so I don't think about.

D: And that's what you think is...

G: a big mistake, because I had all the abilities, might be not physical abilities, might be not even with my hands, but my mind was good, my memory was good. I could have applied myself with studying better, not stopped.

It was fortunate that I had a husband who knew how to get along in life, that my children were becoming independent. But I...I didn't develop a sense of independence at all.

D: Hmmm.

G: If I were born again, I would pursue something constantly and not stop at the point where one gets married.

D: To have a career.

G: Not especially for a career, but to be able...

D: A profession?

G: Yes, to be able to do something to support myself, to support my children, without help of a husband. Even though I was very happy when I was married.

D: Mmmhmmm. Hmmmm....How does it feel to be old?

G: It doesn't feel different. In some way, only, while when you're young you think everything smiles at you. You...

D: Everything what?

G: People smile at you, make compliments, try to be with you. When one is old one is not needed really. One feels like being in the way of the young people, that...life has only a meaning if you feel that you are needed.

D: Hmm.

G: But otherwise, for oneself it's just...not a happy period, with old age.

D: Are there any advantages you can think of? Is there anything good about old age?

G: It is one thing that you don't struggle anymore so much, you don't aim too high. Is that good? I don't know.

D: You feel more peaceful with yourself?

G: Might be so. Yes. That's the good part. Except one feels it's time to go. Because one gets into situations where one becomes very dependent, on help, and being able to cover it with money...it's not the best thing.

D: Do you have any hopes for the future? Things that you still want to do?

G: I would want to correct something that I did not fill out. If I would be well I would want to do something with Jadwiga (the Polish woman who saved grandma and her children during World War II). I would want to do better with my sister (Fela, in Israel), and I would want to...I would like to see my grandchildren settled in some way, not being anxious, to think, What am I doing? What am I going to do? Like having a straightforward way. Which is perhaps impossible in life. Only, I think, limited people can have it.

D: What do you feel best about in your life?

(long pause)

D: Is there anything you feel good about, that you did, or...

G: I mainly criticize myself.

D: I know (we both laugh), but is there anything good that you can think of, that you feel pleased about in your life, that you...

G: Not a great deal....

D: ...that you've experienced, or witnessed, or helped in some way...

G: Yes, I helped very much my husband, and I feel good about that. I've done my utmost to spare him...not with the idea that I needed him so much.

D: Mmmhmmm.

G: Tried to save my children. So...but those are the normal things. It's not that one can praise oneself for it. I mean, I haven't been thinking about myself much. Either financial comfort or...I have no vanity, which would have helped also to be happy.

D: (gently) What do you feel worst about? (I hesitate to ask this, for fear of dredging up terrible memories, but grandma responds right away)

G: At this point what bothers me is that Jadwiga business. That bothers me very much. I think, if I get well, I'll write her and tell her to come, or the children to come, to help them in whatever way. She has *saved* my children, she has helped me find an apartment in Warsaw, she has...I want to reciprocate in some way. I don't know if she would accept still now, because she is very disappointed. But it is very much on my mind.

D: Hmmm. What advice would you give me, in living my life?

(pause)

D: Judging from your experience...

G: Would you say I have a good experience? Did I do what I was to do?

D: You've lived many years, and, as your mother would have said, You have experience... Your mother used to say about young people, they may be smart, but they don't have experience.

G: I just was...I wasn't shaping my life.

D: You were just letting it happen.

G: As it was coming, as it was coming. What I would like you to be able to do is to shape your life. To find the right party that you would love, to be with. That's not an advice...

D: A wish...

G: Yes.

D: You know mom's attitude is, well, things just happen and you can't plan them too much. But you're saying you should try and plan and try and take...

G: Your mom is for things that happen?

D: Yes, she says, Don't try and plan out things too much...

G: That doesn't matter, might be she's right. She has been lucky that it happened to her to find a man, with a great character and the means and everything. But that doesn't happen every day.

(That wasn't just luck, though. Mom waited until she felt sure she found the right per-

son. She didn’t settle for something less.)

D: My friend Ted is somebody who takes control of his life and plans, that’s the kind of thing you mean more?

G: I am more for that. But not everybody can do it. I couldn’t plan, either.

D: It’s hard. It is hard.

G: And I wasn’t directed by anybody to do things.

D: Mmhmm. Hmmmm.

G: If parents can help that, that’s a great thing. So let’s finish now, okay?

D: One last question is...

G: You ask me philosophical questions, you make me think!

D: Yes! It’s interesting. But...if you were writing your own obituary, what would you like it to say?

G: Nothing.

D: Nothing!?

G: Just born and dead.

D: (laughing) Grandma, come on.

G: Yes, yes, nothing.

D: Ohhhh...

G: Nothing...Sorry to go from a loving family...

D: Wouldn’t you like to say something?

G: No.

D: No?

G: I have no merits...I really don’t praise myself.

* * *

People are like icebergs.

When passing by an iceberg only the tip is visible above water. This can be dangerous for the tip represents only a fraction of a huge mass below the surface, subject to unseen forces and currents.

In people, powerful memories and relationships remain hidden, invisible to a casual observer. But they are there, spreading behind them, a mass of memory, moving on the currents of hope, dreams, trauma and desire. A huge, invisible ‘psychberg’ is the bulk of what that person really is. It informs all their actions, sometimes making them hostile or friendly for no apparent reason.

Thus I approach each person carefully, aware of a field that extends in every direction beyond the physical limits of their body. Cautiously, gently, I probe, examine, question, in order to determine the best point of entry into that particular person’s world.

On the subway I am crushed and exhilarated by thoughts, memories, dreams pressing in from every direction. So much history I will never know. Mysteries, dark, hidden secrets colliding, crashing, rubbing up close to one another, filling the space like radio and television waves.

I am an antenna...

Grandma says that when I was a child and we were walking together, I used to say to her, “Talk to the people, grandma. Talk to the people!”

Now that I have talked to my grandmother, I see not just a frail, bent over elderly woman. I see a golden haired, blue eyed girl laughing and running and picking flowers in the fields of Dzialoszyce; a serious young student in Kielce and Toulouse; a young mother with two children and a husband in Lodz; a weary Jewess selling scissors and corks and candy in the war torn streets of Poland; a struggling

1920

Perla Friedman

1952

Pauline Monat

1985

Grandma

immigrant in France, then in the United States, working in grocery stores, taking in the wash for neighbors, babysitting. Finally, a delicate, bent over, old woman, my grandmother.

A wizened child.

All the while, running through her life like the subject of a fugue, I see the music of her soul, her unique sensitivity and intelligence.

I feel that I have had the privilege of getting to know another person’s life very well, charting the vast reaches and deep crevices of her being. In the process, I have come to understand myself better.

Sitting in the sun-drenched kitchen of my parents' California home after a day of sunshine on the beach. Grandma is peacefully eating a healthy meal of risotto, salad and vegetable soup.

You've come a long way since Dzialoszyce. Did you ever imagine it might be so?

On the beach, Santa Monica, California.
“You've come a long way, baby.”

* * *

At lunch with grandma, on a spring afternoon, talking...

G: ...what has changed in the thinking of people today is mostly that from idealistic the trend has changed to more materialistic attitudes among young people.

D: Isn’t that more just in the 1980’s? You know, during the 1960’s here in the United States there were the hippies and...

G: Young people had ideas for which they were fighting, devoting their lives. Young people were reading a lot, discussing world problems or individual problems. Here the young people are running after...

D: Pleasure.

G: Not...pleasure, I couldn’t say. Careers, financial careers, to achieve, to become wealthy...

D: Or famous.

G: Very rarely you encounter somebody who does something for an idea, for a...

D: belief...

G: belief...

D: principle...

G: Yes.

D: Well, a lot of people think, especially when you speak to older people, Oh, the good old days, you know everything is not as good as it was. But, do you feel that way?

G: Might be the life was more peaceful. People enjoyed better the little things in life, like gardening, reading a book, listening to music. There was not a chase after money.

D: Isn't that partly just New York City? New York City is supposed to be more like that than almost anywhere in the world.

G: Could be, could be...

D: You know, people tell me if you come from Europe there's a slower pace life there. I'm thinking of a conversation that I had recently had with an Italian cab driver as we drove across Central Park. He said that in Italy or France, in the southern countries, people take life more easily, aren't so materialistic. And enjoy cultural things more...

G: Yes, that may be so, even now...

D: But New York is supposed to be a cold, materialistic place. Money rules.

G: Might be I'm not right. If you look at life in California with all that surfing and the beach, people spending days on the beach, it's a different life again. But it's still, it's still carnal pleasures....

D: Yeah...

G: mostly...

D: Yeah, (languorously stretching) pleasure seeking (sigh). Hmmm. And people not so serious.

G: Superficial living.

D: Yes.

* * *

I feel very peaceful here with her. The sun is finally coming out, the trees are gaining their leaves in the center garden of our brownstone block, and a gentle light filters through the white lace curtains as I listen to the music of Chopin and talk with my grandmother.

Epilogue

Grandma and mom in the kitchen, Santa Monica 1997.

By 1989 grandma couldn’t live in New York any longer. The climate was too harsh for her body. Wild swings from terrible humidity in the summer to extremely dry heat indoors in the winter wreaked havoc with her legs. She was suffering from stasis dermatitis: swelling, cracking and weeping of the skin on her legs. My mother had to come to New York repeatedly to help her during many health crises.

When grandma moved to California to live in my parents’ home, she became depressed at first and my mother had to help her once more with shock treatment. Again she was fine almost immediately after that. Her legs improved greatly also, thanks to the close attention and loving care of my mother and the good climate.

She stayed in a little room next to the kitchen, helping my mother cook and clean. My father was not well, he had Parkinson’s, so he and my grandmother spent many hours together at the kitchen table, my father working on the computer, my grandmother listening to books on tape.

She came to enjoy her life again, cared for by my mother , snug in the heart of her family, “like a cricket behind the chimney,” a Polish expression she liked to say. Several years later I moved back from New York to be closer to my parents and grandmother, to help my mother with caring for dad and grandma. What follows is an essay I wrote around that time.

Come, Give Me Your Hand

(1993)

"Please - Come - Quickly. I'm - Badly - Hurt."

I hang up the phone and move through the darkened house to find my father in the bathroom, blood streaming down his face. "I think I knocked out several teeth," he says. "Please help me clean up before mom sees me." He was in the driveway and tripped over a car stop in the dark. Just three months earlier he also fell on his face in the street, badly slashing his nose and forehead. I do what I can before getting my mother.

"Oh Pete, oh Pete," she says seeing him.

We spend an hour pulling pieces of gravel out of his face before taking him to the emergency room. There's a deep gash on his upper lip, but fortunately he knocked out only one tooth. It's 3 A.M. when I get home, but I can't fall asleep.

My father has Parkinson's disease, a slowly progressing illness that most people recognize by its tremors and rigidity. But it is the falls that are most dangerous. As his illness has progressed I've made accommodations in my life that may seem unusual for a 35 year old man.

Recently I moved back to Los Angeles from New York where I had a floor-through apartment in an old townhouse. It looked across the garden of a brownstone block and every morning I woke to the changing seasons and the sound of birds. On Friday and Saturday nights I went to the Metropolitan Museum to hear chamber music drift across the balcony. "This is the height of civilization," I thought.

But I never took root. Being a freelance writer it didn't matter where I lived. I wasn't married and didn't have any children, though I'd still very much like to. My grandmother, who I was very close to, lived one floor below me. But she couldn't tolerate the climate anymore and went to live with my parents in California. Now my father's condition had progressed to the point where my family really needed me.

It's good to feel needed. Working for large companies I always felt like a cog in a wheel, an interchangeable part ready to be replaced or discarded at a moment's notice. For years I had an offer from my parents to help them in their work, to pay me a salary, but I resisted. I had to be independent. Children are supposed to move away. Parents are supposed to live on their own until it's time to go to a nursing home.

One day, while standing in my parents' garden, looking up at their house, I had a crashing revelation: "This is where I belong, this is where I'm needed. There's so much to do here." The grass was freshly cut and sculptures leaned in the wind. I realized what an extraordinary setting this was, what an unusual life my parents had created.

My father is a sculptor and my mother is a painter. I worked with them while I was growing up. Now their workshops and their lives were in disarray and my mother was beginning to show signs of breaking under the stress. I could make a difference here, working with them.

In Milan Kundera's book *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* there is a philosophical meditation [quoted earlier on p. 267] that I often think of. Kundera says that responsibilities and suffering press one downward, closer to earth and reality, whereas a lack of responsibility makes one light, a "luftmensch," floating upward, free and irrelevant. There is the possibility of being crushed by one's responsibilities, but there is also more of a sense of reality and sharing with the rest of humanity.

I'm seeking a balance between lightness and responsibility. In Japan before the turn of the century, when they were first exposed to the West, there was no word for "rights." People didn't have rights, they only had obligations. I wouldn't go that far, but I do feel that my obligation to my family helps keep me centered.

I spend half my time writing, the other half helping my parents in their work and their day to day needs. Frictions do arise, but doesn't that happen in any work

situation? Occasionally I have to remind my mother not to treat me like a child or tell my father that I've got to get to my own projects. But I've always gotten along well with my parents. I'm able to progress in my own career while making a difference in the lives of the people I am closest to.

I took a shower with my father the other day, to help him get ready to go into town. As we stood naked next to each other I was struck by the memory of having done this before, when I was a small child. He was so large and strong then. Now as I looked down at him his hair was gray, his body withered and bent. It was a shock, as if I hadn't seen him for thirty years and now saw the changes in an instant.

Last night dad fell again and broke his leg just below the hip. Sitting next to him in the hospital I see a look of peaceful amazement on his face. "How could this have happened? How did I arrive at this state?" I find it soothing to be with him. It helps allay some of the sadness I feel; I've wasted time, I didn't appreciate him fully when he was better. I hold his head with my hand and feel that I'm speaking more directly than I ever could with words. Dad looks out the window of the hospital room and says, "I can almost always find faces in the clouds."

I miss New York less and less as time goes on. Instead of walking in Central Park, I walk along the ocean. I ride my bicycle on the beach path, lifted up by the Santa Monica Mountains as they plunge into the sea. I watch the sunset from Adelaide Drive, looking across Santa Monica Canyon as the sky turns from blue to orange to black. The lights of Malibu twinkle, the stars appear. I feel like a tourist in my own home, seeing everything anew. There is a bustling night life on the Third Street Promenade and the L.A. County Museum is now open on Friday evenings, with music in the courtyard. There is life and culture after New York.

* * *

As we step out of the car to take a walk in Torrey Pines State park, Dad is having trouble with his balance. His muscles are freezing up from his Parkinson's. He walks up the hill, along the dusty road, but then is stuck, unable to move at the beginning of the path. Mom is ahead and hears him calling for her. She turns back and reaches out to him, saying, "Come, give me your hand."

We walk along the path together. My younger brother, Billy, is with us and there is a quiet solidity to our companionship. We walk along the path looking at many different kinds of flowers: red ones with star shaped petals, flowering gray succulents, purple flowers on long wavy stalks, yellow daisies.

The Torrey pines are old, twisted and gnarled. Many are dead, a forest of skeletons. The ones that are alive are unusual in the way their trunks widen high off the ground and flatten out as they twist. We walk to a point overlooking the ocean. The wind is strong. We sit on a bench together
for a few moments, watching the sea from above, the windswept pines behind us.

Come, give me your hand. Somehow those words resonate for me. A deeper caring, years together and a dedication that is uncommon in this day and age. What is true love? Maybe that is. Being willing to help, to stay with someone who is suffering. A gesture. Hands reaching out to each other, one trembling, the other still strong.

After I wrote that essay, both dad's and grandma's conditions continued to decline: dad broke his other hip six months after the first one and grandma had a stroke one week after that. Two years later dad nearly died when he had a massive seizure/stroke. He was like a quadraplegic for many months after that. Mom brought him back to life and, after years of slow recovery, to some measure of physical function.

Grandma recovered from her stroke and was able to walk using a walker. She had macular degeneration, some loss of bladder and bowel control, but her mind was always there. When my father had the seizure, my mother rushed to the kitchen to help him, and grandma (who was wheelchair bound and almost blind at that point) was shouting to my mother, "Mouth to mouth! Give him mouth to mouth!"

She always wanted to be of help, to be useful, not to be a burden. By 1997 she could no longer even wash the dishes. Grandma began to get sleepier and sleepier. She spent most of the days in the kitchen at the table, dozing off, her eyes closed. My mother would ask her if she was awake and she would say yes, she was just thinking.

One day she was listening to Gibbons' *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* while sitting in my parents' courtyard, covered with blankets, aged and frail, resting in the afternoon sun, A friend who was visiting was struck by that image. Seeing it through my friend's eyes, that image has stayed with me, too.

By the end of May grandma had stopped eating. When we tried to get her to eat she refused. She could not go on anymore, her body was too worn out.

We called my brother, Billy, to come and be with us, The end was approaching. What follows are my notes from the last days of grandma's life.

* * *

Wednesday, June 4, 1997, 5:30 a.m.

Grandma's eyes are open. Her life is slowly ebbing away. Where does it go?

The face of death is triangular: all the lines of grandma's face seem to be pulling together to form triangles: her open mouth, her nostrils, the outline of her nose, All pointing up.

My mother comes in to the room, says to grandma,"Yes, my darling, what is it?" and it feels so right, the tone of her voice, so familiar and reassuring. I've been very lucky to have a mother and a father and a grandmother and a brother—a full, rich family experience.

Grandma is fading in and out of consciousness.

I wish it was easier for her to just pass away in her sleep. But her body still does not want to go.

Death seems almost like birth—a period of labor, labored breathing, then she'll stop breathing momentarily. Moaning, crying out.

This morning grandma said to my mother that she was afraid. Mom said she saw grandma raising her hands in front of her face, as if to ward off something coming towards her.

Grandma doesn’t want to be touched. She’s not able to speak anymore, but she’s trying to take off her diaper, then she makes a gesture like “I give up” with her hand—so she’s still aware.

Now she just said, “Can you open that?”

Grandma opens her eyes wide and arches her eyebrows like in thought. She’s not looking at me, though. Her gaze is inward.

Where is she going?

* * *

7:00 a.m. Wednesday

I just said I love you to grandma and she reached out for my hand with her finger. It’s as if she’s below the surface of the water, occasionally breaking through the surface, but then falling back below.

I feel privileged to be close to grandma during this time; a mysterious, profound process is taking place.

Even though grandma is in distress and barely conscious, she still smiles when I enthusiastically say, “Hi!” It reminds me of the effect of seeing me always had on her when I was a child.

* * *

June 5, Thursday

Grandma is still here.

It feels bad to see her suffer. It reminds me of when I'm sick and no one can help me.

This morning she said, "Why can't I die?" Then, a bit later, "Time to start life. Let's get up."

* * *

June 6, Friday

Grandma is sucking water from a syringe. It makes me think of a baby sucking on a bottle. Now she's sucking on my finger!

There is a kind of symmetry in being like a baby at the end of life.

* * *

June 7, Saturday

Grandma died at 3:30 p.m., one week before her 94th birthday.

My brother Billy was the only one nearby. He heard a louder than normal exhale. He

went over to her bedside and said, “Grandma, grandma,” looking for any sign of life. It was her last breath.

I was out getting some medication for her and researching at a medical library about how to help people through the dying process.

When I arrive home her body is cold, but she looks very peaceful. She is lying in bed as if asleep. I sit next to her for a long time, thinking about our life together.

* * *

In the days that follow I feel her presence around me, near me, hovering, reassuring, as if to say that she is okay. She always used to say, “Wherever I am, I will always be with you.”

While grandma was dying I wasn’t spending much time in my own home. One day I came home and noticed a pair of birds had made their nest in my bedroom window. Shortly after grandma’s death three baby birds hatched. A few days before a party I had to celebrate my fortieth birthday and grandma’s life, the last baby bird flew away. To me it was a sign from grandma, of the continuity of life—birth, decay and birth again—all part of the same cycle.

A few weeks later a woman at a party asked me if I miss grandma. I tried to explain how I had difficulty grieving for her, that somehow I did not miss her; I feel she is still so much with me, that she simply could not go on any longer, that there was nothing more we could do or say.

“You feel complete with her,” said the woman.

* * *

At home, on my mantle, I look up at the three photos of grandma at ages 17, 49, and 82 surrounded by flowers. Her ashes are behind the photos and the image of grandma at 82 is smiling. I think of something I wrote many years earlier, while we were still living in New York together:

Grandma is gradually growing thinner and weaker, vanishing, a wisp, a puff of smoke ascending. But I will not be sad when she is gone for I feel that I have made the most of our time together and she will live on through me, through these words, forever, running and laughing, a golden child, through the fields of Dzialoszyce.

Recipes

GRANDMA'S RECIPES for the food we ate together:

ARTICHOKES

1) When buying artichokes, check whether inside the leaves there are any black ones or bugs or anything rotten. Green and firm are best.

2) If there are any brown edges on the tips of the leaves cut them off (brown part seems to spoil the taste).

3) Wash to get sand out.

4) Put in boiling water. Can add some salt to the water, but we usually don't use salt.

5) Boil about 40 to 45 minutes (young ones 30-40 minutes).

6) Test if they are ready by seeing how easily a leaf is pulled off.

BAKED APPLES

1) Wash the apples and puncture with a fork in several places to prevent splitting.

2) Put in a pan and bake in oven set at 350-375 degrees until soft.

(They can be put in when cooking something else at the same time—
for example: lamb chops).

BRISKET POT ROAST

1) Cut up: a lot of celery (with leaves) into 2 inch cubes
1 carrot into 3 pieces
1 big onion into little squares.

2) Add 1 bay leaf and some dry mushrooms.

3) Put Goulden mustard on meat, also some pepper and salt.

4) Brown the meat in a pan with oil or butter.

5) After it is brown put the onions in and brown lightly.

6) Add all of the other ingredients and steam on a slow fire for about 3 hours.

7) Add a little water if necessary.

BROILED STEAK

1) Preheat oven to 550 degrees - Broil (Let run for about 10 minutes).

2) Wash and dry a filet steak, cut off fat.

3) Smear a tiny bit of peanut oil on either side.

4) Put on: a few slices of onion +/or garlic powder
a little pepper
some pieces of butter.

5) Cook for about 5 minutes on each side.

BROWN RICE

1) Take 1/3 cup of oat groats and 1 cup brown rice.

2) Mix together and wash very thoroughly (3X).

3) Put in 2X as much water.

4) Bring to a boil.

5) Put in 1 bay leaf & 1/4 teaspoon cumin seed (or ground).

6)Lower flame when boiling and let boil 20 to 30 minutes.

CHICKEN/CHICKEN SOUP

1) “I cut off most of the fat and leave some skin because I think it makes it tastier. If you leave skin, scrape it with a knife to clean it off a little.”

2)“Inside I take out whatever parts we don’t use. Or you can buy it already cut up so you don’t have to clean it. If you buy breasts, clean out the fat.”

3) Then, after cleaning, wash it well (Jewish people used to soak chicken for 1/2 hour).

4) If you want tasty meat:
put chicken in boiling water.

5) If your main purpose is to have the chicken soup:
put the chicken in cold water (not too much water, just enough to cover the

meat—but it varies with your intent).

6) I cook the chicken about 1/2 hour on a slow flame. After it comes to a boil, clear off the scum.

7) After 20 minutes I put in the vegetables as it boils.

The vegetables:

1 big carrot in 3 pieces

1/2 or 1 small onion

1/2 or a whole leak.

Can also put in Kohlrabi, cabbage, green parsely or 1/2 parsely root.

8) After it comes to a boil put it on a small flame.

9) 10 minutes before the end, if you like, you can put in green parsely tied up with thread around the tails.

10) When over (just stopped boiling), can add some chopped up dill.

FARINA

A warm breakfast cereal, good for upset stomach. Takes 2 minutes to cook.

1) Use 1/2 water and 1/2 milk.

2) Bring to a boil.

3) Add 3 tablespoons /serving and a pinch of salt, a piece of butter and honey.

4) Pour from a certain height.

5) Stir as it boils (for about 2 minutes).

KAPUSNIAK

1) Boil prime or choice beef flank till almost tender (approx. 1 1/2 hours).

2) Add: onion cut up into squares

2 tomatoes (peeled and cored)

an apple or two (sour)

a grated carrot

a pinch of sugar

sometimes a little cummin and soursalt.

KLOPS (meat loaf—small ones are called Klopsiki)

1) Buy small package of chopped sirloin (not round, too dry).

2) Scrape a piece of onion (cut in 1/2 and peel first) on a grater. Use < 1/4 size of medium sized onion. Also grate 1/3 of a potato.

3) Remove rind of one piece of white bread or challah, then soak bread in water and squeeze out..

4) Add: 1 raw egg

a little salt (and pepper if you like).

5) Mix all of the above together very well, till you can't see the individual elements.

If too dry (and hard) add a little cold water (1 tablespoon)

If too wet, can add good breadcrumbs.

6) At this point you can freeze and store or cook.

7) To cook:

Put breadcrumbs on both sides.

Put a bit of butter and bit of sesame oil (or just oil, no butter) fry the rest of the onion first in a pan, then fry the Klops (not too small flame or will stick), first on one side till brown, then other side.

Finally, add a drop of water and steam on a very small flame until done (about 15-20 minutes).

Good to serve with potatoes or rice.

KRUPNIK (Barley soup)

1) In a pot with 3 times as much water as barley and some dried mushrooms, cook barley until almost ready to be eaten, until tender (approx. 45 min - 1 hour).

2) Then add: a small carrot
a piece of celery root (or regular celery)
some salt and a little butter
eventually chopped green parsely (if available).

LEEK AND POTATO SOUP

1) Take 2 leaks (mostly the white part), 2 potatoes, 1/4-1/2 of an onion.

2) Cut up into small pieces.

3) Cook it! (in boiling water for as long as it takes to get soft).

LEMON SOUP

Add an egg yolk to chicken soup (lemon squeezed into soup already), warm up gradually. (Don't bring to a boil).

MILLET

1) Wash grain twice.

2) Put 2-1/2 times as much water as grain in a pot.

3) Bring water to a boil, then add millet.

4) Let boil on a slow flame, just bubbling a little.

5) Cover and let steam about 15-20 minutes (until grains are soft).

VINAIGRETTE (Salad Dressing)

1) 2 1/2 tablespoons of sesame oil to 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice.

2) A pinch of salt.

3) Piece of chopped onion or scallion.

4) Sometimes chopped parsely.

VEGETABLE SOUP

When chilled perfect for a hot afternoon.

1) Ingredients to put in a pot:

2 carrots (not too thick)

1 leak

4 or 5 pieces of green celery.

Cut into little pieces (little squares):

A piece of parsely root

One tomato (peeled)

Half an onion cut into squares

One large potato (can put in more than one)

Some cut up string beans (optional)

(Really any vegetable—all cut in small pieces).

2) Add water to pot.

3) Boil approximately 20 minutes.

4) Pass through a blender.

5) Chill.

6) Add cream.

General Tips:

1) Never stop cooking potatoes before they are done, and don't add cold water to them.

2) Put green vegetables into water that is already boiling. Don't heat them up gradually.