



GUT YONTEV

MEIN MEINEKE

MELAMED

MEIN SHITETELE

DIERTSUNG

ZELNER

NESEYYAH

SHPITZLE

TANTSN

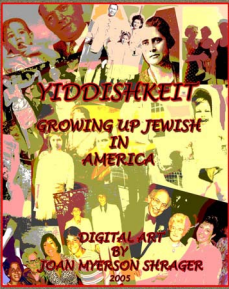
BAR MITZVAH

MENTSHE

FREILACH

SHAYNA MAIDEL

CHUSSEN CHALLA MAZELTOV



YIDDISHKEIT

GROWING UP JEWISH IN AMERICA

DIGITAL ART
BY
JOAN MYERSON SHRAGER
2005

YIDDISHKEIT

growing up Jewish in America

An Exhibition of Digital Art
by

Joan Myerson Shrager

September 18 through November 13, 2005

Temple Judea Museum
Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel
Elkins Park, PA



ME AND MY DADDY



GRAN, GRAMP, MOM,
DADDY AND ME



GRANNY, MOM AND ME

SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

Growing up at a time when I had the good fortune to live with my immigrant grandparents and associate with family and friends of their generation gave me a taste of the meaning of America to people who were unjaded about loving this country. This project allowed me to step back into a wonderful period of my life.

How I would love to go back just once to my house on Allensgrove Street and see my Granny hanging sheets on the line in the yard; hear my grandfather sing "Tumbala, Tumbala, Tumbala Leika" one more time; smell the delicious borscht; taste Bogaslovsky's Russian Pumpernickel again; hear them speak Yiddish or heavily accented English; taste the blintzes or knishes not from the freezer box, but made right in my kitchen.

I remember so many things: saving tin cans for the war effort; hiding under the piano with my grandpa there to protect me, during air raid drills; blackout curtains; seeing President Roosevelt from atop my father's shoulders; hide and go seek with kids on the block; doors unlocked, keys left in the ignition; holidays with aunts, uncles and cousins; taking chocolate batter of the cake my grandmother baked every other day; wiping dishes while my mother washed and singing with my grandfather; neighbors coming to watch our TV. Ours was the first on the block. What a life!

I regret that my children and grandchildren will never know what I experienced. So I dedicate this booklet to them and my wonderful, colorful, family who lived my life with such joy mixed with stories and songs.

The following pages are designed to let the viewer in on the process of creating these digital prints. Thanks to my mother who saved so much memorabilia, I have an extraordinary collection of photographs and mementos from the turn of the 20th century. It is quite a journey from sepia photographs to state of the art computer software and prints. But here I am, a 21st century woman with ties to the horse and buggy era. I fed sugar to the milk man's horse and now I traverse the internet.

SHPILE - KNITTING NEEDLE

The men in my family were idealized and idealized. When she lay dying my grandmother pointed to my father, her son-in-law, and said to her nurse, "Do you see that man? He's the son of God."

She achieved her due recognition after my grandfather died in 1963. Throughout his life she was a background figure. The pattern of stitches symbolizes her strength as the one who kept the family intertwined. When she died at 90 in 1979 I knew no one would ever love me like that again. She was totally accepting of all of us and fought to keep us united.

As she looks out at right I imagine her thinking of the girl in 1907, center, posed with books she could hardly read then. She lived to attend her great grandsons' bar mitzvahs. She sent her daughter to the University of Pennsylvania. She encouraged me. At left is my grandfather holding me 1939 and holding my mother 1912. Lower left she is with me and my sons. Her father Avrum peers out upper center. My grandsons are upper right 2005. My parents and I are center right in 1946.



My grandmother
circa 1915



Granny's crochet work



Avrum Katz my
grandmother's
father circa 1900



Gramp and me 1939



My parents and
me 1946



Granny, me, Stuart and
Steve 1977



Granny age 16



Nick and Alex 2005
My grandsons



SHAYNA MAIDEL

I am on the beach with my mother. We both were called Shayna Maidel by my father and grandfather.

My mother saved hundreds of playbills many with a Jewish theme. Many starred Jewish performers like Jan Peerce, Robert Merrill, Richard Tucker, Benny Goodman, Jascha Heifetz, Yehudi Menuhin, Lillian Hellman, Eddie Cantor, Al Johnson and Isaac Stern. My grandfather sang Johnson songs. I taught myself Hativenu from a Johnson recording. Many of these stars performed in Yiddish theater as well.

I remember a resort called Zuni's Farm that my grandparents went to, a totally Yiddish experience. There would always be performances by guests whom Zuni would call to the stage. "Joanie is da?" I sang "I'm an Otter Buck from Or' Kentucky" in Yiddish there at about age 6 in 1945.

"Shayna Maidel" is the story of a young woman who remains in Poland to be with her mother while her father and sister go to America. She is sent to a concentration camp and her mother is killed by the Nazis. After the war, she comes to live with her sister. Together they relive the past.

We were not taught about the Holocaust in school. When I was growing up I knew nothing about it. At 16, I discovered photographs in "The Pictorial History of the Jewish People" and confronted my parents. I remember being stunned. It challenged my belief in God and changed me forever.

My sister-in-law Simone, a contemporary, was a survivor so the subject continues to haunt me. I frequently asked my mother about those years. I will never forget her saying, "We were all afraid."

She said that during that time she experienced blatant anti-Semitism by people who blamed the Jews for the country's participation in WW II.



Playbill 1946



My mother and I at
Rainbow Lake New Jersey
1947



Isaac Stern performance
1959

NESEYAH - LONG JOURNEY

It is hard to imagine the journey of 16 year old Lisa Katz, later Lena Meyers who sailed on the Waldensee, below, to strange shores, speaking no English. First she lived in Duluth where my mother was born and later moved to Philadelphia.

She and my grandfather rented an apartment "down the shore" in Atlantic City where I spent many teenage summers with other Jewish families from Philadelphia. My grandfather upper left became a community leader there, leading hundreds of people in Yiddish singing.

I took my first steps on the beach, left and spent my early childhood there as well, center. My parents shared a rented home with 2 other families during the war and I remember VJ day in August 1945 at the shore. We ran out of the house banging pots and pans, ran to the boardwalk and I was passed from soldier to sailor smothered with hugs and kisses at age 6. My father worked in a defense plant and commuted to Atlantic City during summers.



Gramp, Gramp, Inc. 1941



First steps 1940



Waldensee - ship my grandmother sailed to America on



Duluth family, my grandfather on right
Me center 1944



By the boardwalk 1942

ADVOCAT - LAWYER

My husband, David S. Shrager was born of an immigrant father and raised in an observant home. He came from modest circumstances to achieve national recognition as a leading trial attorney. His father was sent to America for an education. Instead, Harry or Herschel worked in a factory so his sons could be educated.

Photos: DSS as national lead epee fencer at University of Pennsylvania; books referencing him Trial Masters and Best Lawyers in America; major trial headlines; congratulatory letter from Ronald Reagan when elected president of the Association of Trial Lawyers of America, 1983; newspaper clip when became Pres. of PA. Trial Lawyers; upper left news clip hosting Adlai Stevenson at Penn, 1950's; upper right with President Clinton. Lower center Shrager family portrait in Russia; background the Talmud-Jewish law. David received a set of the Hebrew - English Talmud as a gift from from a colleague.



DSS right, fencing team U of P



Congratulations.



Judge OKs \$640 million pact for HIV-infected hemophiliacs



DSS's father Harry center



DSS - Young Democrats



Greening President Clinton



DSS Bar Mitzvah



MELAMED - TEACHER

My parents were teachers. Every night at dinner they talked about students, lesson plans and school politics. They both attended the University of Pennsylvania where they met. They were consummate professionals.

Bottom center is a copy of my father's four year Mayor's Scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania, 1925. Although born in America he spoke only Yiddish when he first attended school. He said he was terrified at first because he could not understand anything. Later his English became impeccable.

At right my mother as a Penn coed, 1928. Center is a photo of my father's parents, as newlyweds in 1907. At left is my father a Wharton school student in 1927. He is above right teaching a class at Frankford High School which he attended, where he taught for 47 years. My mother stands in the Wagner Jr. High School yard in the 50's. Current photos of the University of Pennsylvania are the background.



My father's parents



The Quadrangle U of P



Houston Hall U of P



My father 1929



My father in class at Frankford
High School



My mother college age 1928



My mother in school yard 60's

MEIN SHITETELE BERDICHEV



To paraphrase a song, "Mein Shitetele Belt", this is a painting of my grandfather's street, Berdichev. This 1917 photo is of the main street. Lower left is a family photo of my mother and her parents in 1912. At right is a Russian postcard sent to them in 1910. Upper left is a photo of my grandmother's father wearing his "spodik," the traditional Russian fur hat. Over 100 years later his great great grandson Steve sported a "spodik" when he visited Russia in 1983.

When my grandmother learned my parents were taking me to Europe in 1957 she reacted with disdain saying she had come from there and had no reason to return. My grandfather said I would never understand what it was like to fight his little brothers to keep them from drinking the milk meant for the youngest child. He escaped from the Cossacks who were looking for him because he had a gun and was a Menshevik. For him, America was the "Golden Medina."



Berdichev 1917 my grandfather's birthplace



My grandmother's father and siblings circa 1906



My grandparents and mother



Postcard from Russia 1910



My son, Steve, Moscow 1983

MEIN ANKLE

This title reminds me of Atlantic City in the 1940's and 50's spent with my grandparents . My grandfather would be standing on a bench leading 50 or more people in Yiddish song at the Virginia Avenue pier. When he saw me, he would stop the singing, pull me up and announce to the clapping crowd, "Ladies and gentlemen, this is mein ankle."

When he died, bus loads of these people came to his funeral. They took out a full page advertisement in his memory in the Atlantic City Press.

I lived with my mother's parents, Yiddish, Jewish food, Yiddish singing, English spoken with heavy accents seasoned my life. Ours was a political, polemical household with nightly discussions at dinner mainly between my parents and grandfather. My grandmother tended to dinner, a full time endeavor. All read voraciously. My grandfather read American literature and political texts, having been a revolutionary and a union organizer. Yes, we were liberals and progressives.

Paul Robeson, Henry Wallace, Roosevelt, David Dubinsky, were hallowed names in our house.

The patterning is my grandmother's creative stitches. Left my grandfather holds me in 1930 and I hold my grandson Alex, 2005, lower center. My grandparents at center in 1907. Lower left a postcard in Yiddish from family.



My grandmother's crocheting
early 1900's



My grandfather and me 1939



My grandparents 1907



My grandson, Alex 2005



Yiddish postcard 1908



GUT YONTIF - HOLIDAY GREETING

Holidays unite us in celebrating our Jewish heritage with family members and friends.

Holidays are milestones with changing casts, as some die and some are born. We tell our stories remembering past family gatherings. My sister-in-law Simone "olav hasholem" was a survivor so we always related her experiences to the holiday observed.

Rosh Hashanah and Pesach bring back wonderful memories of stories told by my parents who remembered what their parents had told them. I remember my grandfather's extraordinary chicken soup and her unsurpassed gefilte fish. When I eat those dishes I am transported back to my birth home.

My husband and his brother traditionally lead us on these holidays. Lower right is my niece, Camile, 2005, reading her Passover story. To her left is her paternal great grandfather in 1965, who once had the role her grandfather now has. The Passover Haggadah at left was purchased by my father in 1963 for my son's first Passover.



2005 Passover with DSS and family



1960's Harry Shragar Passover



My father bought this in 1964 for my son's 1st Passover



2005 niece at Passover



Haggadah



David and Mort 2005

FRELACH

Dance was always part of my life. My mother performed at Perin and later taught dance at Wagner Junior High School. I remember standing on my father's shoes as he danced with me. Later he and my mother taught me to dance.

At every family celebration we danced. When the Freilach sounded, large circles formed as people stopped and kicked to the Klezmer music. Often my mother was at the center. Then my son Stuart took her place doing the "Kasachka" or high kicking from a squatting position.

For the background of Freilach I have used my grandfather's naturalization certificate, 1913; my Jewish marriage certificate, 1976; my grandfather's membership in the YMHA, 1953; a postcard written in 1913 by my grandfather's brother upon his arrival in the United States; and my grandfather's necklace, 1907 that I now wear.

Lower left is my mother performing at the Academy of Music in a University of Pennsylvania dance group, 1926. She is bottom left. I am the ballerina posing in 1948. My mother and grandfather are dancing the Freilach in 1957 at my wedding. My grandfather danced with elbows bent, hands clasped behind his head.



1957 my mother, her mother, her aunt at my wedding



My grandfather's naturalization certificate 1913



My grandmother's necklace and ring



1948 in front of my house



My Jewish marriage certificate 1976



My grandfather's membership in the Jewish Y



The Book of Knowledge symbolizes the importance of education in my family. My grandfather purchased it in 1918, eleven years after coming to America. It was the reference for my mother and me. I read it from cover to cover as did my sons when we were children.

My mother is the University of Pennsylvania graduate, 1930. Her diploma is at center. My masters degree is lower left. Lower center is my mother's Potter Elementary School photo, circa 1911. The large print background is a letter from the superintendent of schools when she retired from teaching after 30 years. The elderly couple lower left were my grandfather's aunt and uncle whom he left behind in Russia. Upper left is a student's note to my mother, her teacher, in 1944.



My mother's diploma from Penn 1930



Note to my mother from a devoted student 1944



Potter Elementary School 1913



My grandfather's aunt and uncle



My mother's elementary school diploma



My masters degree 1982



My mother 1930



Book of Knowledge 1918

**FROM HANDWRITTEN NOTES
BY
RUTH LEONE MEYERS MYERSON**
additional commentary by Joan Myerson Shrago

I was born in Duluth Minnesota on July 29, 1908. My father was Sam Meyers and mother, Lena. I was named after my maternal grandmother, Rachel, who had died at the early age of 42 of typhus in a hospital in Kiev.

Joan- I remember my grandmother (Lena) telling me about taking a horse carriage to Kiev and walking among the bodies of the dead to identify her mother and bring her back for burial.

My maternal grandfather, Avrum Katz, was the owner of a tavern in the small town of Belsztserkov, a rather unusual situation for a Jew in Russia. He had been married and divorced from a woman who had been ill, their offspring being a son, Pini (Philip). Because of the type of illness, divorce was considered justifiable.

Joan- my grandmother Lena told me that the first wife never stopped bleeding after the birth of her son Pini so therefore she was "unclean" and not worthy of marriage. She remained in the house to care for the children of the second marriage and to nurse Pini. My grandmother never knew this until she was older. Her brother Joe never knew that Pini was a half brother until I told him when he was in his 90's.

My mother was born of the second marriage. The children of that marriage in addition to mother were Fanny, Motie (Muts), Abbe (Art, Gedalia (the eldest George), Joe (Yossele) and Rifka. The relationship between Pini and those children was close and good. Thus mother showed no differentiation. After his mother died, Pini who had married went to America, through the efforts of his mother-in-law, who had a wealthy son in New York. He in turn brought over his wife and children. My mother was to go to America - a ticket, which was promised her never, arrived on time. She started out, reached London, and met a fellow passenger who paid for her passage. He had hoped she would marry him. She did not however.

Her brother, Pini, met her at Ellis Island and brought her to his mother in law's home where she stayed until she obtained employment. Gradually, all of her sisters and brothers except Rifka came over to the US. After Mother left Belsztserkov, her father remarried. Mother repudiated the two children born of this match, especially since they corresponded and obtained money on the pretext that it was to aid Rifka who was ill. When Mother learned that Rifka had died previously of typhus, she broke off all correspondence in great anger.

This occurred during World War I. Obviously their need was great, but she never forgave them the deception and secrecy she had never forgiven her father for having no married. Her beauty was such that Mother attracted males easily. From the fellow passenger who proposed marriage to her in London, to an older man in New York with whom she went steadily, and finally Dad, she charmed them all with her beautiful dark, lustrant hair, dark brown eyes, classic features, fine (hooked) nose and well shaped head.

After obtaining employment at a waist maker factory, she moved into a boarding house where she met many young people. During this period, she was engaged and broke off her engagement after a stormy courtship. Among the young men gathering at the boarding house, was my Dad. It apparently did not take long before they fell in love.

CHUSSEN CHALLA MAZELTOV



A wedding is a wonderful celebration in a Jewish family. I am the bride on the right in 1957. My parents' Ketuba is layered over me. They pose for their 1932 wedding photo at left. On the lower left my son breaks the glass at his wedding in 1994. My grandparents pose for their wedding lower right in 1907. My 1975 marriage certificate is at left. At bottom left is the wedding gown lace I beaded in 1957. A photo of a wedding kiddush cup was also used.



My grandmother's brother marries my grandfather's sister 1929



Joan - bride 1957



Ruth and Adolph - Ketuba 1932



Lace I beaded for my wedding gown 1957



Marriage of Steve and Kate my son 1994



Joan and David marriage certificate 1976

BAR MITZVAH

Most Jewish boys have a Bar Mitzvah even if they do not come from a religious home. My father went to Cheder and was Bar Mitzvah in an orthodox synagogue. Here he poses for his Bar Mitzvah picture in 1921. Stuart, his grandson reads from the Torah in 1978. Nick, his great grandson, in a Spiderman costume says a prayer in 2005, holding a wine cup at synagogue nursery school. Steve and Stuart, my sons, stand together in KI. The background is the announcement of Stu's Bar Mitzvah. My father, lower left plays at the Wall in Jerusalem. My husband, David, remembers candy tossed at him by women separated from men at his Bar Mitzvah. As the song goes, "Tradition!"



Nick 2005 prayer in
synagogue school



My grandfather's
brother cantor 1907



Stu's Bar Mitzvah 1978



Steve and Stu circa 1976



Stu announcement of Bar Mitzvah



A's Bar Mitzvah 1921



Stu reading from Torah



A in Israel circa 1980

MENTSH - HONORABLE, DECENT MAN

My father was the quintessential mentsh. He was my mother's love until she died at 90. She often talked of when they met, where they first kissed. A superb teacher he was known by female students as a snappy dresser. He taught for 47 years. Notes from students saved by mother attest to how much he meant to them. He was a devoted father. But no title suited him better than "Pop." He transformed from a strict dad to a mellow grandfather with endless patience and adoration for my sons.

Upper left is my father leading a WW11 bond rally.

Lower left he is leading a group of teachers to fight for teacher's tenure in Harrisburg. He also was instrumental in getting better working conditions for doctors at Albert Einstein Hospital, Southern Division. He went to jail in support of the Teacher's Union.

He went to Cheder, but was not an observant Jew. Upper right: he prays at the Wall in Israel. He worked for 2 Jewish newspapers before becoming a teacher. He also completed 2 years of training at Temple Law School and got a master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania.



A's diploma from Penn



The Jewish World newspaper



Teacher tenure demonstration



"A" in class



50th wedding anniversary



WW11 bond rally



The Jewish Ledger-letter to my mother



Employed by Jewish Ledger in Rochester NY

SAM MEYERS

written by my mother

He was a very handsome, dark-haired and dark-eyed fellow with a gift of conversation. Meyer Litvak (Samuel Meyer Litvak) had recently arrived from Russia. He was born in the town of Bendichev, son to the town's kosher butcher. He was the eldest son, Jacob (Jack), Motel (Max), Schmendel, Bessel (Bessie), and Rachel (Rose) following. His mother, Sosie Toubet (?) died at an early age, and a grandmother came to care for them.

Meyer was an adventure loving spirit, full of curiosity and concern about the world around him. He was educated in a cheder, learning basic Hebrew and Russian as well as Yiddish. He was a voracious reader and devoured all he could lay his hands on, including such authors as Mark Twain and the French writers, Zola and Dumas. His interests led him to join with young revolutionaries who resented the harsh rule of Czar Nicholas 111.

Their rebellion first took the form of holding secret meetings where revolutionary ideas and doctrines were read and discussed. Later there were physical clashes with the brutal police.

Meyer was at this time apprenticed to a dry goods merchant at the prevailing low wage scale. At this establishment he met many of the friends who later migrated to America. He was a skeptic regarding religious and superstitious traditions at this early age. He often told about the portion of synagogue services, which required the eyes of all but a few to be closed during the exhibition of the Torah. One day he decided to gamble on one eye, opening it secretly, waiting apprehensively to have it struck blind. When this did not happen he opened the other eye.

Kosher food was more expensive than the other types and as he had a tremendous appetite of a growing boy, he gradually experimented with the foods on sale everywhere. He found all forms of food tasty and to the end of his life never hesitated to try something new. He was eating seafood, ham and pork (he made a wonderful pork roast stuffed with garlic cloves and basted with wine) in all the years of his life in addition to the famous Jewish dishes, which Mother was adept at preparing.

Joan- I recall the pork roast which was his specialty and which sometimes he served his cronies who kept Kosher, delighting rather maliciously in their enthusiasm for it. He told them it was turkey. He was violently opposed to religiosity and had little tolerance for people who were observant. That was one of his personalities. He went to religious events under duress. He had rejected such influences as an admirer of socialist philosophy. He often quoted Marx's "Religion is the opiate of the masses."

Yet, he was the repository of Jewish customs, tradition, literature and music which he adored. He supported the state of Israel and was disdainful of the Orthodox who did not. He had been a freedom fighter and a union organizer and was a true liberal and progressive.

Joan- He told me his boss used to send him to purchase lunch. He would be so hungry and the lunch meats smelled so good. At first he decided to lick the paper wrapping to test whether God would strike him down for eating food that was not kosher. When nothing happened he decided to taste some of the meats meant for the boss. From then on he would eat a small portion. The boss never noticed. As for the hunger, he used to tell me he had to fend his brothers off from drinking milk meant for the baby.

His interest in revolutionary activities became greater and it became quite dangerous to remain in Russia without becoming further involved.

Joan- My mother's cousin Dolly now in her 80's told me that her father, Sam's brother Jack, told her that Sam was at a meeting of his revolutionary friends when Jack came running to warn him to come home because the Cossacks were looking for him. Their father ordered Sam to get undressed and tied him to a chair. Jack threw Sam's gun into a nearby river and their father put up the money for a ticket to America. My grandfather always told me he swam underwater to the ship to escape the Cossacks. He came to America on the Rhein, sailing from Bremen in 1907.

At age 17 or 18 he immigrated to the United States where cousins lived. They lived in Chicago and in Duluth. Naively, his father had suggested that of an afternoon he walk over to visit them. Since he soon learned this was impossible, he corresponded with them. In the meantime he sought work in New York City. He was never lazy, and if he needed work, he even pretended training if necessary to procure the job.

One of his unfortunate experiences had to do with shrinking an expensive fur felt men's hat instead of blocking it to a specific size, thus causing him to flee without his wages. He worked at a series of jobs – walked endlessly through NY streets and took advantage of the abundance of food. He would enter a bar and order a beer, which he didn't like in order to avail himself of the free lunch.

He was anxious to find a good job so that he could marry my mother (Lena or Lisa Katz) whom he met at a mutual friend's home. His cousins prevailed upon him to settle there because they felt he would have greater opportunities. He did go after a definite understanding with Mother that she would come there to marry him when he found a job. Against the wishes of her family she came to Duluth.

His cousins the Azine family all pitched in to make a wedding for them. She was very unhappy with Duluth. It certainly was a one-horse town compared to gay New York! However, love and a baby, nine months later made Duluth definitely her home for a long while. These cousins tried to make her feel at home. Although Dad was a willing and hard worker, we were quite poor.

Mother was meticulously clean and became an excellent housekeeper. She accepted the good advice of experienced neighbors, one a Frenchwoman, Mrs. Garsel and applied it all to making a good home. She became adept at cooking, sewing, and keeping her home clean and comfortable.

Dad's various jobs were sources of many interesting stories. When he first applied for a job, a paymaster found his name too difficult to say or write and brusquely said we'll call you Sam Meyers. And so that became his name for the rest of his life. He preferred Sam to Samuel. If he had had formal education, he might have risen to the heights because of his native intelligence. As it was, he educated himself through his insatiable desire to read.



Samuel and Margaret



Sam

Joan- he had the stables on 3rd Street in Philadelphia. My father said he saw my grandfather lift a horse off the ground in order to shoe him. My father said Sam Meyers was the most physically strong man he had ever seen and my father was raised on a farm doing hard physical labor himself.

Once when our family went to N.Y. over a weekend my mother cooked a huge caldron of beef stew for our dog Nellie that the men were to feed her and take care of her. They ate the stew and gave her their food. "It is too good for a dog," they said.

This was a hard working time for Dad. He had come to Philadelphia to help out mother's brother who was dying of cancer and had beseeched Dad to come. After this Dad sold the stable on Fitzwater Street and bought a store. Some of the money to pay for my college tuition came from the sale of the horse manure to farmers.

Joan- my grandfather told me he turned down a college scholarship for my mother because a Republican councilman offered it to him while my grandfather was a Democrat. He laughed at his own naivete when he told me the story since he could have accepted the scholarship and still voted for the Democrats.

He was in bankruptcy at that time. I dropped out of Phi Epsilon sorority then we were broke and the depression hit us.

Story about my grandfather's sister Rose Heller told by her daughter Elaine Reis.

She came to Ellis Island in 1923. She went to Philadelphia for a short time and then to Duluth. Her mother died when she was a baby. A Mastoid ear infection. She then lived with her grandmother until she was 3 and her grandmother died. Then she lived with two aunts. She and her brother had tickets to America when the war broke out. Her brother was a prisoner of the Germans and died when he got back. I believe my mother must have been alone during her teen years till she escaped to Warsaw (She had to go under the wire and told how she hid in a feather bed as soldiers stuck bayonets into the bed) She loved Warsaw but Uncle Jack finally got enough together to send her a ticket. Dolly always said my mother was the smartest in the family. She was born in the wrong place at the wrong time. When she was sick she said, " I've always been alone. She would never talk about Russia. She said her life started when she got here. She did once say the Germans, White Russians and Reds came thru her town. Also that she could not believe that people ate cabbage by choice in America since cabbage was all they had to eat in Europe.

One-day Dad's sister Bessie arrived. Mother bathed her, washed her long hair that hung to her knees. She was enrolled in school and we walked there daily. The 4-room apartment became too crowded for 6 people and the 3 relatives moved to 2 rooms a few doors away. There was some ill feeling at the time, however.

Dad and Mother had a wonderfully close relationship with Max and Nanny Conoval. I recall mother's wonderful meal prepared in honor of Nanny's coming back from a visit to her relatives in Yonkers, New York. - Hot kornsch, knishes, roast, and apple kugel.

Joan- that was a standard meal at our house on Allensgrave Street. I remember Granny rolling out the paper-thin dough for the knishes on our kitchen table, the length of the table. She made liver knishes and always had to have "ling" which was lung for it to taste just right. She also made cheese kreploch and blintzes regularly.

Dad became a dress goods salesman, traveling on the road. He purchased goods on consignment from Singer and Rine and then went on the road. He traveled as far as Idaho, Montana and the 2 Dakotas. He traveled in all kinds of weather.

He told of a time when the train was snow bound and how he got off the train and walked to town by throwing his heavy suitcase in front of him and walking up to it all along the way. He developed quite a line and made out well selling dress goods to all of these families in isolated areas- really dependent on those peddlers who would brave the elements to reach them. This was the period of fascinating boarding house stories. One in which his friend gobbled up all the potatoes set in front of him thinking this was his portion of the dinner.

Joan- Food was served family or boarding house style so the potatoes were meant for the whole group.

There was also the story of the French couple in Montana to whom Dad spoke in Hebrew telling them it was French dialect as spoken in the suburbs of Paris that they didn't understand because they spoke Canadian French. Another story had to do with a North Dakota Jewish family who insisted he come for dinner, which he did. The food was not good - the matzo balls hard as marbles and he somehow surreptitiously dropped them into a large rubber plant. Almost every household had rubber plants then. The tea was forthcoming, good color, nice and strong but horribly bitter. After investigation in the kitchen it was learned that the host's cigar which had been resting on the shelf of the old fashioned stove had fallen into the pot brewing the tea.

Joan- I remember that tea was almost ritualistic. My grandparents drank Three Touch Tea in a glass. One of them had brought a Samovar to America that was used to brew tea. My grandmother would sip it through a sugar cube that she saved from cup to cup throughout the day. They drank it steaming hot.

Dad being self-taught had many different jobs. He was never out of work because he was a hard worker. At one time he was a hat blocker of very expensive fur hats. Not having been taught how, he spoiled one and left the establishment quickly.

Joan- my grandfather helped me make a whole collection of felt hats for my dolls, which were quite fabulous. He also built a marvelous dollhouse for me with upholstered furniture.

He was a storekeeper, a butcher, a salesman and an insurance salesman. At the end of his life he was a meat wholesaler. At another period he rented out 200 head of horses and took care of them with the help of 2 Russian workers.

Joan-He coached me with all my high school reading assignments, as he was totally familiar with all the great American writers and also with Shakespeare. He drove me to Girls' High everyday so he and I had many conversations about the meaning of what I was reading. He was brilliant. One summer I read the great Russian novels he selected for me. He was my professor.

He told of being sent down to the wine cellar of a swanky hotel – Holland Hotel to fetch an empty barrel. He painstakingly turned every barrel, every case – looking for the works “empty barrel” when the boss ran down seized an empty barrel shouting bring up another empty barrel, Sam. Thus he learned the meanings of terms. His experience at this job led to a better position with J D Zion a wealthy liquor dealer. During this period he learned a great deal about fine liquors, wines and liquors. He knew brands and types well. He never was a drinker however. Shortly before his death he was discussing the merits of Port wines for nutrition. He was losing his appetite and weight [by] then.

Mrs. Zion liked to take advantage of this strong young clerk. She insisted on his clearing the snow off the roof of her house. Mr. Zion sent him there. As he resentfully began shoveling he noticed Mrs. Z walk out of the house carrying a pan of garbage. At this precise moment he shoveled off a large section of snow timed to make her the target. Sputtering with rage, she tried to attract his attention, but Dad developed a deaf ear and faithfully continued the shoveling with malicious satisfaction.

During mother's pregnancy she developed a craving for a fresh tomato. At that time fresh vegetables and fruits were a luxury in Duluth. He walked all-over town in vain. Finally he purchased canned tomatoes at Gassens the town's gourmet shop. On his return, she broke-out in wild weeping. He, by that time was very hungry so he opened the can, seasoned the contents and ate them himself. She never forgave him for this. I don't remember the house in which I was born. I do recall having it pointed out to me years later.

The apartment or flat most familiar to me was on the second floor of the Sosnosky house on 5th St. near Lake Ave. It was a four-room apartment – a kitchen, dining room, bedroom, and living room. The latter was turned into a bedroom at night for my father's two brother, Jack and Max who had in the meantime come to the U.S. they live with us and showered me with love and much attention.

A large talking parrot shared the living room with them. This bird was given away when my mother hysterically (superstition) connected it with the death of her second child my sister who died shortly after her birth of erysipelas.

Joan- my grandmother told me about the little girl named Jessie on her deathbed. She wept almost 49 years later as she spoke of her lost child. The baby died in winter in Duluth and had to be kept in her carriage frozen on the porch for several months until spring when she could be buried because the ground was impenetrable.

The landlord, Mr. Sosnosky was an elderly bearded gentleman, twinkling eyes who looked much like George Bernard Shaw. I became very friendly with his daughter, Gertrude. Their phonograph, a Thomas Edison gramophone really was an endless source of entertainment. I maintained my friendship with Gertrude years after we moved away.

I entered kindergarten at age four because I was so unhappy with all the other children being away [in school]. They accepted me but kept me in kindergarten for two years. School was two blocks away. I liked kindergarten very much. Memories of singing, dancing, sandboxes, plants, even-cooking salty carrots are left. (I liked carrot tinnies)



Left my grandmother, grandfather, mother. My grandfathers 1 brothers
sister and sister-in-law and niece.

MY DAD

A separate account by Ruth Myerson.

I was his only child, and our relationship was close and very warm. We had mutual interests. I could approach him in complete confidence that he could understand my problem and give sound and sensible advice when necessary.

His relationship with Joan, my daughter, was equally close. The intellectual stimulation, moral background and his deep love are her heritage and mine. He and my mother were inseparable as the right hand is to the left. His hobby of fishing brought him much pleasure and gave him the opportunity to make many friends. He was outgoing and made friends easily. He had a wonderful gift of organizing folk singing groups. He knew Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew and English songs – quite a tremendous repertory all committed to memory. He did not want to sing solo-he wanted people to join in.

His knowledge of Jewish folklore was quite extensive. Joan interviewed him for a project at the University of Pennsylvania sociology department.

Joan-I turned in a long documentation and tapes of him talking about Jewish superstition and religious rituals which is now lost. I remember he told me about being taken to the "medicine woman" of his town when he was sick. She broke eggs over his head and said certain prayers to heal him.

As a young man he was very strong. I remember his picking up a horse. He could fix things. One always felt secure knowing he was around. His sense of humor was delightful. I believe I inherited that. I wish I had also inherited his math ability. He also had a remarkable memory.

ZELNER - PATRIOTISH - SOLDIER - PATRIOT

Patriotism was deeply felt in my home. My grandfather would stand with his hand or hat over his heart whenever he heard the national anthem. He loved America with every breath he took. He studied the history and read every book about this country.

Set against the flag are my grandfather's brother Max at right who served in WW1. His brother-in-law Art also served. Several cousins and my uncle fought in WW1.

The background also includes a postcard from the front during WW1 from Max, and a government issued postcard to let people know a soldier was alright. Upper right is my grandfather's brother who lost his life in the Russian Revolution.

Lower center is an article featuring a cousin on leave who served in WW1 having served over 3 years in Europe with the First Army in the Third Auxiliary Surgical Group. She reports seeing firsthand the ovens at Buchenwald.



Grandmother's brother
1914



From the front



Grandfather's brother 1914



Heroic nurse, a cousin
WW1



Scherel died in Russian
Revolution



From Jewish Welfare Board